



RESEARCH PAPER

Liminality in Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* and Alyan's *The Arsonists' City*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the pathetic condition of Palestinians as depicted by Palestinian American writers: Susan Abulhawa in *The Blue between Sky and Water* (2015) and Hala Alyan in *The Arsonists' City* (2021) through Victor Turner's concept of liminality. Palestine has been the stage for devastating tragedies, with Palestinians enduring brutal massacres, forced abductions, and sexual exploitation at the hands of Israelis since the mid-20th century onward. Consequently, Palestinians grapple with anxieties, uncertainties, and profound doubts about their future due to Israeli violence. Through the lens of liminality, this study investigates how both Palestinian writers portray the Palestinian tragic experience amidst devastating events by addressing themes of migration, discrimination, and promoting understanding and acceptance across diverse cultural backgrounds. This paper explores the Palestinians' painful experiences, which are transmitted to their descendants via colonization.

KEYWORDS Arab-Americans, Civil War, Liminality, Migration, Nakba 1948, Palestine

Introduction

The paper examines the Palestinians' sufferings shown through devastating events in Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue between Sky and Water* (2015) and Hala Alyan's *The Arsonists' City* (2021). The paper investigates Israeli violence on Palestine and looks at Palestinians' beliefs and attitudes through the lens of liminality that Victor Turner (1969) expanded upon Van Gennep's (1960) notion of initiation as the paramount element. Turner defined liminality as the transitional phase during the second stage, where an individual's personality undergoes a transformative change, fundamentally different from their previous self (Turner, 1969, p. 23). The first stage involves a person separating from their parents and childhood memories, like a metaphorical death. This marks the beginning of significant experiences that reshape their personality, signaling a fresh start (p. 27).

The paper aims to understand the long term ongoing effects of Israeli colonial violence on innocent Palestinians. The Nakba 1948, the forced migration of thousands of Palestinians from ancestral lands during the establishment of Israel, created an uncertainty among affected. Throughout the 20th century, conflicts like the Arab-Israeli wars and ongoing Israeli-Palestinian tensions further exacerbated this sense of displacement among Palestinians. Hussain (2021) asserts that recent attacks in 2021 have resulted in numerous innocent Palestinian casualties, during the tragic event of Nakba that marked their initial displacement for the last seven decades and these recent events represent a new Nakba in action, more severe than the previous (p. 9).

The Blue between Sky and Water is the generational saga of Palestinian women amid conflict and displacement. According to Kumar and Nissa (2019), the idealistic

Palestinian past ended in 1948 with the establishment of Israel, which led to the genocide and forced expulsion of Palestinians. The relocation inflicts trauma and exposes people to social, cultural, and psychological challenges as a form of violence (p. 1022). Starting in the early 1940s, the narrative follows a family's journey through Nakba, exploring liminality through its female protagonists across generations, leaving them caught between an uncertain future in the camp and their history in Beit Daras.

The paper also explores transitions across time and nations in *The Arsonists' City*. It follows meeting of Idris and Mazna in 1970s when Mazna is a young actress in Damascus and Idris a medical student in Beirut. Mazna loves Zakaria, Idris's childhood friend and a Palestinian refugee killed due to racial discrimination. After his death, Idris and Mazna marry and move to America. Mazna struggles with her acting career due to her foreign status, color, and language barrier there. Following his father's death, Idris considers selling the family home and invites their three children for a memorial in Beirut. The narrative blends past and present, revealing family secrets and the city's profound influence, while examining the complexities of familial ties and memory. Mazna's journey encompasses—pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stage. In the pre-liminal stage, Mazna resides in New York City, leading an independent life with her career, social circle, and routines separate from her family in Beirut. Upon reuniting with her family in Beirut, she enters a liminal phase, confronting her past, family history, and the complexities of her identity in a new environment. During this phase, Mazna and her family adapt new cultures, and rituals, transitioning from one place to another. In the post-liminal stage, following her time in Beirut, Mazna undergoes significant personal growth and transformation and she forms deeper connections with family members and gains a heightened appreciation for her cultural heritage.

