

## FROM OLIVE GROVES TO FAMILY TABLES: ECO-GASTROFEMINIST CONTINUUMS IN PALESTINIAN NARRATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the interconnections between land, food, and women's agency in Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* and Etaf Rum's *Evil Eye* through an eco-gastrofeminist lens. Building on ecofeminist theory and recent work in gastropolitics, the study proposes the term "eco-gastrofeminism" to capture how Palestinian women's narratives map a continuum of resistance that stretches from olive groves to family tables. Abulhawa's novel foregrounds landscapes, agriculture, and ecological dispossession as central to the experience of occupation, while Rum's diasporic narrative relocates these ecological memories into the kitchen, where the preparation of traditional dishes sustains cultural identity across generations. Read together, these texts illustrate how land and kitchen, though spatially distinct, function as interconnected sites of ecological memory and resistance under settler colonialism and patriarchy. By highlighting women's ecological and culinary labors, this paper argues that Palestinian women's literature reimagines survival and resilience not only as acts of testimony but also as practices embedded in soil, seeds, recipes, and meals. The project contributes to literary studies by bridging ecofeminism and gastrofeminism, showing how Palestinian women's narratives illuminate food and land as intertwined ecologies of resistance.*

**Keywords:** *Ecofeminism, Gastrofeminism, Palestinian women's writing, Diaspora and memory, Resistance narratives*

### ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini mengkaji interkoneksi antara tanah, makanan, dan agensi perempuan dalam novel *Against the Loveless World* karya Susan Abulhawa dan *Evil Eye* karya Etaf Rum melalui lensa eko-gastrofeminisme. Berdasarkan teori ekofeminis dan kajian terbaru dalam gastropolitik, penelitian ini mengusulkan istilah "eko-gastrofeminisme" untuk menangkap bagaimana narasi perempuan Palestina memetakan kontinum perlawanan yang terentang dari kebun zaitun hingga meja makan. Novel Abulhawa menempatkan lanskap, pertanian, dan perampasan ekologis sebagai inti dari pengalaman pendudukan. Narasi diaspora Rum merelokasi memori ekologis ini ke dapur, melihat penyiapan hidangan tradisional mempertahankan identitas kultural lintas generasi. Teks ini mengilustrasikan bagaimana tanah dan dapur, meskipun berbeda secara spasial, berfungsi sebagai situs memori ekologis dan perlawanan yang saling terhubung di bawah kolonialisme dan patriarki. Tulisan ini berargumen bahwa sastra perempuan Palestina menata ulang ketahanan dan kelangsungan hidup bukan hanya sebagai tindakan kesaksian, tetapi juga sebagai praktik yang tertanam dalam tanah, benih, resep, dan makanan. Tulisan ini berkontribusi pada kajian sastra dengan menjembatani ekofeminisme dan gastrofeminisme, menunjukkan bagaimana narasi perempuan Palestina menggambarkan makanan dan tanah sebagai ekologi perlawanan yang saling terkait.

Kata kunci: ekofeminisme, gastrofeminisme, sastra perempuan Palestina, diaspora dan memori, dan naratif perlawanan

