From Dusk to Dawn:
The Evolution of Cultural Identity in Edna O'Brien's *The Light of the Evening* and Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*

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Abstract:

This essay traces the evolution of the Irish and Palestinian cultural identities of Dilly in Edna O'Brien's *The Light of the Evening* and Amal in Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*. It implements Stuart Hall's Three Conceptions of Identity to uncover the dynamic development of their evolving cultural identities, tracing the three stages of cultural identity evolution. First, the Enlightenment subject outlines the relationship between the protagonists, their homeland. Second, the Sociological subject analyses the protagonists who have been shocked by societal and political changes. Third, the Postmodern subject portrays the fragmentation and hybridity of the protagonists. O'Brien and Abulhawa subvert colonial binaries, generating a radical vision of selfhood that thrives in ambiguity.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Enlightenment Subject, Postmodern Subject, Sociological Subject, Stuart Hall's Three Conceptions of Identity

1. Introduction

The constructs of identity, a fundamental theme in cultural studies, are indispensably connected with the historical, social, and political frameworks in which individuals and communities exist. Literary texts, particularly those rooted in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, depict individuals as fluid and ever-evolving shaped by the confluence of factors. Colonised identities have emerged as a central concept due to the continuous failure of traditional ideas of national and cultural cohesion to capture the fluidity and multiplicity of identities shaped by various intersecting forces, highlighting the inaccuracy of focusing on singular or monolithic forms of identity while overlooking the social, historical, and political conditions. The exclusion of political or

any other cultural force from discussions on cultural identity formation restricts the creation of a more realistic, globalised identity, disregarding the ultimate fact that individuals navigate and negotiate multiple identities as they belong to various categories.

The cultural identity of colonised subjects, by nature, challenges traditional notions of cohesion and highlights the need to address these intersections. Despite the complexity and fluidity of the term, cultural identity is part of an individual's self-definition that subconsciously navigates a cultural subject to be psychologically and socially interconnected to the frame of his/her cultural arena. In other words, the construction of cultural identity is tied to how a culture defines and experiences nationality, political beliefs, culinary practices, traditions, and colonial acts. In this regard, Stuart Hall, a seminal figure in cultural studies, has attempted to challenge the essentialist notion of cultural identity by outlining the chronological evolutionary phases of cultural identity: the Enlightenment subject (pre-colonial phase), the Sociological subject (colonial phase), and the Postmodern subject (postcolonial phase). Accordingly, this article conducts a thematic, comparative analysis of the Enlightenment subject, Sociological subject, and Postmodern subject between Dilly – the protagonist of Edna O'Brien's *The Light of the Evening* – and Amal – the protagonist of Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*.

1.1 Three Conceptions of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity theory aims to scrutinise and navigate the complexities and impacts of culture, history, and power dynamics in the construction cultural identity of a certain nation. For instance, Stuart Hall has developed the cultural identity theory, asserting that identities are not fixed but rather flexible, continuously shaped by social interactions and cultural influences. In *The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual*, Hall confirms that "cultural identity is not fixed, it's always hybrid […] because it comes out of very specific historical formations, out of very specific histories and cultural repertoires of enunciation" (2018, 208). It can be inferred that rigid categories or predetermined essences should not bind identities; instead, identities are constructed by various external factors, leading to a complex and ever-evolving sense of self. In other words, it is suggested that cultural identity is not merely a random assemblage of cultural elements but a positionality: the unique positioning of individuals within the broader socioeconomic, cultural landscape. Hence, cultural identity emerges from the intersection and accumulation of personal experiences, cultural affiliations, and societal structures, reconstructing a provisional yet meaningful sense of self. Hall refers to this loss of a stable "sense of self" as "the dislocation or de-centering of the subject" (597). The traditional notion of identity is, thus, deconstructed by Hall, suggesting a loss of the familiar and disruption of rooted norms; this can occur on both individual and collective levels. Within this anti-essentialist critique, racial and national conceptions of cultural identity undergo a thorough reevaluation, leading Hall to propose alternative theoretical paradigms that attempt to trace and understand the fluid and contingent nature of identity in contemporary society. In *The Question of Cultural Identity*, Hall adds a new dimension that aligns with the postmodern world to trace the construction and transformation of cultural identity, suspecting any fixed or essentialist conception of identity. Hall lists and conceptualises three very different conceptions of identity: those of the (a) Enlightenment subject, (b) Sociological subject, and (c) Postmodern subject (2011, 597).

First, the Enlightenment subject – a stable, coherent, self-centered identity – offers a lens through which to scrutinise pre-colonial, consistent, coherent, and unaltered core identities, which is indispensable for understanding the substantial effects of colonialism and displacement on the evolution of cultural identities. In *National Identity*, Anthony Smith argues that "warfare also acts

as a catalyst for mobilising ethnic sentiments and fostering national consciousness" (1991, 21). In light of this, it can be inferred that colonial acts establish a centralising force within communities, uniting nations under shared experiences of conflict, as warfare has the merits of generating enduring myths and collective memories that become integral to constructing ethnic identities across generations. Building on the Enlightenment subject idea, in his article *Who Needs Identity*, Hall refers to essentialism as built on "trans-historical assumptions", indicating "a stable core of the self" (2012, 3). This perception is built on common qualities – culture – that remain fixed over time. In other words, culture is a set of "shared conceptual maps" where subjects share a common origin and ideals with one group: a nation (18). This perspective underscores that culture transcends mere customs, serving as a foundational framework through which individuals negotiate their identities and affiliations within a national framework. Concurrently, Hall demonstrates that the construction of a self-centered identity is intricately linked to "belonging to distinctive national culture" (274). This implies that cultural identities are shaped and fortified by active participation in and identification with the cultural norms and values emblematic of their nation. Hence, the Enlightenment subject phase in the narratives of Irish and Palestinian women serves as a critical entry point to understanding the ongoing evolution of cultural identities.