The concept of liminality is a framework for interpreting the diverse Palestinian experiences in literature, providing an innovative lens to understand the complex emotions that shape their narrative. This study highlights the concepts of liminality in the postmodern era and how liminality affects the lives of women and their identities.

Literature Review

According to Mohsin et al (2021), the tragic events in Palestine since the mid-twentieth century have caused immense suffering for Palestinians, including massacres, abductions, and sexual exploitation by Israelis. Consequently, people grapple with anxieties and uncertainties about their future, further complicated by the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is transmitted from generation to generation (p. 715).

Atkinson (2017) says that Abulhawa's concept of "transgenerational trauma" addresses intergenerational and multigenerational transmissions that extend beyond the family unit. Abulhawa's narrative (2015) describes the resulting conflicts after Nakba that destroyed the land and "The Six-Day War," also known as "1967 Arab-Israeli War", the start of a new wave of Zionist aggression (p. 57). This conflict left the Palestinian people deeply humiliated and despairing, overwhelmed by loss, anger, and renewed fear, resulting in trauma (p. 58).

In Palestine, human rights violations persist, including severe repression, suppression of freedom of speech, mass killings etc. The Nakba of 1948 led to the erasure of Palestinian culture and the fragmentation of the Palestinian community across the Middle East and beyond. Today, nearly one million Palestinians live in Israel, with almost three million more in the West Bank and Gaza. According to Nashef (2021), Abulhawa's story is one of the first to address the issue of rape during Nakba 1948. This topic is often overlooked in women's Nakba narratives, as it conflicts with the official account of events.

Nashef highlights Abulhawa's use of female perspectives, emphasizing how rape is portrayed as a weapon of war against Palestinians (p. 1).

Hiba and Latheef (2022) claim that Israel has occupied Palestine for over fifty years and committed numerous crimes. Despite facing hardships and waning international support, Palestinians remain resolute in their resistance against the apartheid state. The memory of historic Palestine persists, reflecting its enduring spirit. The novel's main characters are women who must fend for themselves as their men are lost to death or imprisonment by Israel. Their struggle for survival becomes an act of resistance, as they bravely harness their will power and determination to sustain life in their devastated homeland (p. 704). According to Shehzadi et al (2021), Palestinians are dispersed globally due to the unequal conditions they face. Those still in Palestine have been relocated to the West Bank and Gaza from their original homes. Meanwhile, Israelis are migrating to the territory to establish themselves (p. 5142).

Amireh (2022) explores negative stereotypes and prejudices against Arabs and Muslims, highlighting the experiences of exclusion, alienation, marginalization and discrimination faced by Arab immigrants, based on their color, nationality, and religion in *The Arsonists' City*. Alyan, also examines the pervasive culture of fear linked to the "war on terror." This ideological divide results in unfair associations of Arab-Muslim immigrants with extremism and terrorism (p. 5). He presents that Alyan sheds light on the difficulties and traumas that diasporic Arab women experience. Mazna's journey from Syria to Lebanon and then to the United States is loaded with challenges. She struggles with getting rejected by both strangers and people from other countries, which causes her to experience emotional difficulties (p. 8). Mazna's ambitions extend beyond national boundaries as she seeks opportunities in the United States and London. However, her interests remain deeply rooted in issues affecting the Arab world, including ongoing civil wars, the occupation of Arab countries, and rising political tensions.

