بناء رواية تطور البطلة فى ثلاثة أعمال روائية لكاتبات أمريكيات من أصل أفريقى ومن أصل عربى

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ملخص البحث

تعد ديانا أبو جابر (1959-) من الرواد بين كتاب الرواية الأمريكيين من اصل عربى. وتهتم الكاتبة اهتماما كبيرا بقضية وعى النساء الأمريكيات من أصل عربى بتراثهن الحضارى. وفى روايتها الثانية والتى تحمل عنوان "الهلال" والمنشورة فى عام 2003 تركز الكاتبة على معالجة تلك القضية، وتستخدم بنية روائية معينة تصور من خلالها تطور إدراك البطلة لجذورها الحضارية. ولكن لم تتطرق الدراسات النقدية حتى الآن إلى مسألة تناول أعمالها الروائية فى إطار التقاليد النقدية الأمريكية. ولذا يأتى هذا البحث قاصدا معالجة تلك القضية، إذ يقوم على الإعتقاد بأن الكاتبة تستخدم بنية روائية تتشابه كثيرا مع البنية التى تستخدمها الكاتبتان الروائيتان زورا نيل هيرستون وطونى موريسون فى سياق كتابتهما لرواية تطور البطلة الأمريكية من أصل أفريقى. فالكاتبتان تستخدمان بنية ثلاثية التكوين كوسيلة لاستكشاف تطور البطلة فى رواياتهما وعلاقته بالموروث الثقافى للأمريكيين من أصل أفريقى، ويتضح هذا الأمر على وجه الخصوص فى رواية "كانت أعينهم تتطلع إلى الله" للكاتبة زورا نيل هيرستون ورواية "سولا" للكاتبة طونى موريسون. وسوف تبين الدراسة المقارنة لبنية الروايتين و بنية رواية "الهلال" للكاتبة ديانا أبو جابر أن الكاتبة ديانا أبو جابر تستخدم بنية ثلاثية التكوين مشابهة لهما، غير أنها تعطى من خلالها اهتماما أكبر للنضج الثقافى للبطلة.

وتتميز الدراسة بالتدرج فى شمولية التحليل للروايات الثلاثة وذلك وفقا لمدى تطور البنية الروائية ثلاثية التكوين. وعليه فإن رواية"سولا" للكاتبة طونى موريسون تحظى بقدر أوفر من التحليل نظر لإسهام طونى موريسون فى تطوير البنية سالفة الذكر بقدر يجعلها أكثر تميزا من نظيرتها عند زورا نيل هيرستون، كما أن رواية "الهلال" للكاتبة ديانا أبو جابر تحظى بالقدرالأكبر من التحليل حيث أنه من الأهداف الأساسة للبحث إبراز استخدام الكاتبة ديانا أبو جابر لتلك البنية الروائية وتطويعها كى تبرز قدرا أكبر من استيعاب البطلة لميراثها الحضارى.

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STRUCTURE OF FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN IN THREE NOVELS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN AND ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

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Abstract

Diana Abu-Jaber (1959-) is a pioneering Arab American novelist, who is deeply concerned with awakening Arab American women to their ethnic heritage. In her second novel, *Crescent* (first published 2003), she focuses on this objective, and employs a certain structure whereby she portrays the ethnic development of the heroine. But no study has been conducted with the view of integrating her creative endeavour into the American critical tradition. The present study deals with this gap, assuming that the structure which she uses parallels in a substantial way that which Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison develop in the context of their writing convention of African American female bildungsroman. Both Hurston and Morrison use a tripartite structure, by means of which they explore the development of their heroines against the background of their African American ethnic legacy. This is particularly clear in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (first published 1937) and Morrison's *Sula* (first published 1973). The following comparative study of structural parallels in Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and the above-mentioned two novels would show that Abu-Jaber uses their tripartite structure, which she invests with a greater emphasis on the ethnic maturation of the heroine.

The study is graded in thoroughness of treatment, which is commensurate with the three novelists' development of their tripartite structure. Since Morrison elaborates and improves upon the structure used by Hurston, her Sula will be treated in more detail. Crescent will receive the bulk of analytical attention, because the main objective of the study is to show how Abu-Jaber not only adopts the tripartite structure but also adapts it in order to serve her more ambitious ethnic purpose.

