

# Historiographic Metafiction: A Study of Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*

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**Abstract**—This article aims to show the application of historiographic metafiction in Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2016), highlighting the embodiment of historiographic metafictional characteristics in rewriting Palestinian history, exactly the Nakba (1948). Since Linda Hutcheon calls for revision of the past in order to rewrite history, Abulhawa's work has granted her a place among postmodern literary authors since she does so. Such an aesthetic and resisting act aims at acknowledging falsity and prejudice practiced by both ends responsible of historical documentation: the winner and the loser. This study argues that metafictional techniques allow the author to re-visit the Nakba (1948), re-present the events and eventually allow readers to re-pen history. Simultaneously, the novel's historiographic metafictional characteristics will be underscored including challenging one historical truth, blending history and fiction, using self-reflexive narration, narrating through an openly controlling narrator, and importing real and famous historical and political personalities. The findings show that historiographic metafiction is applicable in Abulhawa's novel. Interestingly, this paper demonstrates how the author enlarges her scope of writing, by adding postmodern dimension to the political and historical issues she depicts.

**Index Terms**—historiographic metafiction, history, Nakba, Palestine, diaspora

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of postmodern thought, history writing began to be treated as a literary artifact rather than a scientific work. Rather than acting as scientists, supporting realities with official documents, diaries, and accounts, historians sought truth within common people's stories, memories and places. Essentially, Cox and Reynolds (1993) claim that postmodernism denies the role of 'History' as the only access to the past and replace it with the concept of 'histories'. For them, official history is said to be the history of the dominant power that suppresses the history of the marginalized and oppressed people. Acknowledging the presence of opposing histories paved the way for new historiography as the history's writing, particularly the history's writing that relies on the critical analysis of sources, choice of specific facts from authentic documents in those sources, and the integration of that information into a narrative that withstands criticism (Vann, 2023). Such argument emphasizes the historian's involvement in assessing the relevance of particular historical events and integrating only some into historical narratives while neglecting others. Historiographic metafiction, coined by Linda Hutcheon, is a new way of producing novels aiming at sharpening writer's imagination in retelling and rewriting history. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon (1988) further explains that historiographic metafiction pushes authors "to narrate past events in such a way that events seem to narrate themselves" (p. 92).

Since having postmodernist roots, historiographic metafiction rejects the notion of a singular historical truth. In addition, it revisits the history of losers and victors, women and men, the marginalized and the powerful. Eventually, historiographic metafiction puts emphasis on occurrences which the dominant and authoritative history intends to eliminate. In doing so, it challenges the previously dominant presentation and attempts to rewrite the histories of suppressed people. Accordingly, this loss of faith in what was once dominant history leads to a new eagerness to enter into a dialogue with history using historiographic metafictional terms. This innovative dialogue, where history and fiction are blended, shapes the foundation upon which the concept of historiographic metafiction is based. Thus, trying to challenge the privileged status and validity of the authoritative history, historiographic metafiction presents the eliminated histories of oppressed people by writing both history and fiction side-by-side. As Muneer puts it, Historiographic metafiction conveys narratives of silenced peoples by challenging the dominant presented history. In doing so, it attempts to reveal the erased stories of other historical individuals (2020, p. 145).

Truly, historiographic metafiction is a rethinking and reworking of both the conventions of history and of literature as "the literary and the historiographical are always being brought together" (Hutcheon, 2005, p. 101). Postmodern fiction puts into question the clear distinction between history and fiction, as the line between the real and the imaginary is always blurred. Historiographic metafiction celebrates novels that include both historical facts and fictive elements simultaneously. Metafictional writing deals with a response and contribution related to reality or history. According to

Waugh (1984), metafiction is that fictional work which calls attention to its position as an artifact for the purpose to raise concerns about the link between fictional and real worlds. Thus, metafiction is a mode of writing which makes the meeting fiction and reality possible. Since Hutcheon applies metafiction to the writing of history, she justifies labeling postmodernist historical novel as historiographic metafiction.

Historiographic metafiction refuses the distinction between fiction and historical facts and calls for self-reflexivity as it asserts “theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). Self-reflexivity refutes the idea that history is universal and given and rather claims that the historical facts embedded in fiction are rewritten by a writer, just as in any other literary work. The narrator frequently reminds readers of the functionality of the text through self-reflexive comments and interventions despite its historical context. Self-reflexive historiographic metafiction blends the historical and the fictional in a way which leaves borders between the two blurry. Hutcheon (2005) highlights that as a self-reflexive art, historiographic metafiction question the legitimacy of what is given as the ultimate truth through history re-evaluation in terms of the representation of historical and political events.