Methodology

This research paper takes cue from Victor Turner's notion on liminality as propounded in his *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). The notion of liminality was initially presented in Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1960) and was later developed further by Victor Turner. Gennep (1960) defined liminality as events that take place within transforming rituals and emphasized that ritualistic acts that mark individual or communal life passages follow a particular three-fold sequential pattern, and he claimed that changes occur during transitional periods or phases of transition (p. vii). The term "liminality" describes transitional stages within rituals. Turner focused on Gennep's writings in 1963. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" was one of the essays Turner included in his *The Forest of Symbols* (1967). Beyond its initial confinement to ceremonial transitions and rituals in smaller communities, Turner enlarged the concept of liminality to encompass a broader range of situations and portrayed it as a transformative phase facilitating considerable changes in perception and conduct. The concept of liminality in anthropology, centers on how transformations occur throughout a rite of passage. Van Gennep (1960) distinguishes between the secular, profane and the holy worlds, which adheres to religious beliefs. Although they are two distinct worlds, he asserts that similarities exist between them; both contain transition points that every individual must go through at some point or another in their lives. He emphasizes that this transition is so significant that a person "cannot pass from one transition point to the other without going through an intermediate stage" (p. 1), that is a stage that satisfies standards, and norms. He examines the subject by studying semi-civilized cultural groups where taboos and the concept of 'the sacred' are considered legal norms. In addition, he examines the individuals who are part of this culture and defines 'life' as a series of passages from one phase to another. Hence, several life events, including birth, childbirth, hunting, social puberty, getting married, becoming a

mother and death, assume significant meaning and are associated with ceremonial connotations (pp. 2-3). In these societies, any alteration in an individual's life involves a transition between religious and secular aspects, which must be controlled and protected to ensure that society remains free from unease or harm (p. 3). The primary purpose of these ceremonies is to help individuals mark their transition from one role to another as a significant event.

Results and Discussion

The Blue between Sky and Water

Susan Abulhawa portrays Gaza's beauty and challenges through Khaled, that reflects his liminal existence between life and death. The Baraka family's migration during the Nakba in 1948 from Beit Daras to Gaza exemplifies liminality, marking their transition from stability to instability. The Nakba is deeply associated with loss and confusion for Palestinians, and this migration symbolizes not just a physical shift but a profound transformation of a family's sociocultural status. The peaceful past before Nakba, when the people of Beit Daras connected with nature, represents the pre-liminal phase in terms of liminality. The displacement of the migrants in 1948 represents the liminal phase that is a period of ambiguity, disorientation and uncertainty about their future. The period following the transition period when things begin to calm down is known as the post-liminal phase. This time has not come yet for the residents of Beit Daras. Their future is still uncertain, the past is a distant memory, and the present is a struggle.

Gaza is a powerful symbol of liminality, marked by ongoing conflict and economic struggle. It embodies the Palestinian experience of living in a state of transition, where present-day hardships starkly contrast with its historical grandeur - a legacy that, while lost, remains remembered. The Palestinians were in a liminal state, as they leave their homes and their belongings and move to a new state of uncertainty. They were also forced to separate from their men, who stayed behind to fight for their survival with a hope to return to their normal lives after the conflict was over, but uncertain when or how that would happen. As Turner identified the term liminality as a sense of *communitas* with other refugees, who shared their misery and their hopes as they had to find new ways of surviving themselves: "Israel's bombing of Gaza disrupted life, plunging the community into silent mourning where hope felt lost and death seemed appealing. Despite this, time moved on, and people slowly resumed their routines, grappling with fears and memories while living on the margins, waiting for their time" (Abulhawa, 2015, p. 134).

After exile, Palestinians settled in aid-supported camps. Their lives were deeply affected, with many injuries or losing loved ones. Despite the initial confusion and sorrow, they are known for their resilience and hope of returning home: "Over time, mud bricks and metal sheets replaced cloth tents, leading to a new way of life in the refugee camps. This life embodies pride, defiance, and a steadfast commitment to preserving their sense of home, no matter how challenging it may be" (Abulhawa, 2015, p. 52). In the context of liminality, these lines suggest a deep sense of displacement and disorientation, where individuals or community are caught between old and new harsh realities, waiting for things to become clear and to be resolved. In this text, the characters' struggles and navigating of liminality are deeply influenced by the socio-political realities of the 20th century.

