

## Grafting Eco-Diasporic Identity in Randa Abdel-Fattah's Selected Novels

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is based on three selected novels entitled *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2005), *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006), and *Where The Streets Had A Name* (2008) written by Randa Abdel-Fattah (1979), a Palestinian-Egyptian Australian Muslim diasporic writer. In this article, we examine the manifestations of grafting eco-diasporic identity by Abdel-Fattah in order to address how identity graft is operated by interacting with ideology, culture and nature in the contexts of the host land and the homeland as represented in the three selected novels. Using Colin Richards' theory of graft as a framework, we explore identity contestations of Muslim young adults in the novels from an ecocritical and diasporic perspectives. In the novel *Does My Head Look Big In This?*, the images of Amal's sense of being marginalised in the semiosphere of the host land and the sense of self-respect of her Muslim rootedness and heritage of the homeland semiosphere frame the fractured graft of identity. The character of Jamilah, in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* displays genuine manifestations of the collective emblem of the grafted identity. Finally, the symbol of the iconic jar of the homeland soil and its potentiality of regenerating Hayaat's identity in *Where the Streets Had A Name* exhibits the ecological semiosphere in which the grafted identity is shaped. The current discussion, therefore, offers fresh insights into allowing a new horizon for identity grafting in Abdel-Fattah's works as well as other writers within the tradition of Muslim Diasporic Literature.

**Keywords:** Grafting; eco-diasporic identity; Randa Abdel-Fattah; Muslim young adult; homeland semiosphere

### INTRODUCTION

Jenkins (1999) states that young adult literature addresses issues related to young adults to highlight the challenges that often afflict them before they achieve the maturity of adulthood. They face many issues; one of the most important is the matter of identity. According to Marc Aronson (2001, p. 21), the young adults' stories capture "the innocent passion of adolescence, when children sense the layers of human existence, experience the desires, and work out the ideals that will add depth to their character and provide them with a road map on their journey". Similarly, McCallum (1999) highlights the dialogic constructions and representations of identity in literature for young people by focusing on the way the self is constructed through interactions with ideology, culture and social forces in the society. This focus on identity relates to a central concern in the works of the contemporary Palestinian-Egyptian Australian diasporic writer Randa Abdel-Fattah, whose novels center on the identity

complications of female Muslim diasporic young adults who negotiate their religious beliefs in a largely Christian and Caucasian environment.

### ABDEL-FATTAH'S PLACE IN THE CONTEXT OF MUSLIM DIASPORIC LITERATURE

Diasporic writers are writers who reside outside their homelands yet return to them in their writings (Ruzy Suliza Hashim & Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf, 2009). Raihanah M.M., Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Noraini Yusof (2013, p. 105) argue that "Muslim Diaspora is an ever-growing literary tradition with writers from a heterogeneous background who display various social, cultural and religious identities in their works of fiction". Among the Muslim diasporic writers, Abdel-Fattah has emerged as a prominent young adult writer with her first novel in 2005. She is a highly successful Muslim diasporic writer not only for producing eight young adult fiction but more importantly, for demonstrating noticeable concerns for issues affecting Muslims migrants facing crises of identities and acute inequities in the host lands. The emergence of Abdel-Fattah's literary works to some extent has created visibility for Muslim diasporic community in Australia.