Second, as theorised by Hall, the Sociological subject constitutes the second stage in the identity formation of a colonised people; this phase serves as a transitional bridge, bridging the gap between the pure precolonial and fragmented postcolonial identities. From his perspective, the Sociological subject conceptualises identity as being reconstructed through socio-political interactions and colonial contexts, rather than immutable and fixed. In *The Question of Cultural Identity*, Hall explicates that "the subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities" (2011, 276-277). It can be inferred that the coloniser's cultural hegemony establishes a hierarchy that devalues Indigenous identities, creating internalised conflicts with subjects, as they have to navigate pure, native identity and the imposed colonial identity. Reflecting Hall's notion of fragmented identities, it can be deduced that hybrid identity is marked by contradictions and unresolved tensions. In simple terms, the Sociological subject signifies that identity is self-dependent, but rather modified through interaction with significant others. Moreover, Hall confirms that "the identities which composed the social landscapes 'out there', and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective 'needs' of the culture, are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change" (277). It can be inferred that the colonial enterprise induced significant changes – the establishment of colonial administrations, the introduction of Western education systems, and the reorganisation of internal entities to serve colonial interests – forced the colonised subjects to conform to new social norms, constructing an unstable identity that is inherently fragmented, composed of historical memories, cultural hybridity, and ongoing struggles for cultural and political autonomy. Hence, this double displacement constitutes a crisis of identity, leading to a state of disorientation.

Third, Hall's conception of the Postmodern subject represents the transition from the sociological phase to the postmodern. Figuratively speaking, the Postmodern subject may be viewed as akin to a post-traumatic reaction to the "trauma" of the colonial era. In response, the Postmodern subject is not simply a non-definite, non-essentialist, unstable construct; it is rather a fragmented, decentered, and performative identity. First, Hall, in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, argues that cultural identity is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture,

and power (Hall 1990, 225). This conceptualisation aligns with the viewpoint that cultural identity is intrinsically fragmented because of the continuous transformation of cultural identity through historical play, implying that the postmodern subject is never a whole or intact but perpetually changing. Colonial domination leads to the disintegration of established cultural frameworks, leaving colonised subjects with fractured identities that struggle with adapting to new power structures and cultural impositions. As a result of the fragmentation of the cultural identity, it transforms into a decentered identity, lacking a central core and relying on external influences. Michel Foucault extends this point further in *Power/Knowledge*. Foucault confirms Hall's conception of the instability of the Postmodern subject by asserting that relations of power are "indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work" (2003, 24). This underscores the key aspect of the Postmodern subject: the notion that explains cultural identity is not fixed but is instead constructed through the circulation of power and so-called truth within cultural discourses.

2. Analysis of Stuart Hall's Three Conceptions of Identity

2.1 Enlightenment Subject

In O'Brien's *The Light of Evening*, the character Dilly – one of the central characters who used to live in the rural Irish countryside and a profoundly emotionally attached mother – presents the Enlightenment subject phase, indicating the pure identity resonating with pure Irish culture, and reflects the unchanging aspects of her cultural identity. For instance, Dilly's life is deeply interwoven with the land and traditional practices, which serves as a demonstration of a stable Irish identity despite influences from postcolonial modernity. In the Enlightenment subject phase, her cultural identity is depicted in her deep connection to her environment and her adherence to rural, traditional practices. For example, Dilly's deep familiarity with her home and farm exemplifies her bond with her rural heritage. This connection is vividly portrayed when "Dilly thumps the armchair cushions in the breakfast room, talks to them, reckons that the swath of soot at the back of the chimney will stop it from catching fire. She knows Con's habits, piling on turf and logs, mad for the big blaze, reckless with firewood like there was no tomorrow" (O'Brien 2006, 17). This narration underscores various elements that resonate with the pure Irish identity: the reflection of domestic knowledge and control, the symbolism of fire and hearth, and the emotional and sensory engagement. First, the narration illustrates Dilly's comprehensive understanding of the household's maintenance, where her awareness of the soot's preventive function against chimney fires and her detailed knowledge of Con's habits demonstrate her control of the domestic sphere. This control showcases Dilly's authority and competence within her home, emphasising the traditional gender roles where women were seen as the keepers of the household. Second, the reference to "fire" and "hearth" is rich with symbolic meaning. The hearth, traditionally the center of the home, symbolises warmth, safety and family unity. Hence, Dilly's attention to the soot preventing a chimney fire illustrates her protective instincts and dedication to family safety, which are integral to her rural identity. Third, Dilly's actions are deeply sensory and emotional. For example, thumping the cushions and considering the impacts of the soot represents the tactile and visual engagements with her environment, further cementing her connection to her rural heritage and underscoring that her identity is constructed through her daily interactions with her environment. On the one

hand, the concept of a pure, unadulterated cultural identity in Hall's three conceptions' initial phase is highlighted by Frantz Fanon's insights in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon discusses the pre-colonial phase of cultural identity as one of purity, untouched by colonial influences, noting that "colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (1963, 210). This perspective reinforces the idea that Dilly's identity, steeped in the unadulterated traditions of the Irish countryside, represents a form of cultural purity that existed before the disruptions of colonialism. On the other hand, Hall explicates – in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* – that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation" (1990, 225). This underscores the dynamic nature of Dilly's cultural identity. Although deeply rooted in a stable past, Dilly's identity has to and will continuously interact with her transforming environment, creating a sense of self that is both enduring and adaptable. This idea is further supported by Edward Said's assertion that "nations themselves are narrations" (1993, xiii). This emphasises the constructed and evolving nature of cultural identity. In this context, Dilly's narrative, shaped by her interactions with her environment, is inspired by Irish national identity. Thus, Dilly's cultural identity is stable and rooted in her intimate connection to her home, land, and family.