Khaled, the storyteller with Locked-In Syndrome, embodies liminality that is crucial to understand his journey. He tells how Palestinians were forced to leave their homeland. "In May 1948, after European Jewish immigrants announced the creation of a new state called Israel instead of the old land of Palestine, now known as the 'Israel Defense Forces,' entered Beit Daras following hours of heavy bombing" (p. 37). Abulhawa challenges the Zionist assertion that Palestinians willingly left their communities at the

exact moment. The horrific events that the peasants went through during their forced exile are recorded in Khaled's description. Those who remained were either killed, captured and never released or fled to Gaza (p. 30). Khaled's illness becomes a catalyst for transformation.

This work follows four generations of resilient Palestinian women from Gaza who seek refuge in a camp after being uprooted from their village, Beit Daras. While the men join the resistance with pride, matriarch Nazmiyeh leads the women, who become the family's pillars during political and personal turmoil: "It was difficult to figure out or accept their truth because it was so unexpected and shocking" (p. 18). The protagonist, Nazmiyeh, a young newly bride, had to escape with her family and many other native people from her village. This act indicated a transitory phase, which is a crucial aspect of liminality, as they left their homes and other belongings due to fear of being murdered, sexually assaulted, and robbed by the Zionist forces. Nazmiyeh was further driven into a transitional state of trauma by the nightmare searching for her sister, gang-raped by the Israeli soldiers and seeing her sister Mariam killed. This traumatic event stayed with her throughout her life, resulting in not only physical harm but also a deep wound to her soul, which indicates a transformative liminal experience. Nazmiyeh was feeling the confusion and ambiguity, characteristic of liminality, when she was torn between the past—the pre-existing state of Palestine—and the present—the state of Israel that was invading on her territory. This personal struggle was a mirror of the larger sociopolitical changes that many individuals and communities are currently navigating. Another transitional period is when Nazmiyeh's brother Mamdouh move to North Carolina from Kuwait, her son's engagement, and his intention to travel to Saudi Arabia for work. Despite the physical distance, her family remained united, just as her country, Palestine, was also scattering. This dispersion reflects a state of liminality, where the unity and stability of her family and homeland collapsed, leading to a period of division and change before they could start their lives in new locations. Nazmiyeh is a complete example of liminality; stands for a change, uncertainty, and transition. Emotionally and physically shattered, she survives through the assurance of Mariam's spirit, who promises they will be together forever and she will have a daughter named Alwan. This connection transforms Nazmiyeh into a passionate and wise matriarch. Her experiences—giving birth to a son who reminds her of her trauma, coping with her sister's loss, and facing her son's imprisonment—shape her relationships and role within the family.

The Six Day War started in 1967 when Israel attacked Egypt by bringing more Zionist soldiers to Gaza. Nazmiyeh's husband and older son were arrested with many innocent Palestinians. She tried to stop them, but her legs paralyzed. Everybody faced new tragedy, new wrath, and resurrected fear due to this conflict: "The world split in two by that horrific moment—those who were crying and those who were cheering. The Palestinians cried, but their tears always ended in something different. Israeli soldiers' persistent brutality was accepted as part of daily life" (p. 55).

After her grandfather Mamdouh's death, Nur faces abuse and hardship in the United States, finds herself alone. Her grandfather had cared for her after her father's accidental death when she was a child. Now, with him gone and unable to return to Gaza, Nur is moved to live with her mother and her mother's partner, who earn her trust. Nur, despite being Palestinian by birth, had been uprooted due to political unrest and disconnected with their homeland, culture, or traditions. Before being saved by Tio Santiago and caseworker Nzinga, Nur experienced years of verbal and sexual abuse. Nur maintains her academic excellence while transitioning from foster family to foster home, experiencing emotional hardening and isolation and pursues a career in psychotherapy. Like Abulhawa, whose parents were exiled from East Jerusalem during the 1967 war, Nur represents the enduring love for Palestine and a willingness to sacrifice for it. Abulhawa, born in Kuwait after her parents reunited there, faced trauma from their early separation while growing up across various countries. Nur's journey mirrors this experience. She falls