Hence, in order to enhance the novel’s status as a self-reflexive historiographic metafiction, the narrator repeatedly emphasizes the text’s position as a literary creation. Given this, Kirca (2009) proposes that the presence of a self-reflexive narrator contributes to the destruction of the reality’s illusion. In doing so, such narrator unveils the writing processes by making comments to illustrate that reality is a creation. Interestingly, this self-reflexivity allows for a critical understanding of what is portrayed in the novels. Additionally, according to Waugh (1984), the novel’s self-reflexivity allows the reader to investigate the probable fictionality of reality beyond the literary fictitious text. In this sense, self-reflexivity contributes to the rewriting of history with regard to how historical and political events are represented, as well as the questioning of the validity of what is presented as the absolute truth.

Conventionally, the narrator, implied author, or historian, is regarded to be cohesive, self-sufficient, and coherent entities capable of viewing the real world and creating objective narrative. The historian adopts “the innocent eye” (White, 1978, p. 53) treating historical personalities and events as cohesive targets that could be fully reviewed and comprehended. This holds true in traditional historical fiction as well; historical figures and events are depicted rationally, with no challenge or uncertainty in their creation. The authority of the traditional historian and history is broken through the postmodern subjectivity. Likewise, in historiographic metafiction, the narrator appears to have been dethroned from its former position. Hutcheon distinguishes the importance of “an overtly controlling narrator” (1988, p. 117) who is “self-conscious but also overtly manipulative narrators and narratives” (1988, p. 206). In contrast to the conventional historian/narrator, whose purpose is to convey historical accounts as true, the narrator in historiographic metafictional novels is fragmented. Such fragmentation produces narrative gaps that require the readers’ elucidation, which contributes to the novel’s status as a human creation.

It is quite surprising that such historiographic metafictional characteristics have been attributed to a literary current which subsumes Palestinian women writers in diaspora. More and more, Palestinian women writers have risen to the challenge of postmodern understanding of the nature of history and the historical writing’s process. Actually, being diasporic has made the possibilities of resurrecting, altering and rewriting history greater. In details, such writers, although being second or third generation, maintain several political and historical affiliations with their homeland. Indeed, as Al Malah (2009) puts it: “much of what they wrote still reflected a warm relationship to the homeland despite the authors’ geographical distance from it” (p. 13). For them, the diaspora as a physical location provides them with a more subjective perspective and widens their political and artistic capacities as they address issues concerning homeland. Al Malah declares that “No longer beholden to the dictates of the ‘home’ community, she benefits from her position as ‘outsider’/‘insider’ and inters into a dialogue with past and present, the distant and the near” (2009, p. 15). Susan Abulhawa is one Palestinian American writer and activist who has reinvested history’s role in literature and literature’s place in history with a new importance. Abulhawa attempts to depict political issues and to include historical events of Palestine in her diasporic narratives. Within this space, her voice find a favourable ground, historiographic metafiction, for questioning and criticizing all forms of representation and for her working in the past and present. Thus, she employs postmodern historiographic metafiction as both an aesthetic and political mechanism to explore and reevaluate various historical truths and to blur the borders between fiction and history.

Through historiographic metafiction, Abulhawa tries to explore the innumerable injustices Palestinians suffer from and highlight the reality of their tragedy, the Nakba, which remains the inner traumatic moment of the Palestinian collective memory since 1948 until present. According to Morris (2008), the Nakba is used in Palestinian discourse to describe the circumstances that followed the founding of Israel in 1948 while the Jews referred to it as the War of Independence or the War of Establishment. In his discussion of the Nakbah and basing on Palestinian sources, Israeli military records and oral recollections, Pappé (2006), he documents the several massacres committed against the Palestinians in 1947 and ending in 1949. Importantly, he adds that there is still a lack of a comprehensive Nakba archive that would help to track the identities of all those who died in the killings. The Nakba caused thousands of Palestinians to be compulsorily dispersed throughout the world, creating endless agony and forcing them to live as displaced refugees and exiles. Besides, according to Saloul (2012), around 780,000 Palestinians once lived on the land, and nearly 10 million uprooted Palestinians today live in Israel, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Middle East. The Nakba has left Palestinians with permanent wounds and tremendous agony in their lives and sentiments. They have been subjected to forced displacement, oppression, homelessness, and many forms of humiliation. As a result, the Nakba has

had a significant impact on the conscience of Palestinian writers, who have struggled to raise the consciousness of their people and rewrite the disaster in a different form.