In addition, Dilly's Enlightenment subject is manifested through her adherence to and glorification of Irish oral traditions because they serve as conduits for transmitting cultural beliefs and collective memory. As recited by Dilly, "[t]hings learned by heart at school — 'The Harp that once through Tara's hall … Gearoid Og … The fall of the house of Kildare' " (O'Brien 2006, 21). Dilly's references to Irish history and poetry situate her within the continuum of Ireland's oral traditions, as precolonial Ireland has always viewed its oral heritage as the primary tool for preserving historical stories, mythology, and Irish values. By invoking these lines, Dilly asserts her alignment with the history of cultural resilience. Evoking Thomas Moore's poem *The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls* (1875), Dilly's references to "The harp" and "Tara's Hall" symbolises her unnegotiable belief in Ireland's ancient sovereignty, representing the precolonial Irish identity that is intertwined with the glory of the nation. Hence, Dilly's connection to her oral heritage ensures that the rich heritage of Ireland remains alive in the collective consciousness. Oral tradition is not merely a mechanism for storytelling; it has always been a technical strategy for nations to confirm and secure their cultural identity against forces and change and erasure. As noted by Margaret Field and Kona Meza Cuero "traditional stories and other forms of oral tradition may be viewed as interactional strategies through which cultural identity is discursively produced" (2012, 322). This observation depicts oral traditions as active, evolving mechanisms that engage subjects in the co-creation of cultural identity. The "interactional strategies" are dialogic, engaging the interlocutor and the audience in a shared cultural performance in which cultural values and perceptions are craved in the cultural consciousness. For Dilly, Irish oral traditions provide a "discursive framework" through which she articulates her continuously changing world while ensuring communal belonging and pre-colonial ideals. This resonates with Penny Fielding's assertion that "[t]he oral is never simply one thing" and what orality signifies cannot be "understood without considering its uses as an agent in the creation and re-creation of cultural norms and values" (qtd. in Khasawneh 2013, 83). Fielding asserts the multifunctional nature of Irish oral narratives as living traditions that aim at adapting to and facing contemporary needs rather than being static relics of the past. Dilly's engagement with the Irish oral traditions further signifies their ongoing relevance and demonstrates that these narratives function as dynamic mechanisms for preserving identity. By invoking the

Irish heroic epic, Dilly's participation in the active construction of her cultural identity, as her connection to these traditions bridges the past and present, confirms that the Irish precolonial heritage remains alive in the collective consciousness. Aside from being only storytelling tools, oral traditions stand as powerful devices for nations to safeguard, adapt, and ensure, their cultural identity against forces of erasure and change.

Besides the Irish oral heritage, Irish wedding traditions signified Dilly's pre-modern identity, where her sense of self has been rooted in the cultural fabric of Irish traditional gestures and Ireland's rural environment. In Dilly's recollection of her wedding, she recalls, "I knew my mother would be happy, because when the pony and trap had come to fetch me, she blessed herself, shook holy water on me, and hoped it would lead to prosperity" (O'Brien 2006, 114). The reaction of Dilly's mother underscores their premodern attitudes that are interwoven with Catholic rituals and the pastoral simplicity of the Irish heritage. For example, "the pony and trap" that carried her and her mother's sprinkling of "holy water" signal an identity that draws its strength from established structures of faith and family. These traditional gestures are not merely ceremonial; they signify the enduring influence of what Erin Johnston, in *The Enlightened Self: Identity and Aspiration in Two Communities of Practice*, refers to as "aspirational identity", which is, by definition, an idealised vision of who one desires to be, induced by the religious framework (2016, 2). This concept resonates with Dilly's mother's aspirations for Dilly's marriage: prosperity, protection, and purification. Hence, she is projecting an idealised future onto her daughter; this notion aligns with the collective and religious values of Irish Catholicism. Therefore, Dilly's mother participates in the transmission of an aspirational identity – a belief abiding by the traditional path will result in a meaningful life. This conviction – her mother's act – is an unconscious practice that attempts to secure the continuity of conventional heritage, reinforcing a stable, coherent cultural identity. Moreover, Dilly's wedding incorporates various traditional Irish wedding customs. In the wedding, for example, Dilly vividly recalls the tapestry of Irish wedding customs, as she narrates:

> The vows were spoken at a gallop and by the time we filed out, the bell ringer was already at his task, the bells jubilant […] when an altar boy threw a packet of rice over us, my husband and I exchanged our first married kiss in the view of the Liffey water. (O'Brien 2006, 116)

The portrayal of Dilly's wedding underscores Hall's concept of the Enlightenment subject, as her cultural identity – within this moment – is framed as a coherent construct tied to her cultural heritage. The customs of her wedding – such as hurried vows, the jubilant church bells, and the throwing of the rice – situate Dilly's identity in the shared rituals of the Irish rural framework. Dilly, in this context, can be described as "a fully centred", "unified individual", and "very 'individualist" (Hall 2011, 597). On the one hand, Dilly's participation in these customs can further validate Hall's assertion: "[e]nlightenment subject has an inner core, which first emerged as "when the subject was born" (*ibidem*). This can be confirmed under one condition: assuming that Dilly has intentionally and willingly chosen to entail the rural Irish customs in her wedding. On the other hand, the idea of a stable, unified self suggested by Hall may also have its limitations. The very act of following Irish customs may obscure the complexities inherent in individual subjectivity. Simply put, by sticking strikingly or blindingly to traditions or shared practices, one may lose or disregard unique parts of their identity. Although tradition defines Dilly's sense of self, it may mask her inner struggles and differences that make her a unique individual, raising the question of whether Dilly's identity is ultimately hers or is only shaped by societal complications and expectations.

Paralleling Dilly's preservation of the connection to her home and farm, Amal – the narrator and protagonist in *Morning in Jenin* – demonstrates her pre-colonial Palestinian identity with a

focus on her preservation of Oral traditions and practices. For instance, family gatherings and traditional songs are integral elements of the Palestinian cultural heritage. This is echoed in Abulhawa's depiction of Amal and her family, where they immerse themselves in folk ballads to find solace and unity during the tumultuous first intifada and beyond:

There, Huda and son cloaked themselves in a habit of song at the doorstep of sleep, coaxing the night with melodies to open the doors of pleasant dreams. In the same family room, Osama, Amal – their firstborn – and the twins, Jamil and Jamal, would listen, allowing the lure of Huda's voice to entice them too into slumber. These were the folk ballads of Palestine through which Huda came to lull her entire family to sleep during the years of that first intifada and for a time beyond that (Abulhawa 2010, 197).