in love with a married man Jamal, and travels to Gaza to heal Khaled as a psychologist, when she sees a TV interview that connects her to her roots. Nazmiyeh recognizes Nur by her mismatched eyes. Nur born in America to a Palestinian father and caught between two cultures represents liminal state. Her traumatic experiences of sexual abuse from her mother's boyfriend and then her decision to return to Gaza indicates a liminal journey from disconnection to reconnection with her family and her ancestral homeland. As Nur said: "Nzinga, I feel like nothing is keeping me together. I feel like I am just a collection of pieces from various places taped together and will fall apart if I move too forcefully or speak too loudly" (p. 92).

Nur's life represents a state of liminality because her life is full of several transitional phases. Her disturbed sleep pattern: "lying in fear of what the night might bring" (p. 81), symbolizes her state of being 'betwixt and between'. Furthermore, she has "security, freedom and opportunity," but she feels herself out of place, this displacement indicates disorientation and ambiguity that are characteristics of liminality. She experiences unnecessary criticism after being taken to a Christian foster home where she is the only Muslim. She was punished for her religious convictions after being discovered smoking with other students. The following day, she goes to the church's father and adopts their religion to escape this intolerable situation: "So, one Wednesday at Chapel Service, she accepts Jesus. She received a pardon without any punishment, but in secret, Nur worries for her soul and prays to Allah" (p. 200). In Nazmiyeh's house, Nur feels uncomfortable due to the different cultural norms. Her relationship with Jamal in an Islamic nation is not accepted. This shift exposes her to liminality, influenced by her American upbringing. Nur internalizes that Palestinian women often rely on men, contrasting with the independence and equality in American girls. Her grandmother, Nazmiyeh, disapproves Nur's views, believing she has become too American, while preoccupied with traditional gender roles. When Israel and Palestine exchange prisoners in 2011, it opens new possibilities for Nur and Mazen, a released prisoner, as Nazmiyeh plans for the marriage of Nur and Mazen.

The Arsonist's City

Hala Alyan's novel *The Arsonists' City* is a story of the wealthy Palestinian-American Nasr family, spread across the globe, offering a personal perspective on the war in the Middle East. The protagonist, Idris Nasr, grapples with the difficult decision to sell the family's home in Beirut, triggering a wave of emotions among his wife and children—Ava, Mimi, and Naj. Each member confronts their own challenges, desires for acceptance and belonging, set against the backdrop of Beirut's traumatic past and ongoing sociopolitical tensions. This paper aims to understand the complexity of identity in modern society, where individuals confront and negotiate their sense of self in the face of cultural change and societal expectations through a lens of liminality. Alyan's storytelling reveals family secrets and examines how knowing about one's parents' pre-marriage and pre-childhood experiences might help one better understand who they are today.

Naj's lesbian identity adds a vital layer to her liminal experience, as she navigates a society where queer identities are marginalized. Her relationships with Jo and Fee highlight the emotional and social challenges she faces, balancing lingering feelings with cultural expectations. Through these connections, Naj's story reveals the complexities of queer relationships in a traditional environment, illustrating the tension between personal desire and societal norms: "You think you are altering the world, but your efforts failed to produce a meaningful result" (Alyan, 2021, p. 249).

Mazna, a diasporic Arab woman aspiring to become a Hollywood actress, encouraged by her teachers in Syria, believes her talent in Shakespearean tragedies will lead her to stardom in the U.S. Her marriage to Idris, offers hope for fulfilling her dreams. However, after moving to California, Mazna is disappointed to find that her success in

Syrian theater doesn't translate into opportunities. Despite her efforts, she faces rejection and is often typecast in stereotypical roles for Middle Eastern women. In contrast, Idris flourishes in America, becoming a successful cardiologist with a primary home and a vacation property in Lebanon.