In *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2016), Susan Abulhawa gives a voice to those who are voiceless. She writes stories to narrate the tragedy of Palestinians which has been going on for generations and till the present. In her narrative, she writes down the real names of cities, villages, cities, and neighbourhoods in order to be handed to future generations. As well, she narrates stories to glorify the heroism of Palestinian resistance and struggle. This work is nothing more than a Palestinian narrative intended to rewrite history and reveal the reality hidden by the Zionist grand narrative. Additionally, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* highlights the Palestinians' sufferings and experiences in Palestine and exiles. The novelist's narration of events exposes aspects of Palestinian agony from the Nakba until the near present. Abulhawa traces four generations of a Palestinian family and sheds light on the political and historical circumstances they have gone through. Massacres and offences towards Palestinians, their mandatory eviction shortly after the Nakba, their boundless struggles in refugee camps and exiles, the consequences of the siege, the terrible conditions of prisoners in Israeli jails, and the mistreatment that their families have been subjected to. On top of that, the author of the novel fervently praises family love as well as women companionship. She urges to undermine the Zionist narrative via presenting Palestinian mini-narratives. Such stories are narrated by a child whose voice is underrated in the official authoritative history.

In addition to challenging the Zionist grand narrative, Abulhawa's work blurs the boundaries between history and fiction; such blurring is a basic feature of historiographic metafiction. This mode of writing offers her a hybrid space where apparently reality and fiction realms juxtapose blurring all the lines of separation between the literary and the historical. Besides, the novel embodies other historiographic metafictional characteristics such as: using self-reflexive narration, narrating through an openly controlling narrator, employing an unconventional plot structure, and importing real and famous historical and political personalities. Importantly, through the analysis of the novel, it is clear that Susan Abulhawa does not isolate herself from her people's historical and political issues. Instead, she presents a historical account of the suffering of Palestinian refugees and their demand for political identity recognition. Abulhawa provides a vivid view of the Palestinians' shared history by exposing their displacement and dispersion. Thus, through postmodern historiographic metafiction, she rewrites Palestinian history and documents the injuries and miseries haunting her people back home and in exile.

The novel centers around the experiences of a Palestinian four generational family; the Baraka family. The events took place between the Nakba 1948 and the 2011 Prisoners' exchange when an Israeli soldier was exchanged for over a thousand Palestinian detainees. Significantly, the novel is set in Beit Daras, Gaza, Cairo, and Charlotte in North Carolina. In fact, Bayt Daras was a Palestinian Arab town which was depopulated in 1948. On March 1948, the village was heavily bombarded resulting in the deaths of nine inhabitants and the destruction of most of the crops. The village suffered many casualties, and many houses were then blown up, and wells and granaries sabotaged. Thus, when the massacre took place, people fled the village. Like many villages, Beit Daras was invaded in 1948 by Haganah, the Zionist Gangs, killing many farmers, children and women and forcing others to leave their villages. Being one of the survivors, The Baraka family was displaced to Gaza, where the refugee camp was established as an alternative home for them. Mamdouh's family goes Kuwait and then to the United States of America, while the other family's members remain as refugees in Gaza. Most of the narrative is centered on Nazmiyah, Nur, and Khaled. Nur is Mamdouh's granddaughter who has been raped, rejected, isolated, and displaced in the USA. Although Nur transfers from one foster family to another, she keeps growing academically, eventually working as a psychologist who aids youngsters deal with childhood trauma. Nur travels to Gaza to aid Alwan's ten-year-old child Khaled, the narrator of the story, who is suffering from Locked-In Syndrome and cannot move or talk. She returns to Gaza to live with her aunt Nazmiyah and her family. Thus, the novel is about Palestinians who have found themselves compelled to leave their houses, villages and cities. They have become strangers in their own land and in different foreign countries seeking shelters and refuges.