Based on this vivid description, it can be inferred that oral Palestinian tradition has the merits of preserving cultural identity, sustaining collective memory, and crafting emotional and cultural sanctuary. First, Abulhawa integrates the motif of songs to underscore the preservation and transmission of Palestinian cultural identity within the family unit. In other words, the act of singing traditional songs at bedtime is depicted as a method of finding solace and maintaining a sense of normalcy amidst chaos. From Hall's lens, the Palestinian identity of Amal and her family is anchored in their cultural heritage, expressed through the oral tradition of folk ballads, where songs serve as cultural anchors to provide the family with a sense of unity and belonging, thereby preserving their pre-colonial Palestinian identity. In this context, Said agrees that the role of culture in resistance – in *Culture and Imperialism* – manifested through cultural practices is mandatory in maintaining identity and resisting colonial narratives (1993, 216). This assertion demonstrates that cultural traditions stand as a method of resisting domination and preserving national identity, maintaining their Palestinian identity against the backdrop of political turmoil and displacement. Adding to Said, Khalidi asserts that these cultural traditions help maintain a sense of continuity and connection to the past, despite the disruptions caused by conflict and displacement (2009, 88). It can be suggested that the transformative power of cultural heritage is capable of reshaping and fortifying communal identity amidst ongoing colonial challenges. Confirming this, David A. McDonald, in *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance*, highlights that nonviolent resistance by Palestinians, rooted in daily life and fueled by resilience and a culture of resistance, has effectively challenged Israeli policies in Palestine where diplomacy and other tactics have often fallen short, so art, especially protest songs, has played a crucial role in mobilizing people against Israeli occupation policies (2013). This confirms Said's and Khalidi's assertions that folk ballads reflect a broader cultural strategy to preserve Palestinian identity against the adversities of displacement. Thus, the oral traditions of Palestine are deeply interwoven with Palestinian identity, as they stand as living narratives that preserve history, convey communal values, and strengthen social cohesion.

In a manner akin to Dilly's appreciation of the dairy as an integral aspect of Irish cultural tradition, Amal views traditional Palestinian food as a vital link to her cultural roots and a source of communal joy and unity. This is evident in Abulhawa's description of the excitement of Amal and her family when sharing makloobeh:

They shared the makloobeh—a pile of rice made golden in the syrup of lamb, eggplant, and ginger—and passed the cucumber yogurt sauce, the browned pine nuts, and the crisped onions. Amal was happy. The meal was embellished with spurts of laughter from Mama, who found humor somewhere in the hive of her unseen world, while Yousef and Amal conspired purposelessly in risible peace and smiles, placing that time together in a box of good memories (2010, 92).

It can be inferred from this description that Amal views the makloobeh as a cultural anchor. Palestinian food serves as a cultural anchor for Amal and her family, as the meal is not merely sustenance, but a celebration of cultural heritage, embodying the flavors and practices transmitted through generations. For Amal, this familial dining experience symbolises a connection to her pre-colonial identity, where identity is ingrained in the continuous cultural narrative. The shared meal, filled with laughter and conspiratorial peace, underscores familial bonds and situates their Palestinian identity within the context of pre-colonial/regular life. Transitioning to a broader perspective, the importance of food as a cultural anchor and symbol of resilience is further highlighted by the evidence provided by UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri. He notes that after the 7th of October 2023 or El Aqsa Flood, "Israel's attacks against the Palestinian people and attempts to undermine their food sovereignty is not only restricted to Gaza" (2024, 1) . Fakhri explicates, "food sovereignty is a particular articulation of a people's right to self-determination", underscoring that "the power and authority of food sovereignty do not derive from the political form of the State or national authority; it arises from people's long-standing relationship with the land, and their ability to feed their own communities" (2). Fakhri's stance reflects the critical function that food plays in cultural identity and resilience. As Dilly's and Amal's connections to their cultural traditions through food and agricultural practices anchor their identities, the concept of food sovereignty highlights the intrinsic link between cultural heritage, self-determination, and human rights. Theoretically speaking, Roland Barthes, in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption", clarifies that food – as a fundamental cultural feature – is a signifier and marker of pure cultural identity, demonstrating that "food constitutes sets of information" and signifies "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" (1961, 27). Food, therefore, operates on multiple levels. On a basic level, it fulfills the biological need for sustenance. On a social level, ancestorial food fosters communal bonding and shared memory; this is evident as the experience of eating makloobeh becomes an occasion for the reinforcement of familial ties, which affirms Amal identity as not only an autonomous individual but also as a participant in a continuous cultural narrative. On a symbolic level, food functions as a repository of cultural knowledge, as each dish reflects accumulated historical practices and meaning; therefore, preparing and serving makloobeh is not merely culinary but mainly a traditional symbol that echoes the rhythms of the precolonial Palestinian life. On a spiritual level, food holds a sacred dimension that is often interconnected with rituals, prayer, and expressions of gratitude to God, as the teachings of their religion view food as a central act of worship. This spiritual ethos roots Amal's Enlightenment subject in a transcendent sense of purpose that roots her identity to her cultural heritage. Hence, food rituals reflect broader social structures and relationships, offering insights into communal values and social norms.