Over the last ten years, Abdel-Fattah's selected novels have received scholarly attention. The first novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), tells the story of sixteen-year-old Amal who makes the decision to start wearing the hijab full-time despite varying reactions and responses from her family and friends. The novel has received numerous critical reviews. For instance, Zannettino's study entitled "*From Looking for Alibrandi to Does My Head Look Big in This?: The Role of Teenage Novels in Reconceptualising Racialised-Gendered Identities*" (2007) compares three Australian young adult novels including Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This* (2005) to investigate the racialised-gendered identities of the female character in the narratives. In another study entitled "Looking for Answers to Big Questions: Religion in Current Young Adult Literature" by Letcher (2011), the central protagonist is examined for her religious identity. Letcher (2011) argues that Abdel-Fattah succeeds in presenting the 16-year-old Amal as a sincere and devoted young adult Muslim who enjoys Australian culture. However, she becomes a victim of marginalization among the Australian society once she decides to wear the Muslim hijab as a sign of her faith and this also stated by Amrah Abdul Majid (2016) in her study entitled "Reading the Hijab as a Marker of Faith in Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?*". A study by Haines's (2015) on "Challenging Stereotypes: Randa Abdel-Fattah's Use of Parody in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*" explores the representations of anti-Muslim stereotypes, marginalization and racism. Siti Masitah Md Zin and Low Chan Mee (2014, p. 186) find that Amal "embraces the positive assimilation as a result of her hybrid identity". To them, Amal is conflict free; her fluid identity, they further contend, means that "she can get along with people outside of her ethnic group" (p. 186). While this paper similarly investigates the issue of identity, we extend the discussion by focusing on the theme of identity grafting, specifically examining how the minority self is merged into the majority mainstream society.

The second novel, *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006), narrates the story of a Muslim young adult, Jamilah, who is hiding behind a double identity. With her family and Muslim community, she is known as Jamilah, a hijab wearing young Muslim girl of Lebanese background. At school, she is known as Jamie, a blond and blue-eyed Australian young adult. This novel has been studied previously on the issue of identity crisis of a minority Muslim young adult. Raihanah M. M., Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Noraini Md. Yusof (2013) in their study contend that Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate About Me* shows how the multicultural landscape plays a vital role in the constriction of the protagonist's struggle and conflict to be

an active member of the mainstream white Australian society. In another study, Raihanah M.M., Norzalimah Kassim and Ruzy Suliza Hashim (2013) problematise the second-generation minority identity in their critical essay entitled ‘Minority within: 2nd Generation Young Adult Muslim Australian in *Ten Things I Hate About Me.*’ They emphasise that in both private and public domains, the social, cultural and religious spaces that the young adult minority protagonist inhabits affect her identity formation.

The third novel *Where The Streets Had A Name* (2008), tells the story of the young adult Palestinian Hayaat who travels secretly to Jerusalem to pick up a handful of the soil from her grandmother's ancestral home to fulfill her request. Raihanah M.M, Hamoud Yahya and Ruzy Suliza Hashim (2014) examine Abdel-Fattah's novel *Where The Streets Had A Name* through ecocritical lens where they suggest that the novelist appropriates symbol of the land illuminating identity issues in the novel. The analysis displayed three parts of ecocritical approach focusing on environmental politics and its effects on the mind, body and voice.

Central to our discussion on grafting diasporic identity in Abdel-Fattah's selected novels, we draw attention to two previous studies. The first by Raihanah M.M, Norzalimah Kassim and Ruzy Suliza Hashim (2013) focuses on the experience of the “minority within” in a Muslim community which problematises the spatial provocation of identity by family and cultural community. The second study by Raihanah M. M., Hamoud Yahya and Ruzy Suliza Hashim (2014, p. 137) accentuates “the symbiotic interconnections between humans and land” in Abdel-Fattah's narrative. As an extension to the research on Abdel-Fattah's works thus far, we shall examine the grafting of multiple Muslim diasporic identities on Amal, Jamilah and Hayaat through the lens of Richards' theory of graft in the literary context. Through this lens, we can interrogate the tensions and resolutions of Muslims whose existence and identity in the host land present undercurrents of apprehension.