The first part of the above-mentioned tripartite structure is the presentation of setting as an ethnic milieu in the three novels. The setting of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a town populated by a traditional black community and located in the American South, the seat of African American ethnic heritage. Porch–sitters form what might be called a communal chorus, keen on evaluating the heroine in terms of the black community's ethnic values. The setting of *Sula* is a mountain town called the Bottom. Its origin is associated with slavery, 2 and its inhabitants are a black community living in isolation from whites and sticking to their ethnic heritage. The setting of *Crescent* is Um-Nadia's Café, where the Arab American heroine works as a chef whose duty is to cook Arab food. The Café is an ethnic milieu par excellence. It is a place where Arab food is cooked, Arab music played and the Arabic language spoken. In fact, Abu-Jaber presents the Café as a recreation of the ancestral homeland at the heart of the United States.3 These ethnic underpinnings of setting in the three novels create a context for judging the heroines' ethnic development. In other words, the heroines' conformity or nonconformity to ethnic values is undetectable without the referential ethnic ethos inscribed in the setting of each of the three novels.

Janie, the heroine of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, shows her lack of interest in ethnic development from her early childhood. This is due to the fact that she does not associate herself with her community. Her ethnic dissociation is effectively illustrated when, at the age of six, she sees herself with white children in a picture. They have to make an effort in order to persuade her that she is the coloured girl standing with them in the picture. She then realizes for the first time, and with an unmistakable sense of frustration, that she is black: "Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was mah dress and mah hair so Ah said: 'Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!'" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 82).

The ethnic dissociation characterizing Janie's consciousness is more elaborately delineated in *Sula*. Morrison presents her extensive analysis of the heroine's failure to develop her racial linkage in three basic ways. First, she portrays the heroine's unequivocal and persistent rejection of the values of her community. Second, she illustrates the heroine's estrangement from those values through the close

relationship between the heroine and her ethnically committed black friend, Nel. Third, she emphasizes the dire consequences triggered by the ethnic cleavage that the heroine develops.

Sula's rejection of her ethnic values runs counter to Morrison's vision. In her pursuit of self-realization, Sula does not heed her communal values because, as Morrison points out in an interview with Robert Stepto, "she does not believe in any of those laws and breaks them all" (Stepto 1977, 476). Her subversive approach to the mores of her community defines her egoistic attitude towards its members: "She lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her" (*Sula* 1993, 118). With such an approach to self-realization, she contravenes Morrison's view that communal ethos should frame the pursuit of individual identity. In her comment on Morrison's view in this regard, Cathy Moses observes that "in Morrison's fiction, the exercise of individual agency outside of the context of community is usually dissipated in reification" (Moses 2000, 36). Therefore, Sula is portrayed as a rebel lashing out at the ethnic fabric of her community. This justifies Patrick Bjork's description of the central conflict in the novel as a "tension between community as a monolithic status quo and individual as subversive figure" (Bjork 1992, 56). Although she never mentions it, Sula embraces American mainstream individualism, which Morrison does not accept.

Morrison further emphasizes Sula's ethnic cleavage by drawing a contrast between her and her close friend regarding ethnic conformity. Unlike Sula, Nel carries on the values of her community, which so influence her that she becomes a mere reflection of their hold over her. Morrison tells Stepto about Nel's identification with the same community that Sula distances herself from: "Nel knows and believes in all the laws of [her] community. She is the community" (Stepto 1977, 476). But it seems that Morrison loses sight of her vision when she hints at Nel's victimization at the hands of her mother, who inculcates communal values in her: "Under Helene's hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (*Sula* 1993, 18). The close relationship between Sula

and Nel is inconsistent with their sharply different attitudes towards ethnic affiliation. In other words, the difference between the two girls in this regard is strong enough to preclude any such close friendship.

In an exaggerated attempt to emphasize the dire consequences of ethnic nonconformity, Morrison depicts the rift between Sula and her community in terms of good and evil. Morrison verges on inconsistency because of her hankering for communal appeasement. Her conception of Sula as evil because of her rejection of communal values is at loggerheads with the critical undercurrent underlying her above-mentioned description of Nel's communal indoctrination. She herself admits that her decision to portray Sula as an evil character was not easy to make: "Sula was hard for me; very difficult to make up that kind of character […] as a classic type of evil force" (Stepto 1977, 475). Morrison's mixed feeling is not injected into the fabric of Sula's community, whose view of her as evil is unequivocal. The members of her community regard her as a devil that needs to be exorcized. She is aware of this classification and of the ostracism that accompanies it: "She was pariah, then, and knew it" (*Sula* 1993, 122). This explains their relief on hearing about her death: "The death of Sula Peace was the best news folks up in the Bottom had had […] In any case, both the raw-spirited and the gentle […] felt that either *because* Sula was dead or just *after* she was dead a brighter day was dawning" (*Sula* 1993, 150-51).