Similar to Dilly's admiration of her Irish heritage and rural environment, Amal's profound attachment to her Palestinian roots is closely tied to her homeland, where the memories of her childhood were created and experienced. This connection is vividly captured in her recollections of the Palestinian geographical landscape, as shown in the description:

In a distant time, before history marched over the hills and shattered present and future, before wind grabbed the land at one corner and shook it of its name and character, before Amal was born, a small village east of Haifa lived quietly on figs and olives, open frontiers and sunshine. (Abulhawa 2010, 11)

Amal's nostalgic memories of pre-colonial Palestine serve as a poignant reflection on the resilience of cultural identity amidst colonial impacts. This idyllic imagery of the past symbolises an unbroken connection to cultural roots, postulating that despite the fragmentation brought

about by colonialism, there remains a strong, enduring sense of identity anchored in the land and its nature. Moreover, the memories of the pre-colonial environment, where the village thrived on figs, olives, signify a pure and untainted identity; therefore, the environment serves as a reservoir of pure identity, preserving cultural essence and continuity amidst historical upheavals. Furthermore, environmental imagery serves as a symbolic reclamation of identity. In other words, this act of recounting the past does not serve to mourn the loss of the land, but also to assert the legitimacy of a cultural identity that refuses to be subsumed by colonial redefinitions. As a result, the natural elements of the land are imbued with cultural significance, as the memorisation of the pre-colonial environment ensures that cultural memory is transmitted through generations, making the land an essential component of Palestinian identity. In *New Approaches to Migration?,* Al-Ali and Koser observe that "the speeches on the landscape are often metaphorical speeches on the national identity, and blossom when the latter seeks to be affirmed" (2012, 79). It can be deduced that Amal's recollections of the pre-colonial Palestinian landscape serve as metaphors for asserting the continuity and survival of the Palestinian national and cultural identity. Doraï also notes that "the images of the past are read again and again and idealised in the light of the difficult circumstances in which many Palestinians currently live. It is primarily produced within families" (2002, 7). This demonstrates the significant function of families as the primary institutions, who – in recounting the past – educate younger generations about their heritage to instill a sense of pride and identity. In essence, Doraï clarifies that "the village is a privileged place of memory for the Palestinians because it represents the very expression of their Arabic Palestinian culture and identity" (6). This underscores the centrality of the village and the land in maintaining and expressing Palestinian identity. The natural environment, therefore, becomes a site of symbolic resistance, where cultural identity is continually reclaimed and reaffirmed.

2.2 Sociological Subject

Following the Enlightenment subject phase, the Sociological phase ensues, during which the rural Dilly must begin to interact with the influences of colonialism. For instance, Dilly's interaction with her contemporary environment during a conversation in a hospital setting, where Dilly is receiving medical care, highlights this clash: "[y]ou're a gas woman, she says, though she cannot understand how a country woman used to hens and chickens and cows and calves could be so pernickety about her diet" (O'Brien 2006, 119). In this context, the cultural clash between Dilly and the hospital staff is demonstrated, as the speaker's incredulity at Dilly's dietary concerns underscores the perception that someone from a rural background, shaped by traditional and agrarian lifestyles, should not be concerned with modern dietary preferences. In essence, the interaction between Dilly (the rural self) and the British environment (the urbanised other) demonstrates that her rural identity is comprehended through a lens shaped by colonial attitudes, which are often viewed as bizarre, barbaric practices. In other words, the aforementioned comment reflects a broader societal influence where the colonial legacies have instilled a sense of urban superiority, sustained by the economic wealth of the coloniser over the Irish rurality, which has been weakened by the coloniser's exploitation of Ireland's resources. However, Dilly's insistence on specific dietary choices represents a subtle form of resistance against these imposed norms, hoping to assert her individuality and the validity of her rural identity in the face of dismissive attitudes forced by colonialism. Thus, Chan and Patten highlight the fundamental fact that "if people get their cultural goods from producers based in other countries, then they risk losing their own culture" (2023, 2). This assertion reinforces that Dilly's situation exemplifies the risk of cultural erosion when local traditions and identities

are overshadowed by external influences. Her dietary preferences symbolise an effort to preserve her cultural identity against the backdrop of colonial imposition. This dynamic of cultural imposition and superiority is further illustrated by Walsh in *The Structure of Neo-Colonialism: The Case of the Irish Republic*, who documents that "the bulk of what little manufacturing industry the colony possessed – based mostly on the processing of agricultural produce – was centered on Dublin, which also acted as the diffusion source of English culture" (1980, 67). In a colonial sense, the centralisation of cultural and economic power in Dublin not only marginalised rural practices but also reinforced colonial dominance over Irish culture. In relation to Dilly's interaction with colonialism, Walsh's clarification justifies why she has been perceived from the colonial lens as irrelevant or quaint compared to urban standards, which mirrors the colonial strategy of dictating cultural values onto Irish society to sideline and diminish rural Irish identities effectively. Adding to Walsh, Animasaun confirms that colonial acts feed "cultural homogenisation", as "[w]estern values and lifestyles are promoted at the expense of local traditions" (2024). Like Dilly's case, the persistence of foreign influence in cultural or medical systems diminishes local traditions and identities, leading to a loss of cultural diversity and undermining the sense of self and collective identity within affected communities, perpetuating a cycle of cultural erosion and dependency on Western ideals. Thus, Dilly's interaction with the English norm – the Sociological phase – uncovers the tensions and the ongoing struggles to preserve cultural identity in an increasingly colonially influenced society.

Through a socio-political lens, Abulhawa thoroughly depicts the harsh encounter between Amal and the settler-colonial dynamics, revealing the disruptive effects of the Israeli occupation on long-standing traditions and practices. The long-standing traditions and practices among Palestinians often clash with settler-colonial patterns, as the struggle to maintain cultural identity is challenged by forces seeking to disrupt and replace these deep-rooted customs. In Abulhawa's narrative, Amal clarifies that she responds to the economic and social pressures by embracing traditional habits and mundane practices, confessing that her "greatest pleasures were moments of normalcy" such as "a pot of stuffed grape leaves" (2010, 132). In this scenario, the interaction between Amal's self-identity (Enlightenment subject) and societal forces (settler-colonial powers) shapes her Sociological subject, which reflects a significant shift in her perception of the ordinary under the impact of the Israeli occupation. Amal's interaction with the Israeli occupation has forced her to reconceptualize the way she engages with routine traditions. Before the Israeli occupation, grape leaves, for example, were merely a routine element of Palestinian cuisine; however, in the aftermath, this culinary item has since come to be seen as a symbolic instrument of soft power wielded to counteract the persistent ethnic erasure perpetrated by Israel. Patrick Wolfe, in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", postulates that "the native society was able to accommodate – though hardly unscathed – the invaders and the transformative socioeconomic system that they introduced" (2006, 387). This assertion speaks to the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous cultures in the face of colonialism; however, this accommodation is not without profound consequences; it produces a transformed and often wounded cultural and social fabric. In Amal's evolving identity, her Sociological subject – shaped by the oppressive forces of Israel – embodies the tension between maintaining cultural identity and adapting to the realities imposed by the occupiers. In this sense, Amal's experience is a microcosm of the broader native experience, where cultural practices are transformed into acts of resistance and symbols of identity in the face of attempts at erasure. While Wolfe acknowledges the adaptability of native societies under Israeli pressure, he also emphasizes that "the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc) but access to the territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (388). This fact-based remark underscores the