Syrian occupation signifies liminality and ambiguity, where the normal political authority of Beirut is disrupted and this disruption creates a liminal state where Beirut is neither fully independent nor completely subordinated: "Sometimes the entire situation feels like a machine working by itself. But what I want to do? Mazna sometimes confuses. This is the biggest confusion of all" (p. 150).

Zakaria works in bakery of Deedee where Mazna falls in love with Zakaria at first glance. The handsome soldier comes in the bakery and asks Deedee: "Numerous honest Lebanese people searching work here but you hire Palestinians. Deedee says coldly. "I will employ whomever I choose" (p. 176). Here Zakaria represents the liminal and marginalized condition of Palestine.

The paper explores the enduring effects of Western colonization on Palestine and Lebanon, highlighting its ongoing impact on Palestinians, who continue to face scattering and displacement. Mazna encounters the negative stereotyped images of Arab countries, created by the discourse of Western Orientalism. As her career grows, she undergoes emotional detachment from her family and homeland. Her move to America intensifies her sense of victimization due to xenophobia, deepening her isolation and anxiety. As her dreams falter in an unfamiliar world, Mazna grapples with depression and the loss of her lover, Zakaria, further isolating her in a foreign land as she contends with profound grief.

The situation of Idris is distinct because America cannot tolerate Arab men, whereas the reaction towards her is almost approaching pity. Mazna is unable to express the reasons why the situation is poorer (p. 323). Mazna realizes the discrimination, unfair treatment and the problem of assimilating into this society, which falls her into liminal state, causing her to feel stuck and hopeless. Despite encountering many obstacles, Mazna continues her efforts to overcome them. She contacts numerous acting agencies, although all of them inform her that they are not accepting new clients. This evokes frustration in her: "Do not hope, do not hope, do not hope, she whispered. However, this time, it fails to work; as she travels further west, her optimism gradually fades away" (p. 368). She was unaware of the alternative perception of America and demonstrates her faith in America's opportunities for immigrants. Mazna believed that she can't live a perfect life in her native country, but in America she would be a well-known Hollywood actress. In another example, as Mazna and Zakaria discuss their future plans, she assures him that everything will be fine and "we shall go to London for work and save money for America, so you can apply for asylum there" (p. 192).

Mazna's confidence in a successful career in the West grows when Idris persuades her to marry him by sharing his surgical residency in California. He knows what brings her joy and uses this to convince her to accept his proposal by telling her: "We'll live in California. You can go to Los Angeles [. . .] you could audition for movies and become a Hollywood star" (p. 211). He knows that Mazna will not miss this golden opportunity because her poverty and the unstable political condition in her country are real hurdles in the way of her dreams. While urging Mazna to pursue acting, he secretly undermines her ambitions by rejecting phone calls from directors, that leads Mazna into a liminal state marked by an identity crisis and feelings of inferiority. Mazna is haunted by Zakaria's memories, pregnant with his child, Ava, but fears telling Idris. She experiences a premature birth and seeks to escape from Zakaria's memory through acting. However, Idris doesn't understand her, creating distance between them. After discovering Idris's lies, they don't speak for months. Mazna faces depression during her early marriage and pregnancy, seeing her situation as an obstacle to her dreams. Ultimately, her disappointment with the