Unlike Janie and Sula, Sirine, the heroine of Abu-Jaber's *Crescent,* does not develop ethnic estrangement. Being a second-generation Arab American, she is liable to ethnic amnesia. But the active interaction of the three structural pillars, as will be illustrated in due course, keeps within her the breath of her ethnic culture. All through the different stages of her life, she maintains a measure of ethnic awareness that precludes ethnic alienation. Abu-Jaber shows that even her hybrid parentage does not dilute her ethnic consciousness. She is the daughter of an Iraqi father and a white American mother. Although she resembles her mother physically, she insists that she should be defined by her father's ethnic legacy, or what Brinda Mehta calls "her inner landscape of Arabness" (Mehta 2007, 229):

> She thinks that she may have somehow inherited her mother on the outside and her father on the inside. If she could compare her own and her father's internal organs—the blood and bones and the shape of her mind and emotions—she thinks she would find her truer and deeper nature. (Crescent 2003, 231)

Sirine's above-quoted meditation invites comparison, because it can be considered a critical comment on the motive underlying Janie's misconception of her skin colour. While Janie's imaginary skin colour distances her from her ethnic community, Sirine's real white American physical features do not estrange her from her ethnic legacy.

Sirine translates her ethnic aspiration into an active involvement in ethnic behaviour in the context of the setting of the novel. Although she is able to cook foods of different nations, she prefers to cook ancestral Arab food in Um-Nadia's Café. Her work in this regard reflects her desire to recreate her ethnic culture through her involvement in one of its remarkable manifestations.4 Her view of her work shows that its attraction resides in its ability to resuscitate some part of her ethnic heritage which faces the danger of oblivion:

> Sirine learned how to cook professionally working as a line cook and then a sous chef in the kitchens of French, Italian, and Californian restaurants. When she moved to Nadia's Café, she went through her parents' old recipes and began cooking the favorite—but almost forgotten—dishes of her childhood. She felt as if she were returning to her parents' tiny kitchen and her earliest memories. (Crescent 2003, 22)

The above extract also shows that Sirine resuscitates her ethnic heritage through ethnic exploration. But her objective is sometimes misunderstood. In an overstatement, Brinda Mehta describes Sirine's experience as a kind of resistance to the dominant culture: "Cooking Arabic food consequently becomes her underground resistance to cultural conformity and assimilation" (Mehta 2007, 229). In fact, Sirine seeks to resuscitate her own ethnic culture, showing no resistance to its mainstream American counterpart. She more often than not advocates the coexistence of the two cultures. Her preparation of a special meal to celebrate the Thanksgiving Day is a case in point. She merges both Arab and American food traditions to provide an

Arab American Thanksgiving Day banquet, and tells the gathering proudly that "it was [her] idea" (*Crescent* 2003, 216).

The second part of tripartite structure in the three novels is an elder who supplies the heroine with ancestral tutelage. In each of the three novels, an old family member attempts to instill ancestral values into the heroine and, by so doing, to integrate her into the communal fold. In both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Sula*, ancestral tutelage is administered by the heroines' maternal grandmothers. In *Crescent*, the heroine's paternal uncle takes on this task.

Janie's maternal grandmother, Nanny, is in a good position to teach her ancestral wisdom. Since Janie is deprived of the care of her parents, Nanny has to bring her up. Janie is the illegitimate daughter of a white school teacher and a black woman. Her parents desert her, and she is left in her early childhood under the protection of her maternal grandmother.5 Nanny is therefore fully responsible for Janie's upbringing, which she tries to attune to the ethnic ethos of her community.