## II. THE BLUE BETWEEN SKY AND WATER: DISPLACEMENT AND DISPERSION

As Palestine witnessed significant social, political, and literary upheavals throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Palestinian writers recognized the need to legitimize their people's history. They believed that new literary styles, other than poetry, were required to reflect their contemporaneous circumstances. As a result, it is the novel that has helped to tell the full story of the 1948 Nakba. In doing so, Palestinian writers revisit and rewrite the past to open up possibilities for the future. They seek to rewrite and correct the past through reworking the historical and political events. Additionally, they revolutionize structure, plot, character and setting in order to fit into the historical context they have at hand. Such endeavour is a reaction to the occupation of the land and the creation of a state on Palestine since the Nakba in 1948. The effects of the occupation condition; the influence of racism; a distorted sense of identity; displacement from land; and exile and return are some of the common themes of such works. Meanwhile, major diaspora authors such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani, Fawaz Turki, and others assisted to the development of Palestinian literature. They had therefore contributed to the Palestinian people's quest to establish a conscious identity in the face of persecution since 1948. Remarkably, contemporary Palestinians in the Diaspora—the Arab world and other areas of the world—have continued to share their people's experiences of dispossession, displacement, and exile. Susan Abulhawa is no exception.

Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* can not merely be considered an aesthetic work, but rather one that functions on political, social and cultural levels. For instance, it mentions the rise of the political parties in Palestine: "Hamas, as a counterweight to Yasser Arafat's Fateh party, secular revolutionary resistance movement in the mold of similar guerrilla insurgencies around the world during the Cold War era" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. ix). Furthermore, Abulhawa sheds light on the growing of Israeli colonies, checkpoints, and the political arrestments of the Palestinians as what happens to Mazen. On the social level, the novel captures the daily Palestinian struggles to survive in the refugee camps;

The Refugees moved about, beset by confusion for days. Sufficient tents were not distributed for weeks and people slept on the earth, with stones and insects and animals [...] they lined up twice a day for bread and soup. They lined up for communal toilets. Queues even invaded their dreams. (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 43)

Additionally, Abulhawa shows how they were put on diet; "The tunnels undermined Israel's plans to put us on a diet" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 1), how they recycle the wall steel into other things; "it was a gift, because the underground wall was made of high-grade steel that we recycled into other things" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 2), and how they suffer from unemployment, joblessness, and malnutrition; "There was no work on land. Israel's siege of Gaza saw unemployment rise to eighty percent and malnutrition began a slow creep into the new generation" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 134). Interestingly, the real context, which Abulhawa wants to bring in, is the socio-political unrest in Palestine but she uses the cultural context of a family marriage, celebrations rituals, family unions, jinn summon, gossiping and rumours as a pseudo context to expose the real crux of the narration.

Furthermore, Abulhawa's narrative presents agents of resistance against all Zionist efforts to mold history and deform identities. In this regard, Masalha claims that remembering the individual and public Palestinian experiences of the Nakba can undermine Israeli systematic actions to discount the catastrophe and "consolidate national bonds, mutual solidarity and shared history, memories and struggles" (2005, p. 243). Thus, utilizing personal historical accounts of displaced Palestinians is a means to voice the silenced despite the disapproval of the Zionist grand narrative. Accordingly, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* narrates the Nakba from the individual level. From this perspective, Abulhawa attempts to rewrite the Nakba narrative relying on stories narrated by the Palestinians of refugee camps who became poor refugees in their own land. The novel narrates the on-going Nakba through four generations. Likewise, the experiences of Palestinians' displacement constitute a crucial component of this narrative. In doing so, as many other Palestinian writers in exile, Abulhawa intends to depict the people's lives in the village so that the readers can imagine it as it was in 1948. This depiction will allow Palestinians in refugee camps and in exile stay bonded to their motherland (Muhawi & Kanaana, 1989).

The novel disputes the two core myths propagated by the Zionist grand narrative, namely; the famous Zionist claim that the Nakba never occurred. Esmeir and Lila (2007) find that, its official narrative, Israel rejects the existence of the Nakba, disclaims that it was founded after the dispossession of Palestine, and subdues the attempts to reveal the facts of 1948. In other words, this myth promotes that there were no ethnic cleansing, no massacres, and no displacement. Additionally, Abulhawa's novel challenges the myth which claims that Palestinians willingly leave their villages and that they are not compulsory displaced and are not driven out through violence. The Zionist grand narrative does not stop at propagating lies about its foundation; it further aims at marginalizing and delegitimizing the Palestinian narratives as well. In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said (1992) clarifies that the Palestinian has turned into a nonperson in contrasted to the Zionist who claims to be the sole person in Palestine (p. 37). In this regard, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* has attempted to challenge the Zionist grand narrative and rewrite Palestinian narratives of 1948 Nakba through recalling the historical events and presenting facts of the Zionist occupation of Palestine. The novel mainly narrates the fall of Beit Daras. After living a tranquil and serene life, farming and taking care of their olive groves, the Baraka family's members are internally displaced from Beit Daras and are relocated to Nusseirat refugee camp in Gaza during the 1948 War. Thus, they become suddenly homeless refugees in their country after Israel took everything.