Western film industry leads her to abandon her aspirations of becoming a Hollywood actress, reluctantly accepting her role as a housewife and grandmother, even her past continues to haunt her. Despite several efforts, Mazna gets only stereotypical supporting roles, frequently limited to a few lines. In Syria, she is praised as a great stage actor, but she remains unknown in America. Unbeknownst to Idris, she terminates her pregnancy, believing it may complicate her acting career. This choice weighs heavily on her, and her trauma deepens when Idris reveals that the producers have selected someone else. Mazna represents the Arab experience of feeling caught between cultures, having embraced an idealized vision of the West while overlooking the complexities of her reality. She is confused and doesn't know what to say or do (p. 313). "She has committed an error," she recognizes her reality: living in a desert town, married to Idris, who urged her for marriage. Initially, she expected their life in California to be different, but reality soon set in. Idris defied his parents to come to America, yet they constantly pressure him to return, creates tension between him and Mazna. During a heated argument, he dismisses his mother's calls, insisting he won't go back to that "dead-end land." While Mazna feels distress, she hopes it will ease time. Their financial struggles compound these issues; Lebanon's prosperity feels distant as they live on a modest hospital stipend. Mazna feels a deep disappointment when Idris reveals that most of their wealth is superficial—just decorative items. She was expecting a luxurious life, that her sorrow healed by money (p. 315).

Mazna's intense longing for Syria abruptly awakens her, making Beirut feel insignificant. Her pain is rooted in her connection to Beirut; without it, there would be no Idris, no Blythe, no Zakaria. Ultimately, she accepts reality and forgives Idris: "They moved to America with distinct ambitions. Idris achieves his professional journey as a doctor and enjoying his new life" (p. 311). America changes his mindset. He is now more engaged to the "American Dream" and ignores the idea of returning to Beirut. He considers Beirut lifeless (p. 313). America influences him to adopt a new attitude on his future and hopeful for fulfilling the American Dream: "He believes his wife will become a well-known actress and the hospital will support him. They will have a best life here" (p. 313). He has achieved his goals, except for the one relating to his spouse which remains unaccomplished.

At Ava's birth, Mazna is loudly saying that she is a person of no importance, repeatedly uttering the phrase "nobody" (p. 339). The sight of Ava stirs a deep desire in Mazna to hold her tightly and never let go. In those early months, she feels both joy and profound sadness as she gently rocks her baby, watching her breathe. Mazna's love for Ava is almost beyond her control, evokes both wonder and the sense of having stolen something precious. She loves her infant deeply. Mazna struggles with nostalgia when she attempts to teach at an institution but ultimately cannot continue. She wants to avoid recalling her past. Idris, unhappy with her job in the greenhouse, encourages her for teaching. However, on her first day in the classroom, she is overwhelmed with emotion and nearly cries; chalk, wooden floorboards, the instructor's enthusiasm—reminds her of theater. She never returns to college. While the greenhouse occupies her thoughts, she can never explain this to Idris (p. 346).

Mimi, a thirty-five-year-old chef in Austin, the leader of the rock band Dulcet, navigates a complex life. He lives with his girlfriend, Harper, but faces challenges from his mother's disdain for her middle-class background and his father's concerns about the band's finances. Feeling inadequate compared to his successful sister, Naj, he's the last original member of Dulcet. While he loves music, his job at Olive often takes priority in conversations. Mazna occasionally supports his music financially, unlike his successful sister Naj. Frustrated by his mother's involvement, he worries about his future with Harper despite his deep feelings for her. While his peers pursue stability, Mimi remains dedicated to his band and his job as a chef at Olive. Financial struggles limit his ability to support Harper in her property purchase and celebrate her successes, complicating their relationship. He admires her aspirations. He feels stuck in his band, Dulcet, and often

considers traveling to Beirut but dismisses it due to political fears and pressure from his mother. When Harper confronts him about ignoring her calls, he feels ashamed and frustrated. Their relationship is strained by differing long-term goals, and the compromises Harper suggests are ones he isn't ready to accept. Mimi faces challenges in managing his family responsibilities, pursuing his music career, and maintaining his relationship with Harper. Mimi is hesitant about going to Beirut, partly due to his desire to avoid Naj and the familial disputes regarding his heritage. Tension rises during a band rehearsal with his musical group. Allie, a member of the band, critiques Mimi's commitment to music. Mimi and Allie experience an unexpected and unfortunate incident. This creates issues within the band and engulfs Mimi with guilt and embarrassment. Despite his sense of guilt, he visits to Beirut with Harper to try to repair their relationship and deal with their familial problems. Mimi represent the theme of liminality, where he moves between various thresholds and transitions in his life. As the lead singer and guitarist symbolizes a transitional zone where his artistic enthusiasm meets with his father's career advice. This contrast emphasizes his unwavering determination to reconcile artistic satisfaction with society's demands for stability and achievement. The contrasting aspirations and familial upbringings of Mimi and Harper give rise to conflicts, but their determination to navigate these challenges reflects their transitional state between individual aspirations and external influences, inspiring us with their resilience.