Nevertheless, Nanny's ethnic education of Janie fails because it clashes with the young girl's dreams. The bulk of Nanny's ethnic education of her granddaughter resides in her attempt to prepare her for the conventional roles endorsed by the community, but Janie's insistence on launching a personal search for self-realization is a real stumbling-block. Nanny regards the conventional roles of wife and mother as the effective means by which she can curb her granddaughter's wild imagination. She urges her to marry Logan Killicks, a well-to-do farmer: "Ah wants to see you married right away" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 184). Nanny exercises too much pressure in her attempt to force this conventional marriage on her granddaughter, who still insists on pursuing a personal vision of the matter that pivots only on her unrestricted potentiality. Consequently, she hates her grandmother, because she considers her ancestral instruction a debilitating encroachment on her real self:

> She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love […] She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around. But she had been set in the market place to sell. (Their Eyes Were Watching God 1995, 247)

The outline of ancestral tutelage in *Sula* is similar to its counterpart in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Like Janie, Sula is brought up by her maternal grandmother, Eva. Like Nanny, Eva seeks to fix her granddaughter up with the conventional roles of wife and mother in order to help her strike communal roots:

> "When you gone to get married? You need to have some babies. It'll settle you.'
>
> "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself."
>
> "Selfish. Ain't no woman got no business floatin' around without no man." (Sula 1993, 92)

The above exchange shows that Eva and Sula have opposite views regarding the latter's identity development. Like Nanny, Eva seeks to develop the conventional inclination of her granddaughter who, like Janie, aspires after self-realization.

Sula's attitude towards the agent of ancestral tutelage is also similar to Janie's. Like Janie, Sula betrays her strong hatred of her grandmother. It continues to sour her relationship with her grandmother, and culminates in her decision to send her to a home for the elderly. From the perspective of African American heritage, it is an extremely serious act. Morrison warns against any underestimation of its seriousness, which might result from an improper understanding of the specificity of African American tradition. In her interview with Nellie McKay, she stresses the importance of a proper understanding of the ethnic implications of her portrayal of the ancestor's position in her fiction: "I long for a critic who will know what I mean when I say 'church,' or 'community,' or when I say 'ancestor,' or 'chorus.' Because my books come out of those things and represent how they function in the black cosmology" (McKay 1983, 425). In terms of this ethnic specificity, Sula's act amounts to an aggression on African American tradition. In her interview with Stepto, Morrison states that Sula actually commits a crime against her community: "Sula did the one terrible thing for black people which was to put her grandmother in an old folks' home, which was outrageous" (Stepto 1977, 478).

Ancestral tutelage in *Crescent* is different with respect to agency.

Unlike Janie and Sula, Sirine receives ancestral instruction from her paternal uncle. When she is nine years old, she loses her parents, who are killed while working for the American Red Cross in Africa. Therefore, she lives with her paternal uncle, a wise first-generation immigrant who provides her with a significant part of her ethnic education. It can be said that he represents a link between her and her ancestral roots. This assumption is supported by his namelessness, which Abu-Jaber relates to his role as a conduit for ancestral heritage. In her interview with Robin Field, Abu-Jaber underlines the implications of his namelessness: "I wanted to give him this very archetypal, avuncular presence, because in a way, for a great deal of the book, Sirine doesn't see him as person really […] He is the Story-teller" (Field 2006, 220-21). It is obvious that his character fades into his role as a culture bearer.

Sirine's uncle administers ancestral education mainly through story-telling. He introduces Sirine to the legacy of Arab oral tradition, which manifests itself in this folkloric form. It is worthy of note that Abu-Jaber draws on her own experience in presenting Sirine's ethnic education in such a manner. In her interview with Luan Gaines, she points out that story-telling was of fundamental importance to her own cultural formation:

> I grew up about big time story-tellers—my father and my uncles loved to regale us with jokes and fairy tales and reminiscences and all sorts of wonderful yarns. Like food, story-telling was a tremendous part of my cultural education and so I wanted to try and convey a little of the flavor of that experience by having Sirine's uncle tell an ongoing tale. (Gaines 2003, 3)

In the above extract, Abu-Jaber's account of her own experience of cultural education underlines the interrelated roles of story-telling and Arab food. When applied to the structure of the novel, this account stresses the complementary roles that the novel's setting and the uncle's story-telling play in promoting Sirine's ethnic coming of age.