On the historical level, historical information about this village is documented, among other villages. Morris (2008) records how inhabitants of Beit Daras and other villages are compulsory displaced not willingly:

On 9–10 May, Givgati launched *mivtza barak* (Operation Lightning). The objective was "to deny the enemy by creating general panic. The aim is to force the Arab inhabitants 'to move.'" The villages initially targeted were Beit Daras, Bash-shit, Batani al-Sharqi, and Batani al-Gharbi.... Beit Daras offered serious resistance, and some twenty villagers were killed (along with four Israelis) and forty wounded before the village was conquered (p. 162).

However, the book lacks the narratives of surviving Palestinians which the novel here foregrounds. Remarkably, the aforementioned real historical events are re-narrated in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*; the novel succeeds to provide a lens to revisit Beit Daras' massacre. Khaled states how Palestinians were uprooted from their indigenous land. Khaled narrates: "the decisive battle occurred in May 1948, soon after European Jewish immigrants declared a new state called Israel in place of ancient Palestine. The Haganah and Stern Gang now called themselves the "Israel Defense Forces," and they marched into Beit Daras after hours of sustained bombardment with mortars" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 37).

Simultaneously, Abulhawa questions the Zionist grand narrative of the Palestinians willingly leaving their villages. Khaled's narration echoes real historical documentation of the traumatic experience of the flight and displacement villagers went through:

Chaos reigned, perpetuated by more explosions, gratuitous now that Beit Daras was fully consumed by the fog of death and defeat. The villagers who had stayed behind either had been killed or were already fleeing toward Gaza, and the rest were taken prisoner, never to be seen again. (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 30)

Here, the narrative mixes historical reality with fictional representation and individualized exodus experiences. Hence, this is again documented in Morris's historical work. Morris (2008) asserts that the invasion and dispossession of Beit Daras caused the displacement of Palestinian people from the neighbouring villages such as Batani al-Sharqi, Ibdis, Julis, and Beit Gaffa. Four people were killed at Batani al-Sharqi by Givgati forces. Noticeably, Morris's documentation implies clearly the Zionist grand narratives where he attempts to marginalize important details. What he tries to present is that what happened in 1948 was not an ethnic cleansing, but a displacement because of the fear of war. However, what Abulhawa tries to accomplish in her work is to challenge such narrative and present mini narratives to show that Palestinians' displacement was a result of armed occupation.

Displacement plays a major role in shaping the novel's characters' identities. For Palestinians, displacement becomes a political status similar to that of citizenship or political membership. Their identity is not related only to an abstract land but rather to their current political experiences. To put it differently, being Palestinian is connected to historical Palestine and also to living in neighboring refugee camps and in exile. Displacement reminds them of the very existence of a homeland that they can belong to. Thus, being Palestinian involves substituting the physical with the political, which means seeing their displacement and the occupation of their land as the most important problems of their lives (Suleiman, 2016). Given this, displacement, in the novel under study, means the enforced movement of Palestinian during the Nakba over borders due to political persecution, leaving issues of identity and culture widely open for discussion and consideration. When approaching questions of displacement in *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, it is worth mentioning that, historically, the term "Palestinian displacement" refers not merely to people who were exiled internationally in 1948, but as well to people who were displaced within their own country's borders.

In this regard, *The Blue Between Sky and Water* is about the Baraka's family displacement and how they identify themselves not only on a Palestinian level but as well on a global level. Taking this into consideration, the characters' identities in the novel are politically formed, as their lives are shaped by the Nakba such as Nazmiyeh's identity and Nur's. For instance, Nazmiyeh is internally displaced while Nur lives in exile because of her grandparents' international displacement. Thus, the two women's personal experiences are entangled with the fall of Beit Daras village and the prolonged Nakba that the Palestinians have gone through. Such mini narratives of displacements' experiences are manifested where the irritability of the Nakba from a women's viewpoint is foregrounded. Belonging to the Nakba generation, Nazmiyeh is a strong woman who comes from a family that has nothing to brag about. Being a member in a family as such let her to be stranded in Nusseirat refugee camp in Gaza which makes her and her offspring suffer from being treated as aliens in their country.