### **‘GRAFTING’ AS A TOOL OF CONSTRUCTING ECO-DIASPORIC IDENTITY**

The term “grafting” is originally a horticultural expression that refers to “the act of joining two plant parts, ... stock and scion, so that they will form a union and grow together (Southwick, 1981, p. 5). Through the process of inosculation, whereby the stock and the scion are placed in contact with each other to stimulate growth, a composite plant is created. Grafting only works if the plants are compatible. When applied to literary texts, the theory of grafting opens up a plethora of possibilities, especially relating to the grafting of identities. It is an encultured space, within which the role of the variation in the development of the human identity revolves between spaces and boundaries. To extend further the concept of space, we appropriate the notion of semiosphere, a term used by a Russian semiotician, Yuri Lotman (1984) to denote space that captures the processes of signification. Semiosphere is characterized by an existence of boundary described by Lotman as semiotic homogeneity and individuality. Hence, the process of grafting opens up the semiosphere in which hybrid identities are formed. Similar to the horticultural practice, Richards (1997) uses the concept of “graft” to refer to a process or an action that takes place physically which requires considerable effort from both sides of the boundary. Richards further argues that the process of grafting is rather traumatic and painful as it involves cutting through boundaries of nature and culture that are at play.

The importance of compatibility for successful grafting to take place is also emphasized in this case, where the parent tree or stock, in horticultural parlance, provides welcoming conditions for the hybrid to thrive. This symbiotic relationship is mutually satisfying for both stock and scion. In the case of a diasporic subject, the host land is the stock and the newly placed person is the scion. The reasons for movement often range from voluntary migration to forceful displacement. For a person who voluntarily moves to a new

host land, often he or she will endeavor to make the new dwelling and the values it encompasses feasible. It is more likely that a forceful displacement results in unsuccessful grafting.

It is important to note there is another form of grafting in literature. While Richards shows the positive aspect of grafting, Lee (2016, p. 6) provides another view of ‘identity grafting’ describing it as “the process of reconciling normative disjuncture via the grafting of symbolic power” whereby people with authority or influence decide the construction of normative realities. Lee (2016) cites the example of Chinese women who undergo plastic surgery so that they appear more European physically while maintaining some of their more appealing Chinese attributes which markedly raise their economic values. In this instance, grafting a more European identity through their physical appearance takes on a more disquieting notion, because the hybrid product has apparently betrayed important characteristics of the original identity.

In the case of the diasporic subject, demands for change may take on positive or negative consequences. To avoid a misconnection or disjuncture with the host land, the diasporan, says Lee (2016, p. 6), may resort to “imitation, subversion, hybridization, and/or recombination”. Both Richards and Lee’s notions of grafting are utilized in this paper in our attempt to examine Abdel-Fattah’s characters in the three novels. To extend the grafting thread of inquiry, we adopt three key concepts from diasporic and ecocritical theories which can explain the process of grafting the eco-diasporic identity as manifested and represented through Abdel-Fattah’s portrayals of the female characters. These concepts will bring to light the contexts of the host land and the homeland as a cultural semiosphere in which eco-diasporic grafting takes place. Amal, Jamilah and Hayaat’s identities lend themselves well to grafting a new identity as each character is an embodiment of a well-defined cultural-religious characteristic that possesses one root in the semiosphere/an encultured space of the homeland and the other in a new semiosphere of the host land.

### **MARGINALISED IDENTITY**

Marginalisation is a process, through which a person gets excluded from a group due to the label of being less important. It is a widespread and powerful phenomenon in the social world. In such a manner, a minority group is usually excluded from the society; as a result, both need, and desires of these people are disregarded. It is also defined as the act of ignoring some individuals, especially through exiling them over the outer edge of a group or through redirecting the attention of the public to other issues (Valença, Nel & Leimgruber, 2008). Marginalisation, therefore, can be regarded as inharmonious relationship between those who are being marginalised as compared to those who marginalise. The concept of “marginalised identity” will be used for the analysis of grafting Amal’s identity in *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2005) through linking the images of Amal’s sense of being marginalised in the semiosphere of the host land and the sense of self-respect of her Muslim semiosphere that are incorporated to frame the fractured example of the new grafted eco-diasporic identity in the novel.