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Palestinian literature has long been a medium to express the struggle for national identity, resistance, and survival amid displacement and occupation. Among contemporary Palestinian narratives, Susan Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* and Etaf Rum's *Evil Eye* stand out for their intricate portrayal of women's experiences and their intimate connections to land, food, and family. This study situates these novels within an eco-gastrofeminist framework, which interweaves ecological consciousness, food politics, and feminist theory to explore women's roles as carriers of cultural resilience and resistance. Eco-gastrofeminism calls attention to the intersections of women's ecological labor, their relationship to food, and their social and political agency (Sen et al., 2024). In this study, eco-gastrofeminism is defined as a framework that brings together ecological consciousness, food politics, and feminist theory to explore how Palestinian women sustain cultural resilience and resistance through both their relationships to land and their roles in preparing traditional food. It highlights the continuity between homeland ecology and the diasporic kitchen, positioning women's ecological and culinary practices as inseparable feminist acts of survival and resistance. This study will focus only on main female character, Nahr and Yara. In *Against the Loveless World*, Nahr's memories of olive groves and domestic culinary traditions emphasize the embodied connection between Palestinian identity and land, an attachment that endures despite exile and imprisonment (Abulhawa, 2019). Similarly, Rum's *Evil Eye* foregrounds the diasporic kitchen as a pivotal site where Palestinian culinary rituals preserve and transmit cultural memory, fostering solidarity and survival for Palestinian American women (Rum, 2023). Both narratives highlight how women's care work functions not only as cultural preservation but also as political resistance against erasure and colonial violence (Mihalache, 2024; Nasooha, 2024). This paper argues that *Against the Loveless World* and *Evil Eye* together map a continuum of eco-gastrofeminist praxis, bridging grounded connection to homeland ecology with diasporic reinvention of cultural sustenance. By focusing on female embodied experience in relation to land, food, and memory, these texts reveal how eco-gastrofeminism can deepen understandings of Palestinian femininity, resistance, and identity formation across geographies and generations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Ecofeminism, as articulated by foundational scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Greta Gaard, exposes the entwined systems of patriarchal domination over women's bodies and nature, arguing that ecological degradation and gender oppression stem from a shared logic of exploitation. Extending this analysis, gastrofeminism highlights food as a site of political and feminist praxis where domestic labor and culinary traditions become acts of decolonial memory and agency (Binju, 2025; Sen et al., 2024). These frameworks collectively provide an analytic lens to examine Palestinian women's roles in resisting colonial dislocation through their caretaking of land and foodways. Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* has been studied through postcolonial and feminist lenses emphasizing memory, trauma, and resistance (Halem, 2025; Vidyarini & Munjid, 2024). Altomani identifies the novel's recurrent olive tree metaphor as emblematic of Palestinian identity—"dressed in olive branches and cracked happiness"—linking personal and collective resilience to ecological rootedness (2017).

Amireh et al. further conceptualize Abulhawa's narrative space as a diasporic "third space," where exilic consciousness negotiates between memory of homeland and current dispossession, an interstitial site for eco-gastrofeminist praxis (Amireh et al., 2024). In parallel, *Evil Eye* by Rum foregrounds maternal transmission of culinary rituals as a counter-narrative to diaspora's fragmentation (Kasaragod, 2024; Sarfraz, 2025). Lundegaard discusses Rum's depiction of Palestinian American women's stories as reclaiming subjectivity by reclaiming food traditions (Lundegaard, 2025). Mihalache situates such "care work of food" as fundamental to sustaining diasporic communities' ecological and social coherence (Mihalache, 2024). The hypothesis developed here posits that both novels enact a continuum where Palestinian women's ecological and culinary labor articulate resistance through embodied memory and care. This continuum bridges rootedness in homeland ecology with diasporic adaptability, positioning domestic and ecological practices as inseparable feminist acts of survival and insurgency. This aligns with Qabaha's observation from her interview with Abulhawa, emphasizing that "owning one's story is as important as the ownership (Qabaha, 2019). This study seeks to explore how Palestinian women's ecological labor and culinary practices serve as acts of cultural resilience and political resistance within their narratives. It investigates the ways in which the preparation and transmission of traditional food practices help preserve ecological memory across generations in Palestinian diaspora communities. Additionally, it examines how the interconnected sites of land and kitchen illustrate the dynamic relationship between identity formation and feminist resistance under the conditions of settler colonialism and patriarchy.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a qualitative research design centered on comparative textual analysis to explore the eco-gastrofeminist continuums expressing Palestinian ecological memory, femininity, and resistance within *Against the Loveless World* (Abulhawa, 2019) and *Evil Eye* (Rum, 2023). The primary sources are the full texts of the two novels, selected for their rich portrayals of women's embodied ecological and culinary practices as modes of cultural survival and political resistance. Secondary scholarly sources include peer-reviewed journal articles and critical essays addressing ecofeminist theory (Nasootha, 2024; Halem, 2025), gastrofeminism (Sen, Dey, & Chakrabarti, 2024; Binju, 2025), Palestinian identity and exile (Amireh et al., 2024; Altomani, 2017), and the cultural politics of food in diaspora (Kasaragod, 2024; Lundegaard, 2025). Data collection consists of identifying and coding key narrative passages emphasizing food rituals, ecological imagery, and female agency. The study applies a critical eco-gastrofeminist lens, informed by the theoretical manifesto proposed by Sen et al. (2024), to analyze how female characters enact continuity and resistance through food and ecological care. Emphasis is placed on memory as ecological practice and culinary labor as embodied political act. The research involves close reading, thematic coding, and cross-textual comparison to map continuums between rooted ecological identity and diasporic culinary adaptation. This design facilitates understanding of how Palestinian women's narratives challenge colonial and patriarchal erasure through multisensory, material practices. Ethical considerations are minimal given the nature of literary analysis; however, the study remains

attentive to representational ethics in discussing cultural trauma and resistance.

#### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Eco-gastrofeminism merges ecofeminist and food-centered theories to reveal how women's ecological and culinary agency performs both survival and resistance. As Sen, Dey, and Chakrabarti note, gastrofeminism recognizes food as a political act that both "unsettles colonial consumption patterns" and "recovers the agency of nourishment and care" (Sen et al., 2024). The Palestinian context intensifies this politics: land, ecology, and femininity are inseparable from colonial displacement and occupation (Nasooaha, 2024). Here, the olive tree functions as a living emblem of continuity and reclamation. This section delineates how Abulhawa and Rum employ the motifs of olive groves, kitchens, and female ritual to reframe Palestinian womanhood not as passive suffering, but as eco-gastrofeminist endurance.

The relationship between land, memory, and resistance is central in both Abulhawa's *Against the Loveless World* and Rum's *Evil Eye*. Abulhawa vividly depicts the land, particularly the olive groves of Palestine, as a living symbol of cultural continuity. The narrative describes how "[t]his tree was a member of my family. I belonged to it. All the trees in that garden were my family" illustrating the deep ecological connection residents maintain to their homeland through cultivation and remembrance (Abulhawa, 2019, Kobo Edition, Chapter IV). This attachment underscores the land's role as a source of resilience; even in captivity or exile, the characters' mental and emotional connection to their land persists vividly. Nahr's memories of her clandestine planting of olive saplings exemplify food and land as acts of resistance. Nahr felt nostalgic when she saw the olive trees in front of the destroyed house which only a remaining land is still there. The house is vanished because of the genocide, but the tree stands firmly to demonstrate how non-human entities, in this context the land and plants, remain preserved and symbolize the enduring existence of Palestine.

Nahr's memories of her mother's kitchen and the rituals of cooking and eating, particularly traditional dishes like *mansaf*, represent a performative act of cultural preservation amid violence and displacement. Abulhawa repeatedly emphasizes how meals are perceived as celebrations of resilience and survival—special dishes are carefully prepared and served to mark significant occasions, such as Jihad's university acceptance or his return home after imprisonment. The detailed descriptions of food preparation and communal dining highlight these moments as utopian spaces, where characters experience their greatest happiness through shared sustenance. In this context, food becomes a site of feminist activism, transforming domestic labor into acts of political defiance.

When Nahr marries Bilal—the brother of her previous husband, whom she divorced due to lack of love—Bilal assumes responsibility for domestic tasks, symbolizing a shift in traditional gender roles. Moreover, Nahr is called upon to undertake traditionally "masculine" and dangerous tasks, such as delivering unknown items to support Bilal, who leads a revolutionary organization, signaling her active participation in political resistance beyond the domestic sphere. Abulhawa's characters challenge patriarchal norms that seek to confine women's roles; instead, they embody eco-gastrofeminist agency through nurturing practices. Nahr's mother, for instance, tends her garden and teaches her daughters to care for the land

and each other. Abulhawa's character recalls her grandfather's stories of planting olive trees, emphasizing that every seed sown is an act of defiance against dispossession. This illustrates the intergenerational inheritance of ecological memory, reinforcing resilience through narration.