Nazmiyeh, unlike heroes of historical novels, is not a grand historical figure. She is an old Palestinian woman who is usually ignored in grand narratives, but here her speech is foregrounded: "She [Nazmiyeh] thought Palestine was scattering farther away at the same time that Israel was moving closer. They confiscated the hills and assembled Jewish only settler colonies on the most fertile soil. They uprooted indigenous songs, and planted lies in the ground to grow a new story" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 66). Although her words are fictional but they are foregrounded by a real historical event which is the occupation of the land. Therefore, this can be read in terms of the postmodernist stand that deals with the blurring of the lines between history and fiction. In addition, it shows that Beit Daras massacre is a historical real event and it questions the Zionist grand narrative denial that such a massacre took place. Khaled, the narrator, demonstrates in details his grandmother's internal displacement experience from Beit Daras to a refugee camp after the Zionists attacks. He states: "Nazmiyeh hastily packed a bundle of food and belongings to last two weeks and set off toward the river to fetch Mariam" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 34). Khaled reveals the domestic aspects of women's displacement which the Zionist grand and official narrative lacks.

The stories of Mamdouh and his granddaughter Nur reflect the experiences of Palestinians living in exile. Mamdouh is, as Khaled says, "ripe for both pity and exploitation throughout the Arab world, where the brightest Palestinian minds bore fruit for other nations, and once proud farmers chased the call of bread, becoming desperate workers far from their lands. My great-khalo Mamdouh was swept up in that stream of cheap labor that kept carrying him farther and farther away" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 58). Mamdouh displaces from Gaza to Egypt, then to Kuwait, and finally to The United States. Such displacement makes him a foreigner; permanently out of Place. Exile has taken away his only son's land, ancestry, and language. It has stolen his Yasmine. Thus, he feels that he is a strange old man in a strange place. In addition, displacement, Khaled further adds: "had warped his soul and the possibility of leaving his granddaughter alone there deposited in his eyes a wild fear" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 101). Furthermore, after Mamdouh's death, Nur gets entangled with her own quandaries at a very tender age in the United States. Although Nur did not experience the 1948 War and the Six Days war 1967, she has endured multiple losses of her family members, including the death of her father Mhammad, her grandmother Yasmine, her grandfather Mamdouh, and the rejection by her mother.

Nur is abandoned by her Spanish mother, loses her beloved grandfather, experiences sexual abuse by her stepfather, and finds herself compelled to move from one foster home to another. These are just a few of the experiences that have shaped Nur's identity as a Palestinian in exile. The cycle of grief and happiness continues, and Nur's fate eventually leads her home, where she lives with Nazmiyah, her daughter Alwan, and her cousins Khaled and RhetShel. Her life is identical to many Palestinians' living in exile far away from their homeland. Nur's experience represents the most fundamental fact of what it meant to be Palestinian: dispossessed, disinherited, and exiled. That being alone without a family and land to belong to implies being vulnerable and living at others' mercy (Abulhawa, 2016). Thus, war had been cruel to take Nur, assemble her destiny from pieces of loneliness, exile, rejection, and longing, then bring her to home a stranger. Exile devastates her and "there was no place in the world for her to be" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 103). In *The Blue Between Sky and Water*, then, Abulhawa draws attention to the note that both the internationally and internally dispersed Palestinians' condition is a result of the Nakba and has shaped their entire fate, whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora.