### **ANTI-RACIALISED IDENTITY**

“Anti-racialised identity” refers to an identity that represents behaviours, attitudes and practices that identify, challenge and change the structures and values of racism in a particular society. Anti-racism, as a concept, depends both, in theory and practice, on actions. In the context of diaspora, anti-racism presents and criticizes racism and how it operates against the diasporic people and the theory of anti-racism, therefore, presents practical procedures for taking social actions to reduce racism in the society (Henry & Tator, 2006).

According to McIntosh (1989), the perception of racism involves the awareness of its effects on the lives of the racialised people among the white people. Anti-racist theory allows us to examine the diversity in the context of ethnicity and race as well as the power imbalances between the non-racialised and racialised people in the society. This imbalance is played out in the form of the rights and privileges that the non-racialised people earn, and the racialised people do not. We will utilize the concept of “anti-racialised identity” for the analysis of grafting Jamilah’s collective identity in the novel *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006) by linking the two faces of her identity as Jamilah of the homeland semiosphere and as Jamie of the host land semiosphere that are incorporated to constitute a new collective space in which grafting operates to frame the collective aspect of the new grafted identity in the whole narrative.

#### ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY

The concept of “ecological identity” refers to “the ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth, as manifested in personality, values, actions and sense of themselves” (Thomashow, 1996, p. 3). The connections between identity and land contribute to the development of a strong and deep sense of one’s self as being related with the natural ecosystem of the world. Increasingly over the years, this kind of relationship has given birth to the sense of human-nonhuman rootedness shared by literary scholars and writers of all ages and places. Berry and Swimme (1992: 71) contend that “our individual self finds its most complex realization within our family self, our community self, our species self, our earthly self, and eventually our universe self.” This concept will be applied in the process of grafting Hayaat’s ecological identity in *Where the Streets Had A Name* (2008) by incorporating the symbiotic interconnection between the identity of the Muslim young adults and the land within the semiosphere of the land of their origin.

#### DISCUSSION

The analysis will be carried out by exploring three examples of grafted identities. Each example is intended to highlight the representation of grafting the eco-diasporic identity embodied in the characters analyzed through the chain of events that markedly demonstrate how identities are negotiated and what they imply within the Australian context.

#### **GRAFTING AMAL: MARGINALISED IDENTITY IN ABDEL-FATTAH’S *DOES MY HEAD LOOK BIG IN THIS?***

As the narrative begins, Amal, the protagonist, is highly inspired, all of a sudden, to follow the Islamic rule of wearing the *hijab*. She feels ready to do it as she admits “I was ready to wear the *hijab*. [...] I can’t sleep from stressing whether I’ve got the guts to do it.” (p. 2). She defines herself as having a hyphenated identity: “I’m an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. That means I was born an Aussie and whacked with some seriously identity hyphens.” (p. 6). This remark signals not only Amal’s identity crisis for being a minority in the Australian society but also the contestation of marginalisation. Before deciding to don the *hijab*, she has grafted on the identity of an ordinary Australian. Australia is viewed as the parent stock that influences her behavior. Accordingly, taking a decision to wear the *hijab* comes with doubts and uncertainties. At an age where she would rather blend in with the parent culture, she has chosen to stand out. Amal firmly declares “I am ready for the next step, I am sure about that. But I am still nervous. Agh! There are a million different voices in my head scaring me off.” (p. 8). She further specifies the earliest burden of marginalisation as she will surely be

confronted at school because “I can’t imagine what my class will say if I walk in with the *hijab* on.” (p. 9).

Amal wears the *hijab* and faces various insults and misconceptions from her classmates of the majority group at the school. Her application for a part-time job is rejected by the employer due to her Muslim heritage and faith. She describes her experience while she is involved in arguments with her parents at home:

I think I am ... I mean, yeah, sure, it was really hard at school and everybody was staring at me and I just know they’re all wondering if I’ve flipped. I know it kind of looks like I am asking for it. Do you know what I am saying? You don’t put the *hijab* on and walk to McClean expecting people not to wonder what a hell is going on. (p. 51)

This shows Amal’s bitterness towards marginalisation. Yet, her mother’s arguments warrant attention. She advises her young daughter to look towards her future among people of that society as she tells Amal:

You see how people react and look at *me*, at my age! You’re still young and starting up. You’ve got college and then looking for a job. Have you thought all of it through? (p. 51)

This observation was based on her mother’s sense of self as a minority which Amal has to confront.