Similarly, in *Evil Eye*, Rum echoes the sentiment in her portrayal of diasporic kitchens. The process of Yara preparing Palestinian food in exile, the grinding of *za'atar*, the brewing of coffee, serves as a pedagogical act passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter, reinforcing a collective identity. She writes, "...the aroma bringing her back to her grandmother's kitchen in Palestine" (Rum, Kobo Edition, Chapter 1). This aligns with Binju (2025), who views recipes as "a decolonial archive," central to maintaining cultural resilience amid diaspora. In *Evil Eye*, the act of preparing traditional dishes like *za'atar* and coffee signifies more than nourishment; it is a reclamation of identity, an eco-gastrofeminist act of resistance. Yara—who has been living her own life in North Carolina since her parents move her always cook Palestinian food for her family. Yara—who has a difficulty with her identity as a Palestinian living in America struggles with racism and patriarchal oppression. She uses food and the act of cooking to resist the control. Not only that, Yara also uses this to preserve her memory and identity as a Palestinian. This illustrates how food functions as a physical and symbolic bridge to land, echoing Nasooha's (2024) assertion that "cultural memory in exile becomes embodied through culinary practice," emphasizing the central role of women in nurturing collective memory through food.

In *Evil Eye*, Rum depicts women's culinary labor as an act of spiritual ecology, protective rituals infused into daily routines, such as blessing food to ward off the evil eye. Yara's mother who believes on the evil eye makes Yara struggled to know herself. Through foodwork, Yara sustains not only the body but also the collective spirit, embodying eco-feminist tenets that link nourishment with resistance. Yara maintains memory through recipes, which serve as living archives of homeland ecology transferred across generations. Yara's mother teaches her to "keep the spices alive," a gesture echoing Nasooha's (2024) reflection that "cultural memory in exile is a living ecology, cultivated through taste and tradition." These acts affirm the importance of embodied memory in resisting cultural erasure.

Both works underline the significance of ritual in sustaining resilience. In *Against the Loveless World*, clandestine gatherings where women share food symbolize acts of collective resistance, moments create a "third space," where cultural and ecological continuity is enacted (Amireh et al., 2024). Nahr's recitation of her grandmother's recipes during moments of hardship reveals how ritualized food acts as a form of embodied activism. In *Evil Eye*, daily rituals of blessing food, lighting incense, and reciting prayers serve to safeguard community and restore connection to land. Rum depicts women's ritual practices as eco-gastrofeminist acts that maintain spiritual ecology. Both works depict women's bodies as intertwined with ecological and political resistance. Memory functions as a form of ecological preservation in both narratives.

Together, these narratives underscore the profound resilience of Palestinian women who, through their ecological and culinary practices, embody a form of resistance that transcends conventional political activism. Their daily acts of nurturing land and sustaining

cultural memory in kitchens become powerful tools of survival, identity preservation, and defiance against colonial and patriarchal domination. This continuum of eco-gastrofeminism not only challenges the erasure of Palestinian culture but also affirms women's central role in the ongoing struggle for justice, autonomy, and communal continuity.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The combined reading of the two novels establishes the eco-gastrofeminist continuum, arguing that resistance is a holistic practice that connects the macro-level political struggle of the land to the micro-level cultural work of the kitchen. These texts confirm the core argument that land and kitchen, though spatially distinct, function as interconnected sites of ecological memory and resistance under settler colonialism and patriarchy. Abulhawa illustrates the loss of the land, while Rum illustrates the preservation of that land's memory through food. By highlighting women's ecological and culinary labors, the literature effectively reimagines survival and resilience not just as acts of testimony but as practices embedded in soil, seeds, recipes, and meals. The agency of Palestinian women is thus affirmed through their determined efforts to maintain life and culture, whether through revolutionary acts against political occupation or through quiet, daily acts of sustenance in a foreign land. This integrated reading shows that Palestinian resistance is both singular and collective, extending from the trauma of the past to the dreams of the future.

The study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this research relies heavily on literary analysis of two novels, which may limit the generalizability of findings to broader Palestinian women's experiences beyond the texts. The focus on narratives centered around specific ecological and culinary symbols may also overlook other important dimensions of eco-gastrofeminism in diverse contexts. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study means it cannot measure the prevalence or quantifiable impact of eco-gastrofeminist practices across different Palestinian communities, particularly in non-literary realms.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope by including empirical studies such as ethnographic fieldwork or surveys that directly engage Palestinian women about their ecological and culinary practices as forms of resistance. Comparative studies involving other diaspora communities or regions under ecological threat could deepen understanding of eco-gastrofeminism's varied expressions. Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with social sciences and environmental studies could provide a more holistic view of the intersections between gender, food, land, and political resistance.

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