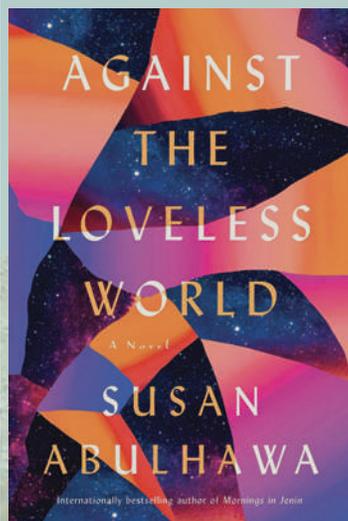


Against the Loveless World by Susan Abulhawa



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Against the Loveless World takes the reader into the spaces of Palestinian women living both in a colonized apartheid society where they face brutality by the state of Israel, and experiencing sexism within a Palestinian patriarchal culture. Abulhawa graphically describes the realities of women living within this complex duality. This novel appeals to the general audience and those willing to hear a stark description of life, love, and state punishment within the context of struggle against the occupation of

Palestine. It is also a novel that can be read in conjunction with works addressing survival in apartheid prisons, for example Naidoo's book on South Africa, *Women Surviving Apartheid's Prisons*, recently published by *Just World Books*.

Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American novelist and activist, is well acquainted with the occupation of Palestine by the superimposition of the state of Israel's colonial machine. An activist, Abulhawa founded *Playgrounds for Palestine*, a group making possible the building of playgrounds for Palestinian children—replacing childhood spaces lost through Israel's destruction of Palestinian communities. A supporter of Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) a non-violent boycott of Israel in a variety of contexts, Abulhawa, is also co-chair of *Palestine Writes*, the first North American Palestinian literature festival. Her parents, born in Jerusalem, Palestine, experienced the occupation and expulsion from their homes by European Zionists, an event known as the Nakbe, 1947-1948—a hellish experience of theft, destruction and murder. Her parents were also refugees of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Born in Kuwait in 1970, Abulhawa's background and literary intelligence motivated several novels, with *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), as her debut work. Since then, she has risen to the status of most widely read Palestinian.

Against the Loveless World presents fictional

characters and settings based on Palestinian reality. Abulhawa tells the story of several Palestinian women and men and their entwined lives, while focusing on the main character, Nahr. In solitary confinement for 16 years, Nahr narrates her child and adult desires and dreams of love and marriage. She describes her traditional culture through the communal spirit of the olive harvest, the love of the land, the Palestinian sense of stewardship, while sadly and angrily acknowledging the fragility of their culture as the presence of settlers and military grow in numbers, and land continues to be confiscated. She tells of familial attachments, befriending a pseudo-madam who introduces Nahr to the exploitative world of party girls for privileged men, a traumatic experience, and a painful, difficult secret. After much disappointment and horrific experiences, she falls in love with Bilal, who is very much in tune with her sensitivity and radical political thinking. Activism leads Bilal to elude the military and for Nahr, solitary confinement in the *cube*, an inhuman technology, designed to isolate, humiliate, degrade and control. The cube is parallel to the walls and checkpoints built around Palestinian areas, that have become indoor prisons. The novel ends as Nahr, released from prison, holds a letter that brings a joy she is willing to feel, despite the toll on her body and the murder of her soul while in the *cube*.

The strengths of the book are several: the beautiful flow of writing, description of traditions and beliefs in Palestinian societies particularly matriarchal circles, a glossary of Arabic terms, the description of the olive harvest, and of the food which the author describes in great detail! A map of the places mentioned, however, placed at the beginning of the book could have assisted the reader in their conceptualization and familiarity with Palestinian territories and environs.

Against the Loveless World, is a stepping stone for readers interested in knowing more about Palestine. Through Abulhawa's novels, it is hoped that a sincere engagement between readers and the current activism in interest of the Palestinian people, takes place. Definitely recommended.

Bio: Yoly Zentella, PhD, a Chicana psychology faculty researcher and writer focusing on culture and attachment to, and loss of place, is also editor of La Plática del Norte

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Visitors and guards have told me that the cube is a technological marvel, the first of its kind. As an almost completely automated solitary cell, it has made me famous in "security circles" – private prison corporations, surveillance tech companies, and various ancillary suppliers of bondage.

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