“Sorry, love, we cannot accept people like you.” George replies.

“What do you mean?” Amal asks George and he replies:

“The thing on your head, love, that’s what I mean. It’s not hygienic and it just doesn’t look good up at the front of the shop. Sorry, love. Try somewhere else.” (pp. 318-319)

The contrast between the patronizing endearment “love” and the racism that is attached to the rejection frames the crux of the issue. It clearly displays Amal’s self-recognition of the actual dilemma of being marginalised in the Australian society. This argument is similar to views by Taylor (1994, p. 25) on the issue of identity reorganization:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.

In other words, the marginalised identity shaped by Amal’s self-recognition in the host land has re-connected her to the land of her origin as she ends the narrative admitting that:

Anyway, I’ve decided I’m through with identity. The next chapter in my life is not going to so much as mention the word. I’ve decided I’ll write a new list. I’ve done To Wear or Not To Wear. I’ve had To Go To Court or Work In A Lab. I’m going traditional now. Straight to the source, right from the horse’s mouth. To Be or Not To Be. But you know what? This time I don’t need a list. I don’t even need to think about it. Because something tells me that I already know which side is going to win this one. (p. 360)

At this juncture, Amal reconnects with the values of her distant homeland, Palestine. It is the religious practices of her forefathers that she recognizes and values in taking on the *hijab*. Instead of seeing Australia, her land of birth as the parent stock, she embraces the beliefs of her ancestors and carves out a space to make their identity as her grafted identity. Despite the fact that the host land presents many complications in Amal’s taking back her Muslim identity, she rejects the normalized Australian practices that would disjuncture in her new acclaimed identity. Thus, this issue of wearing the *hijab* and its misrecognition by the multi-cultural Australian society helps us graft the marginalised identity of the Muslim-Palestinian-Australian young Amal, who represents the Muslim minority, in the diasporic context of the host land of Australia and inadvertently enjoins it to the land of origin. Amal’s

sense of being a marginalised identity in the host land and the sense of self-respect of the values of her Muslim faith and heritage grafts the eco-diasporic example of Amal's identity represented in the whole narrative.

### **GRAFTING JAMILAH: ANTI-RACIALISED IDENTITY IN *TEN THINGS I HATE ABOUT ME***

As the narrative begins, we can see the character of Jamilah, the protagonist of the novel, standing among two conflicting groups of friends and classmates; the friends of the minority group, and those of the majority group in Australian. We can see Ahmed, who represents the minority group, attacking the racist way of looking at them by his Aussie classmates once they were on the beach:

I was with my cousins and some of my mates. We were walking down the esplanade. We heard a crowd of people chanting. They're chanting out stuff like, *No more Lebs! Wogs Go Home, Ethnic Cleansing*. And there were older people in the crowd too! It wasn't just kids. [...] I lost my cool. I was shouting at them, calling them racists. (p. 2)

The above remark by Ahmed reveals, on the one hand, the racial practice and the corresponding reaction towards them. On the other hand, classmates such as Sam, Peter and Chris, who represent the majority group, criticize bitterly Ahmed's response and reaction as Sam crudely declares, "Oh come on! Even our politicians have singled your kind out as troublemakers. [...] You refuse to integrate. Your women wear that funny headgear and most of you don't speak English." (p. 3)

In such mixed situation of reactions among the two extremes, Jamilah, the protagonist, decides to mediate in order to achieve her anti-racialised mission in the multicultural society of Australia. Her stance is revealed by her words when she admits "In fact, my real name is Jamilah Tofweek but I'm known as Jamie when I'm at school because I'm on a mission to de-wog myself" (p. 5). At this point of the narrative, Jamilah's true realization of herself as being "Jamilah", a Lebanese-Muslim young lady and the demand of being "Jamie", a blonde, blue-eyed young Australian woman, gives a horizon for us to graft her anti-racialised identity and develop it throughout the analysis of the novel. As "Jamie", she reminds us of Lee's example of Chinese women undergoing cosmetic surgery in order to resemble more European features because of the economic value. Jamilah becomes Jamie for the economic value of fitting as an Australian, not a "wog".