fundamental and often overlooked element of settler colonialism: the relentless pursuit of land, which starts with cultural fragmentation and omission and ends with the systematic displacement of Indigenous subjects. Critically, the systematic persecution and atrocities that are practiced by the Israeli occupation against the Indigenous Palestinian settlers uncovers the dual pressures that Amal endures: the need to maintain a sense of normalcy and cultural continuity in a landscape increasingly defined by displacement and dispossession. Through this lens, Amal's story is not just about personal survival but about the ongoing battle to maintain a cultural and territorial identity that is constantly under threat of erasure. Moreover, the pre-colonial privileges in Palestinian communities are severely constrained by settler-colonialism, where the pursuit of livelihood often clashes with systemic barriers that undermine traditional means of economic sustainability.

When examining Amal's social status before El Nakba and her social/economic degradation resulting from Israel's economic blockade after the Nakba, the repercussions become strikingly clear. In 1941, her father, Hassan Abulheja, was acknowledged as "a descendant of the founders of Ein Hod and heir to great stretches of cultivated land, thriving orchards, and five impressive olive groves" (2010, 18) However, following the forced displacement caused by Israeli raids and ethnic cleansing, Amal's self perception was drastically altered, leading her to reflect, "[w]ho was I, *indeed!* A pathetic orphan, stateless and poor, living off charity" (128) The stark contrast between Amal's life before and after the Nakba exemplifies the profound economic and psychological ramifications of settler-colonial practices. Before the Nakba, Amal was deeply connected to her heritage, her family's ownership of significant tracts of fertile land symbolizing not just economic prosperity but also a strong sense of identity and continuity. Her father's legacy as a key figure in the founding of Ein Hod underscored their historical and social standing, embodying wealth, stability, and belonging. In marked contrast to before, after the Nakba, Amal life has been characterised by displacement, statelessness, and severe poverty. Her poverty is not merely economic but profoundly existential. The anguish of being "a pathetic orphan" exposes that her loss of land and community eroded her self-worth, transforming her into a hollowed-out figure and a symbol of marginalised self who is deeply reliant on external support: her sociological subject is in a state of humiliating dependence. It is argued that Amal's inability to comprehend her current state is mediated by the outcomes of systematic forces (settler/colonialism), as the humiliation experienced by Amal is a tool for social erasure. The loss of land and home deprives Amal of her agency, as her identity is no longer self-determined. Amal's sense of humiliation and shock stems from dialectical tension, wherein her shock reflects the clash between her inner self (Enlightenment subject) and the sociological reality of being degraded to a marginal figure. In other words, Amal's humiliation as a sociological subject stems from her inability to resist and defy dominant codes that reduce her to a "pathetic orphan", where her anguish can read as a subconscious rejection of dehumanised labels and a demand to be perceived as more than a victim. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, in "The Palestinian Exile as a Writer", explains that "the psychological toll of this social erasure is a loss […] of inner essence" (1979, 83). Hall and Jabra highlight that systematic oppression externalises trauma, converting the stable identity into a battleground between self-perception (former stable identity) and social imposition (colonialism). In Amal's case, her displacement after the Nakba exemplifies that Israeli dynamics not only destroy physical spaces but also fracture her inner life, severing their connection to history, heritage, and identity. This personal story can be understood within the broader framework of partition and national identity formation. Joe Cleary's statement from *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State* directly articulates Amal's tortured identity by showcasing that the process of national/cultural identity construction – following events like partition or, in Amal's case, the Nakba – requires a "violent and clamorous estrangement" (2001, 57).

The pre-Nakba relationship between Palestinians and their land, culture, and community was deeply intimate, but the forced displacement has resulted in a severe break or "estrangement" between the displaced population and their former life. The formerly intimate connection to their homeland is violently severed, and this estrangement is necessary for the new realities (in this case, the Israeli nation-state and its identity) to be solidified. In Cleary's terms, the "pre-partition intimacy" (*ibidem*) of Palestinians with their land and heritage was profound, making the rupture caused by El Nakba not just a loss of territory but a violent, existential break from their past, resulting in both physical dispossession and psychological estrangement. The displacement not only marginalises Amal but, in parallel to Cleary's observation, drives the construction of new, estranged identities for both the displaced (Palestinians like Amal) and the occupiers. In short, Amal's experience.