Ava is the eldest daughter of Mazna. Her life changes when she receives her mother's phone call who is quite angry about Idris's choice to sell the family's inherited residence in Beirut. Mazna insists Ava for journey to Beirut during the summer and convince Mimi to go with them to preserve "the final ancestral residence that is rightfully ours." Ava doubts her mother's intentions to save the home, considering that Mazna has not visited Beirut for almost three decades. The house deed is only in the names of Idris and his sister Sarah. As the Nasr family gathers in Beirut, Ava grapples with personal challenges, including managing an unstable marriage, the responsibilities of being a mother and experiencing feelings of inadequacy and frustration in her life. She rediscovers her identity in Beirut and a long-hidden family secret. The portrayal of her experience focuses on the concept of liminality, emphasizing her journey through transitory phases: "Although it may be incorrect, Ava's primary desire is not to prove herself right, but rather to return to the previous state of affairs" (p. 28).

Zakaria's death influences the family dynamics and relationships. Zakaria and Mazna's sexual relationship had resulted in pregnancy. Mazna never tells Ava about her real father. Ava discovers the truth that she is the daughter of Zakaria, on her grandfather memorial in Beirut that leads her to liminality. Amidst her troubled marriage with Nate, Ava discovers emails of his infidelity but she forgives him. Mazna pressures her to go to Beirut. Reluctantly, Ava agrees to help prevent her father from selling the ancestral home, struggling to balance her familial obligations with her desire for stability with Nate. As she deals with guilt for missing her grandfather's funeral and her mother's disapproval of her Arab heritage, she hides details from Nate about the trip, fearing it could worsen their strained relationship. The situation becomes more complicated when Nate mentions he might have to travel to Portland for two months. Feeling lonely and frustrated, Ava's anger intensifies when he suggests they could join him, leading her to question the fairness of his proposal.

During a social gathering hosted by Alice, Ava comes across Emily, who had previously interacted with Nate over email. Ava finds herself faced with a chaotic mix of fury and betrayal while being alone herself. While contemplating the matter, Ava recalls her sister Naj's suggestion to forgive Nate only if his extramarital relationship has genuinely ended. Ava also experiences in-between situation, her identity is not static but develops as she connects with the past of her family and Palestinian heritage. Analyzing both novels through the lens of liminality the paper points out different examples of liminality and in-between situations in the characters of these novels.

Conclusion

Characters in Abulhawa's novel represent the transitional state between opposing worlds, symbolizing the conflict between happy recollections of the past and the harsh truths of the present. In this novel, the examination of liminality enhances the narrative and encourages readers to contemplate the adaptability of one's identity and the influential nature of transitional periods in molding personal and social awareness. This paper explores the significant consequences of liminality in literature and its ability to provide fresh perspectives on the complex nature of human experiences and societal changes. Likewise, Alyan's novel presents numerous characters and events in which migrants, Palestinians, refugees, displaced individuals, war victims, and the diaspora population confront the liminal situation. Her characters' struggles, rooted in the author's own second-generation migrant background, are vividly depicted, evoking sympathy in the audience. She has exposed the narratives of Naksa, Nakba, and migration through the accounts of her parents and other predecessors highlighted in her fictive characters' potential to realistically show a state of being in-between, transitioning into a blend of cultures.

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