Unsurprisingly, Palestinians in exile pass on their experiences of the Nakba from generation to generation in order to reinforce their general memory of Palestine. According to Hammer (2005), these memories serve as a link to Palestine for Palestinians who were born and have grown up in exile. They become a source of awareness, belonging, and a sense of nationality. The recollections of the event of 1948 are especially important in this context. Indeed, Abulhawa explores this question of memory in her work, which delves into Mamdouh's life and his task of preserving and passing on the memories of his land and people to his granddaughter Nur:

Her grandfather wanted to tell her that story and a thousand more from Beit Daras, again and again, and her curiosity pleased him. He wanted her to know and never forget the place that burned in his heart. He also insisted that they only speak in Arabic. He once told Nur, "Stories matter. We are composed of our stories." (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 69)

This quote is very telling and conveys that the elder generations' individual experiences, their personal narratives and recollections of the past, play a crucial role in the formation of a Palestinian identity. Actually, "words and stories and dreams remained, trying to find a place in the next generation" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 71). As a result, they have become part of Palestinian collective memory and history. Unsurprisingly, Mamdouh's stories of Palestine as a homeland influence Nur to return to Palestine; "And we have a very big family that you'll meet someday soon". She imagined finding an older woman in Gaza with her eyes; being surrounded by her big family; finding the place where she belonged (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 170). When she returns to Palestine, Gaza, her sense of being Palestinian is enhanced by living within her family even if in a refugee camp. The characterisation of Nur highlights a Palestinian growing up in exile's desire for homeland's traits and belonging as Sirhan puts it, "the very act of narrating gives credence and existence to the displaced and dispossessed Palestinians" (2014, p. 70). In brief, the novel relates to Palestinians' memories of the Nakba, its ongoing effects, and their cruel exile.

It is also important to note that *The Blue Between Sky and Water* has self-reflexive authorial contributions that indicate its fictionality. The narrator's self-reflexive comments reinforce the novel's claims as a notable example of historiographic metafiction. Khaled's references to the fictionality of what he recounts, as well as the self-reflexive comments repeated throughout the work, serve to remind readers that history is a construct. For instance, he says: "I'm sorry I can't tell it any other way" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 122), "This is what I want to tell you about being ten." (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 149), and "I don't want to get ahead of myself and tell you about Nur" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 20). By saying these before and after recounting anything, the narrator wants the reader to trust what he narrates while also indicating that it is constructed. This self-reflexively metafictional part of the novel questions historical representation and emphasizes the fictionality of history. Khaled is a character in the novel; however he's also the narrator of his own story, his family's stories, and his people's history. Throughout his narration, he uses self-reflexive comments to make the readers aware of the story's fictitious aspect. So, the following passage, with its self-reflexive aspects, indicates that Khaled claims all over the novel that he is narrating the accounts:

I don't want to get ahead of myself and tell you about Nur. She was still two generations away when my great-khalo Mamdouh went to work for the beekeeper. But if you believe as I do that people are part love, part flesh and blood, and part everything else, then mentioning her name now makes sense, at the source of her love part. (Abulhawa, 2005, p. 20)

These few lines show how the narrator is self-reflexive of himself as a narrator of the stories embedded in the novel. *The Blue Between Sky and Water* provides then an individual mode of history rewriting that revisits historical events from a personal perspective. This includes Khaled's personal historical accounts interwoven with his self-reflexive storytelling. In doing so, Abulhawa avoids the historical approach that concentrates on great figures of national importance in history. Instead, she creates an individual form of history by writing through Khaled's narrative that focuses on the lives and experiences of ordinary Palestinians during and after the Nakba. Thus, Khaled's own individual history emerges as an alternative to the authoritative, totalizing and official understanding of the Nakba. Such an endeavor might be seen as making the individuals silenced by the meta-narrative speak. Thus, self-reflexivity offers Khaled a chance to make his voice and stories heard.

The narrator of self-reflexive texts always deviates from the conventional linear narration which restricts the narrator's freedom in his access to the characters and in narrating the story to the readers. Indeed, the narrator in *The*

*Blue Between Sky and Water* is an openly controlling narrator. Khaled claims that even though he did not live in those days but he can revisit them and re-narrate them to his readers. He informs the readers about the way he is connected to the history of Palestine:

I didn't live in these times. But when I went into the blue, when my condition became as it did, Sulayman revealed all to me. I don't fully understand it and don't expect you to. But maybe you can believe, as I do, that there are truths that defy other truths, where time folds on itself. (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 34)