2.3. Postmodern Subject

Following Dilly's encounter with modernity as a Sociological subject, her cultural identity is not merely unsettled but fractured into fragments, signaling a profound disruption. Therefore, the disintegration of the traditional fundamentals can be viewed as the beginning of Dilly's transformative identity evolution and its complex reformulation. Her physical relocation from her homeland and her life to modern Western society situates Dilly's cultural identity conflict. Struggling to hold onto her heritage, Dilly encounters the dislocating impacts of a rapidly modernising Western world as the plot progresses. In light of this, Hall postulates that cultural identity is reformulated by any sort of dislocation, as subjects are constantly shattered between their diminishing connection to their homeland and the disorienting pull of modernity. In "Post-Colonial Theory and Modern Irish Culture", James Livesey and Stuart Murray conclude that "given that the colonial moment was, and the imperial moment is, determinative of the cultural and political identities of the twentieth century", proving that "Ireland is doubly hybrid, subject and object of the process" (1997, 461). Livesey and Murray's framework aligns with Hall's conception by situating Irish identity within overlapping power structures and historical processes. The "double hybrid" nature of the Irish identity uncovers – in the modern era – demonstrates the Postmodern subject's complexity, which is known for its multiplicity, contradictions, and enduring effects of postcolonial modernity. In this context, the continuous negotiation between the past and present transformed Dilly's current cultural identity into the postmodern phase. Under the influence of modernity, Dilly's Postmodern subject has surfaced and marked a departure from the idealisation of her rural heritage, uprooting her towards the capitalist aspiration formulated by modernity imperative. This shift, on the one hand, is displayed in her hidden letter, where she wholeheartedly expresses her desire "*to go to America where I can have nice clothes and a better life than I have*", followed by her mother's reaction: [s]he beat me for it" (O'Brien 2006, 28, italics in the original). Dilly's aspiration and journey to America have made her long for material prosperity and a more affluent existence, reflecting the compelling forces of capitalist modernity. On the other hand, the clash between her capitalist, modernist aspirations and her indecisiveness about where she belongs explicates a deeper sense of shattering and fragmentation of her current identity; her dislocation triggered the existential struggle between her roots' ruralisation and modern industrialisation. This conflict is captured through her mother's plea "I'll never forget my mother, Bridget, kneeling down on the dirt road to kiss my feet and saying, 'Do not forget us, Dilly, do not ever forget your people' " (29). Bridget's intense plea underscores the ambivalence central to postcolonial hybridity. Her mother's act – a gesture of reverence – paradoxically situates Dilly not only as a

bearer of cultural memory but also forces her to view her immigration as a potential betrayal. In "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", Homi Bhabha's notion of "hybridity" as a space for "almost the same, but not quite" is portrayed, where identity is in a continuous process of negotiation through unresolved tension (1984, 127). Hence, Dilly's postmodern subject is a site where loyalty and abandonment, memory and reinvention, collide. The contradictions between her Irish upbringing and the capitalist aspirations of America create a fragmented sense of self. This condition mirrors Hall's postmodern subject, where identity is neither stable nor cohesive but continuously reshaped by the forces of displacement and modernity. The cultural pull of modern Western consumerism and individualism clashes with her inherited values of Irish communal life. This tension between the allure of Western prosperity and the loss of cultural roots is central to her identity crisis.

Similar to Dilly's shattered, unstable cultural identity, Amal's fragmented identity in *Mornings in Jenin* reflects the tension between her inherited Palestinian identity and her diasporic experience in America, illustrating her Postmodern subjectivity. At one point, Amal confesses, "[t]he truth is that I wanted to be someone else. And that summer at Myrtle Beach, I was Amy in a bathing suit, lounging on the sand as far away from myself as I had ever been" (Abulhawa 2010, 142). Here, Amal's attempt to reinvent herself as "Amy" signifies a desire to escape the weight of her Palestinian identity, choosing to adopt a carefree American persona. This shift marks a critical detachment from her cultural roots, an effort to reconstruct herself in a new, more comfortable image. In *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland*, Helena Lindholm Schulz offers a comprehensive analysis of the Palestinian diaspora. Schulz emphasises the concept of "creative ambivalence" where "Palestinian identity is not yielded, nor is it simply 'conserved'; it is complemented with new experiences" (2003, 197). It can be inferred that Palestinians in exile maintain their connection to their homeland while simultaneously integrating new experiences and influences from their host societies. The result is a fluid identity that is shaped by both the memory of the homeland and the realities of life in the diaspora. This ambivalence is "creative" because it allows for the formation of new cultural practices, perspectives, and self-understandings, without being confined to a singular, static identity. It is about adaptability and the ability to hold onto multiple, sometimes contradictory, facets of identity at once. Amal's attempt to reinvent herself by adopting an American persona can be seen as an example of this creative ambivalence. Despite her efforts to detach, her Palestinian identity remains intertwined with her new experiences, marking a dual existence.

However, her transformation into Amy is a facade, demonstrating her inability to fully sever ties with her heritage, as the persona she adopts is superficial and fleeting. In contrast to this attempt at self-reinvention, Amal later acknowledges the inescapability of her true identity: "no matter what facade I bought, I forever belonged to that Palestinian nation of the banished to no place, no man, no honor" (Abulhawa 2010, 143). Her acknowledgment reveals the deeper conflict within Amal. While she tries to integrate into American society, her sense of belonging remains tethered to her Palestinian roots, making her feel stateless and alienated. The use of "banished" emphasises her exile not just from a physical homeland but from her true self, reflecting a postmodern fragmentation where she is always "in-between" cultures. In Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", he argues that cultural identity is not fixed but is constantly reshaped by historical events, societal changes, and diasporic experiences, as Hall asserts:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity', lays claim. (1990, 222)

Amal's adoption of the "Amy" persona mirrors her desperate attempts to produce a new identity, following Hall's view of cultural identity as a continual negotiation. Amal confirms Hall's postulation by asserting her belonging also to the "Palestinian nation of the banished", suggesting a longing for a fixed, true self craved into her heritage – a notion Hall critiques. Thus, her fragmented sense of self embodies the tension between identity as a lived process and the diasporic yearning for an authentic cultural anchor. Hall argues that even her Palestinian identity is not a simple or pre-made label; it is shaped by multiple factors, such as displacement and memories of her homeland. While Amal is trying to reinvent her identity as Amy (changing with her surroundings), she feels like her "real" identity is still Palestinian (fixed and unchangeable). Amal's Postmodern subject can be explained in a simple analogy. For example, assumingly, her identity transformation symbolises a song playlist. Amal's case can be seen as a person who is always adding new songs and removing the old ones based on his/her state of mind (like Amal being Amy). However, this person always reminisces about a favorite section and keeps ruminating, convinced that those songs define him/her (like Amal becoming Amy). This simple analogy explains Hall's assertation that even if the fundamentals of Amal's Enlightenment subject are not set in stone – they keep transforming as she is displaced, but she still believes that they are permanent and unerasable: this is the tension that Amal is drowning in.