At the beginning, Jamilah's anti-racialised identity makes her swing like a pendulum between the two extremes of Jamilah and Jamie. Keeping her Lebanese-Muslim identity, as Jamilah, among Muslim minority and being accepted and respected; as Jamie, among the majority White Australian society are the two tensions that frame her new anti-racialised identity. In other words, we argue that Jamilah's anti-racialised identity is the agency that enables her to realise the crisis of Muslim diasporic identity among Australian society and consequently appear as a double-faced character to cope with the demands of religion, on the one hand, and Australian whiteness, on the other. Nevertheless, she manages to balance her faith and identity at the end of the narrative.

At one extreme, we can see Jamilah as Jamie, a blonde blue-eyed young Australian lady, trying to cope with her Australian classmates accepting their racial attitudes towards her minority as can be traced clearly in the situation of being in the company of Sam, Peter and Chris:

"What a joke, hey Jamie? Ahmed probably spends his weekends in a garage making bombs or training for a terrorist cell. I'm glad the riots broke out. My dad told me that it's been a long time coming. He used to surf those beaches when he was younger. Sure, there were Italians and Greeks but there weren't too many, so you didn't notice and it was OK. But now the Lebs have invaded the beaches and it's not the same." (p. 5)

This extract shows that Jamilah succeeds in giving an impression to the majority classmates about her Australian origin despite the fact of being merely an illusion or a social mask for the sake of being accepted and respected among her white friends.

On the other extreme, we can see Jamie at home as Jamilah, a Lebanese Muslim young female teenager, trying to convince us through the character of her father to recognize the racist practice against Muslim minority in such society:

“But Dad, you can’t deny it. We are wogs,” I say.

“No we are not! When I came to this country people would call you a wog and spit at you! It is offensive.

“You are an Australian, not a wog.”

“Well, Dad, most people don’t think that way.

(p. 71)

The above argument between Jamilah and her father at home reveals explicitly the dilemma of being a minority in the Australian society and implicitly justifies to us the social mask of being ‘Jamie’ at school but not at home. She further details the crisis of being a minority and the secrets beyond being Jamie and not Jamilah at school. She remarks that: “At my school if you speak two languages or have dark skin or don’t celebrate Christmas you’re never really accepted as an equal. That’s why keeping a low profile is the best option.” (p. 77).

Jamilah’s identity expands and it helps her negotiate the two tensions and the two extremes meet in the safe space of her room:

I practice playing the *darabuka* at home after school. I close my bedroom door, dim the lights and sit on my desk chair. I start to play, my beats getting stronger and deeper as I picture myself on the stage at the formal, my true identity exposed. I imagine Peter, Sam, Chris and the rest of their cronies in the audience, jeering at me.....As I play, and the music takes over me, I realise that I can’t deny that I love my Lebanese culture. (p. 174)

Playing the *darabuka* in privacy gives a horizon for her real identity to come out. Nevertheless, the *darabuka* represents Jamilah’s Lebanese heritage which, in return, constitutes the eco-cultural root of Jamilah’s diasporic identity in the sense of its tradition, material and shape that are originally of Arabic origin and setting. Therefore, such instrument of the cultural and ecocritical implications serves as a means that helps and empowers Jamilah to overcome the crisis of identity she describes:

How can I be three identities in one? It doesn’t work. They’re always at war with one another. If I want to go clubbing, the Muslim in me says it’s wrong and the Lebanese in me panics about bumping into somebody who knows my dad. If I want to go to a Lebanese wedding as the four hundredth guest, the Aussie in me will laugh and wonder why we’re not have civilized cocktails function room seats a maximum of fifty people. If I want to fast during Ramadan, the Aussie in me will think I’m a masochist. I can’t win.