Khaled, who suffers from Locked-In Syndrome and is unable to communicate or move, manages to portray the devastating Nakba events. Such portrayal offers alternative truth from an individual perspective, a child, which is silenced in the grand narrative. So, "other truths" here may refer to the Zionist authoritative narrative. Surprisingly, Khaled's Locked-In Syndrome permits him to wander in time and to narrate his story which challenges the authoritative grand narrative. He further reveals: "when I went into the blue for good, Sulayman took me back in time to witness what had happened that day in the ocean. And in the going-back, we became part of that day (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 130). In this way, Khaled is involved in the rewriting of history as an individual who can control the flow of events; "It wasn't long after that when I went into the quiet blue, that place without time, where I could soak up all the juices of life and let them run through me like a river" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 11). Khaled revisits the past, re-narrates the historical events, and reshapes them through his self-reflexive narration. Therefore, this endeavor of history's self-reflexive narration and then narration's openly controlling dethrone the totalizing Zionist grand narrative. In other words, in the novel, there is self-reflexive interference in the process of history's narration. Such interference attempts to take control of the narration in order to make the reader aware of the fictionality of the text. Abulhawa's employment of an openly controlling self-reflexive narrator promotes the novel to be a historiographic metafiction.

In addition, the importing of real and famous historical and political personalities highlights the novel's status as historiographic metafiction. The novel refers towards famous Palestinian, Arab, foreign, and Zionist historical personalities. Since Abulhawa writes about history and politics, so it should come as no surprise that many of the most famous historical and political personalities in her literary history are based on real political leaders, activists, and people as: Yasir Arafat, Hosni Mubarak, George W. Bush, Benjamin Netanyahu, Rachel Corrie, Mads Gilbert and Gilad Shalit. For instance, the Presidents are mentioned when Khaled celebrates how they outsmarted Israel Egypt, and the United States of America: "newspapers published cartoons that showed Mubarak, Bush, and Netanyahu scratching their heads and asses while we laughed from Rafah's sandy hills, holding what we had made from that excellent steel: car parts, playground equipment, building beams, and rockets" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 2). Alwan and Abdel Qader named their daughter after an American young woman named Rachel Corrie who is "an international activist who had been run over by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian family" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 140). The doctor of Khaled, Dr. Gilberts Mads, is also a real person: "A kindly Norwegian doctor named Mads put tubes in and out of him connected to plastic bladders for nutrition and waste. The doctor said that everything on the inside worked and he taught Alwan and Nazmiyah how to fill his bag with "food" and how to empty his waste" (Abulhawa, 2016, pp. 157-158). Abulhawa goes further by stating a quote from his book on the Gaza War *Eyes on Gaza* (2009), "Where could I cry out the despair and rage I felt for all this terrible fate we saw at such close quarters?" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 158) Whereas Gilad Shalit is an Israeli soldier captured by Hamas captured and held by Palestinian militants from June 2006 to October 2011. In details, Shalit was released on October 18, 2011, following an arrangement by Israel that ensured liberty by freeing over 1,000 Palestinian detainees; " Hamas fighters captured an Israeli soldier named Gilad Shalit" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 172). He is exchanged for one thousand Palestinian political prisoners; "Gilad Shalit, the captured Israeli soldier, would be exchanged for one thousand Palestinian political prisoners" (Abulhawa, 2016, p. 173). Additionally, this technique undermines the readers' knowledge of fixed historical facts and presents to them an alternative view of history. Such importing may reshape their contemporary political attitudes. Thus, Abulhawa uses real and famous people to portray her political events with fictional construction that the readers can relate to in her fiction.

### III. CONCLUSION

The present study has evaluated the Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* as historiographic metafiction. It has argued that the selected novel does rewrite the Nakba through personal and individual stories. The novel challenges and destabilizes the Zionist authoritative historical narrative through the voice of Palestinian children and women. Therefore, the present study's findings conclude that it can be read as a historiographic metafiction because of the portrayal of multiple histories that undermine the authoritative controlling history. These histories are narrated through an openly controlling narrator who controls the course of events. The narrator revisits the past and re-narrates its events through a self-reflexive mode of narration. Such self-reflexivity attempts to make the readers aware of the fictionality of the text. Similarly, the narrator frequently reminds his reader about the fictionality of the work through his self-reflexive comments and interventions despite its historical context. Additionally, the novel imports various real and famous historical and political personalities. To this extend, blending historical and political figures with fictional character contributes also to the novel's status as a historiographic metafiction. Finally, being one of Palestinian fiction writers in diaspora, Susan Abulhawa explores the connection between postmodernism and history.

Hence, historiographic metafiction presents for her the best background to revisit the Nakba (1948) and to re-narrate the histories of Palestinian in the refugee camps and in diaspora.

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