In light of this, this tension is further compounded by her confession that she is "*the remains of an unfulfilled legacy, heirs to a kingdom of stolen identities and ragged confusion*" (Abulhawa 2010, 211). These poetic lines mirror Amal's ancient heritage as a broken inheritance; her postmodern subject – fractured and incomplete – yearns for a coherent, whole identity interconnected to her roots; however, colonial history has disrupted that inheritance. Her reference to "stolen identities" symbolises the trajectory of historical ethnic cleansing, explicating that her Enlightenment subject has been violently erased (by settler/colonialism, exile, oppression). Her belief in her authentic self has been completely diminished: a stable identity she can no longer reclaim. Although her identity is explicitly transformed, Hall's notion affirms that her stolen identity is not static; it is constantly reshaped by resistance, memory, and survival. In addition to historical erasure, the chaos and fragmentation Amal endures depict Amal's postmodern subject in its ongoing process of formation. She is neither Palestinian nor American; she embodies a constellation of paradoxes defined by the friction between irreconcilable elements. The "ragged confusion" is not a failure; it is explicit evidence of continuous negotiation of her identity. Hall critiques Amal's clinging to the "myth of wholeness", clarifying that her pain comes from believing that her identity *should* remain complete. Hall's concept of the Postmodern subject affirms that Amal's unstable and fragmented identity is normal for diasporic subjects; it is a production constructed by survival and adaptation. Hence, this explains the tension theorised by Hall: the Postmodern subject is both inherited and invented, painful and powerful. Rashid Khalidi, in *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, explores the complexities of Palestinian identity, agreeing that their identities are constructed by stolen heritage and colonial dispossession. Khalidi argues that the Palestinian experience is marked by statelessness, leading to fragmentation. Khalidi adds that "the lack of a strong state – indeed of any state of their own—has clearly had a great impact on the Palestinian sense of national identity", and this dislocation is exacerbated by external forces such as Israeli and British colonialism" (1991, 20-21). This insight supports Amal's reflection on the "kingdom of stolen identities", underscoring the enduring effects of colonialism and displacement on personal and collective identity. Palestinians, like many in the Arab world, often find themselves navigating "multiple focus of identity" due to the absence of a cohesive nation-state (32). This notion aligns with Amal's internal disorientation, as her personal identity is entangled with larger, unresolved

historical and cultural legacies. Khalidi's work provides a critical framework for understanding Amal's fractured sense of self, rooted in an intergenerational legacy of displacement and loss.

Additionally, Amal's struggle to reconcile these contradictions is tied deeply to her relationship with her mother, as seen when she reflects: "Dalia, Um Yousef, the untiring mother who gave far more than she ever received, was tranquil, quietly toiling well from which I have drawn strength all my life" (Abulhawa 2010, 263). This connection to Dalia grounds Amal's identity in traditional Palestinian values, serving as an anchor amidst her fragmented sense of self. Her mother represents the enduring link to a past Amal cannot entirely reject, signifying cultural resilience despite the dislocation. At the same time, this maternal figure also underscores Amal's distance from that world, as her life in America alienates her from the groundedness Dalia represents. Thus, through the fragmentation of Amal's identity, Abulhawa explores the postmodern tension between place, memory, and the self. This identity is neither fixed nor fully realised, constantly pulled between the past and the present. In this context, Aboubakr's exploration of cultural continuity further clarifies this struggle, as "the memory work, particularly prosthetic, can highlight and safeguard the cultural and family institutions that third-generation or Palestinian diaspora communities have not experienced" (108). For Amal, her connection to her mother, Dalia, exemplifies this. While Amal experiences a distance from her Palestinian roots, her mother's influence acts as an anchor to her fragmented identity, showcasing the resilience of cultural values despite geographical and generational separation.

3. Conclusion

Building on Hall's framework, from the stable Enlightenment subject to the fragmented Postmodern subject, the evolution of cultural identity reflects the complex nature of cultural identity formation. In the Enlightenment subject, Dilly represents a stable, coherent identity rooted in her established connection to her Irish heritage. As her identity is shaped by her deep connection to the rural landscape and cultural customs, Dilly's attachment to the land conveys a time of belonging and certainty, especially with her role as a caregiver that intricately links her to her Irish rural identity. Similarly, Amal's Palestinian cultural identity is deeply rooted in and inseparable from the heritage of pre-Nakba Palestine. As they move to the sociological subject, Dilly and Amal encounter the complexities of postcolonial modernity and settler-colonialism brutality. At this point, the analysis of both characters reveals that their cultural identity is not in the transformative phase but in a state of shock with a paralysed and frozen identity. questioned and destabilized. Likewise, Amal's identity is paralysed by socioeconomic. As she struggles with the values of urban American society, her once-coherent identity deteriorates because of settler colonialism, where her connection to Palestinian cultural practices becomes strained. She experiences an internal conflict as she navigates the pressures of maintaining her heritage and economic and social status amidst the disruptive forces of occupation. In the Postmodern subject, both characters have gradually possessed the symptoms of identity fragmentation. Dilly's sense of self becomes increasingly unstable as she is neither familiar with her traditional roots nor comfortable with the capitalist aspirations of modernity, revealing her struggle with dislocation and ambiguity. For Amal, her identity reflects a profound sense of alienation; her attempts to reconcile her Palestinian heritage with her diasporic experiences in America, unfortunately, failed. This fragmentation underscores their continuous negotiation of identity. Nevertheless, the analysis of the three identity conceptions – the Enlightenment, Sociological, and Postmodern subjects – marks only phases in the ongoing evolution of identity, as the cultural identity evolution does not stop at the postmodern stage. On the contrary, these stages

pave the way for a metamodern analysis of cultural identity, where identity is understood as an open-ended process (neither deeply rooted nor wholistically fragmented). Although uncovering the three conceptions of identity is pivotal, it does not mark the culmination of the evolution of their cultural identities, the Metamodern subject – a phase unmentioned by Hall – represents a crucial step in analysing cultural identity reconstruction in a world that oscillates between modernist idealism and postmodern skepticism.

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