(pp. 175-176)

The extract above clearly signals the pressure and conflict invading Jamilah’s identity as being a minority. However, the end of the novel shows how the instrument of her Arab heritage, the *darabuka*, offers a solution to the crisis of identity within her and even helps her achieve her anti-racialised mission, overcomes the tension of three-in-one-identity and reveals her real identity in public by providing a basis for taking action to eradicate racism in the Australian society as she concludes the narrative with such a surprising remark:

I can’t believe I’m here, at my formal, in front of all my classmates, exposing myself like this. There’s no shame; there’s no embarrassment. With every drumming, down on the *darabuka* I’m announcing who I am. For the first time in my life, knowing the answer has never felt so sweet.

(p. 278)

Standing confidently in public to show proudly herself as a Muslim-Lebanese Australian young woman is a genuine example of grafting Jamilah’s eco-diasporic identity of



an anti-racialised Australian root in the semiosphere of the host land of Australia that is attached to her Muslim Arab root in the semiosphere of the homeland of Lebanon.

### **GRAFTING HAYAAT: ECOLOGICAL IDENTITY IN *WHERE THE STREETS HAD A NAME***

The narrative of this novel presents clearly the symbiotic interconnectedness between the diasporic identities and the homeland which, in return, displays land as an agency of grafting the ecological identity of the protagonist. A crucial indication of the identity formation through the agency of land can be seen manifested in Hayaat's expressions. Her admission highlights how the natural setting of homeland influences her father's identity and even helps us graft it ecologically as she admits:

In *Beit Sahour*, he was loud and jocular. Working on his land made him happy and we felt that happiness when he came home to us in the evening. However, in our apartment in *Bethlehem*, Baba sits in silence, sucking his argeela or flicking through the news channels. (p. 24)

This excerpt reveals the strong effect of the land on the identity of Hayaat's father. In the past, being free to manage the land made him expressive and active and, conversely, at present, being displaced from it, brings about brooding silence. This showcases the land's effect on a person's sense of Self. Once the land is taken from them, the people symbolically lose their happiness and vitality as seen in the case of Hayaat's father who becomes passive in the new place, Bethlehem.

Further, being disconnected from the land has enabled Hayaat and her family to recognize their ecological sense of self. Though they are still within Palestinian land, the current separation from the land of birth seems meaningful in reconstructing the ecological aspects of identity. In other words, the new land of Bethlehem, which is now "home" to the family, becomes a source of continuous mourning and unending silence for them, particularly the father's identity that appears like "a parent mourning a child" (p. 24). The natural aspects of the land are deeply rooted within them as can be traced through Hayaat's father:

When we lost our land, he imploded. We have no way of seeing the evidence of his demolition but he no longer talks and laughs and tells stories as he did before.

(pp. 24-25)

Another presentation of grafting ecological identity in the narrative can be seen depicted in the character sketch of Hayaat's grandmother, Siti Zeynab, who seems to be closely engaged with memories of her homeland. The land is constantly and influentially present in the mind and emotions of the grandmother. The echoes of the song she sings about her homeland demonstrate the ecological sense of self and her connection to the land:

The breeze of our homeland revives the body  
And surely we cannot live without our homeland  
The bird cries when it is thrown out of its nest  
So how is the homeland that has its own people?

(p. 233)

The images of various aspects of home, land and nature such as "the limestone house," "the arched windows," "hills," "stones," "jasmine", "almond trees" and "olive trees" conjure the ecological sparks of memory that make up the ecological shape of her identity as she admits, "Those memories stow themselves in my windpipe until I dare not conjure another memory or I will scarcely be able to breathe" (p. 50). This admission reveals the in-depth influence of the past images of the land on her sense of self and therefore frames the ecological example of her identity. This green sense of self re-connects Hayaat and her grandmother with the homeland and even provides them with a hope of returning to the land

of birth as the grandmother narrates, “I planted the seed. I am still responsible. I am a fool. I have one foot in the grave and still have a severed soul, one-half in my village, one-half here” (p. 236).

The prominent example in the novel can be seen in the discussion between Hayaat and her grandmother, Siti Zeynab, who is sincere with her own of identity and origin.:

Land, ya, Hayaat. There is nothing so important. The deeper your roots, the taller and stronger you grow. When your roots are ripped out from under you, you risk shriveling up. All I want is to die on my land. Not in my daughter’s home, but in my home. (p. 63)

The sense of rootedness with the land imparted to Hayaat by grandmother in the excerpt above represents clearly the ecological structure of identity in Abdel-Fattah’s fiction. This organic attachment between the characters and their land signals the ecological semiosphere in which the grafted identity is formed. Further, the evocation between “the handful of soil” brought by Hayaat and the vitality of her grandmother’s body exhibits clearly the intimate link between identity and land and, in return, represents the space in which the ecological graft of the identity is implanted and formed.

Out of the other two novels discussed earlier, *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008) does not overtly seem to possess any diasporic attributes. The location is in Palestine; the characters are Palestinians living out their everyday realities being colonized in their own homeland. We contend that the grafted identity needs to be examined differently. At the fictional level, the conflicts faced by the characters demonstrate very clearly the attachment of identity and land. The fight for a free Palestine survives in the lives of young characters because Palestinian history passes on from the previous generation to the current generation. Land and home remain inseparable. By writing a novel about the lives of young Palestinians in their homeland, Abdel-Fattah is grafting onto the Australian literary landscape the enduring hope of a liberated Palestine, a place Palestinians can truly call their own. Hence, while *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008) appears divorced from the concerns of Australian-Palestinian/Lebanese-Muslim young adults as shown in the other two novels, Abdel-Fattah shifts her focus from grafted identity of those born in Australia and their struggles to return to Palestine or Lebanon as the foundation on which their identity as Muslim rests on.

## CONCLUSION

Based on our analysis of the three selected novels of Abdel-Fattah, it can be concluded that the characters of Amal, Jamilah and Hayaat demonstrate three examples of representing identity grafting that are incorporated to construct a tripartite shape of the eco-diasporic grafting of the Muslim young adults identity in Abdel-Fattah’s work. In the novel *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (2005), the images of Amal’s sense of being marginalised in the semiosphere of the host land and the sense of self-respect of her Muslim rootedness and heritage of the homeland semiosphere are incorporated to constitute the new semiosphere in which the fractured grafting of the eco-diasporic identity takes place. The example of grafting Jamilah’s identity in *Ten Things I Hate About Me* (2006) displays genuine manifestations of the two semiospheres in which the collective emblem of grafting the eco-diasporic identity is formed. The symbol of the iconic jar of the homeland soil and its potentiality of regenerating Hayaat’s identity in *Where the Streets Had A Name* (2008) exhibits the ecological semiosphere in which the grafted identity is shaped. Further, the evocation between “the handful of soil” brought by Hayaat and the vitality of her grandmother’s body exhibits clearly the intimate link between identity and land and, in return, represents the new encultured space in which the ecological graft of the identity is implanted and formed in the whole narrative. By introducing to the Australian landscape, a story of young Palestinians’ struggles

to repossess some of the things they have lost, the hyphenated author unsettles the mainstream Australian narratives that privilege local sensibilities. The current discussion, therefore, offers fresh insights into opening up a new horizon for the new way of the eco-diasporic graft of identity in Abdel-Fattah's work as well as in other emerging writers who contribute to the burgeoning treasure trove of Muslim Diasporic Literature.

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