The way in which Abu-Jaber employs story-telling defines its cultural function. In other words, story-telling in the novel serves the objective of introducing the heroine to the folkloric tradition of her

ancestral homeland. The tale that Sirine's uncle tells is significant with respect to content and deployment. Both aspects parallel *One Thousand and One Nights*. Following the example of *One Thousand and One Nights*, Sirine's uncle tells a long and winding fairy tale that recounts the miraculous adventures of a young man called Abdelrahman Salahadin. The tale depicts the great dangers facing Abdelrahman Salahadin as he roams the seas, as well as the matchless courage of his mother who goes out in search of him. The deployment of the tale in *Crescent* also strikes a strong affinity to *One Thousand and One Nights*. Abu-Jaber begins each chapter with an episode of the fairy tale that Sirine's uncle tells while she is listening, and then the story proper is resumed. With their installments of the uncle's tale, the chapters of the novel look like the "nights" of *One Thousand and One Nights*. This manipulation of the uncle's tale imparts to both the tale and the novel a strong folkloric quality, which may be misunderstood if its purpose of ethnic education is not taken into consideration. For instance, Gregory Orfalea complains that "Abu-Jaber [is] trying too hard to get Arab content into her novel" (Orfalea 2006, 124). But this kind of criticism simply fails to relate the presentation of the tale to its function in the overall structure of the novel, in terms of which each structural unit contributes an aspect of the heroine's ethnic education.

The third component of tripartite structure in the three novels is a love relationship that impinges on the heroine's ethnic development. The three novelists are concerned with the relation between love and ethnic growth, but they present its progress in different ways. In other words, the impact of the three heroines' experience of love on their ethnic development varies considerably. It ranges from encouraging escape from the ethnic domain to consummating ethnic maturation. Hence, the heroines' love relationships in the three novels reflect either a subversion of ancestral wisdom or a confirmation of its hold.

Janie's conception of love reflects her pursuit of personal identity at the expense of ethnic growth. Her association of love with personal identity manifests itself in two patterns of thought and action. The first is that she links successful love to nature, particularly to a pear tree blossoming in the backyard of her grandmother's house. When her grandmother urges her to accept the marriage proposal of Logan Killicks, whom she does not love, Janie views herself as the pear tree

abused by this man: "The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but Janie didn't know how to tell Nanny that. She merely hunched over and pouted at the door" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 185). When she is forced to consent to the proposal, she spends the time of engagement in strange communion with the pear tree: "She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 192). After she marries Killicks, she is unhappy because the link between her married life and the pear tree is missing. She is in tears when she explains to her grandmother the dysfunction of her marriage, which resides in its failure to sustain the metaphorical relation between her and the pear tree: "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 193).

Janie's strong attachment to the pear tree affirms the fact that she prefers the spontaneity of nature to tradition and its fixed values. It might be assumed that the pear tree stands for her free self, which refuses to be restrained by tradition. Her disposition shows that she attunes her marital aspirations to the realization of her individual identity regardless of the traditional rules of her community. She reveals her disregard for the norms of her community again after the death of her second husband, Joe. She infuriates her community when she refuses to wear traditional mourning clothes simply because her next lover, Tea Cake, likes to see her in blue: "Tea Cake love me in blue, so Ah wears it. De world picked out black and white for mournin', Joe didn't" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 266).

The second pattern of action that reveals Janie's pursuit of personal identity at the expense of the tradition of her community is her constant movement. She is always in flight, which corresponds with her tireless search for a kind of love that speaks to her individuality. This is a violation of the values of settling down and bearing children inscribed in her ethnic tradition (her failure to bear any children despite her three marriages cannot be regarded as accidental or insignificant). Her three marriages are associated with flight. When her first marriage breaks up because of its failure to lead her to self-realization, she thinks of flight from her husband as the gateway to freedom: "She hung over the gate and looked up the road towards way

off" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 194). She is attracted to her second husband, Joe Starks, because "he spoke for far horizon" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 197). She regards his promised "far horizon" as her own self-realization and moves with him to another town, Eatonville, in the hope of reaching it. When it proves to be false, she thinks again of flight: "Now and again she thought of a country road at sun-up and considered flight" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 236). Movement also accompanies her third marriage, which leads up to her long-awaited self-realization. She moves to her third lover's work place, Jacksonville, where they marry.

The unconventionality of Janie's third husband is the real factor that accounts for her self-realization. Tea Cake's indifference to traditional restrictions in his attitude towards her opens up the prospect of her self-realization: "She found herself glowing inside" (*Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1995, 252). As Maria Racine puts it, what Janie loves in Tea Cake is that "unlike her previous restrictive male companions who sought to silence [her] true feelings, Tea Cake does not expect her to act in a specific manner" (Racine 1994, 288). In fact, Tea Cake's attraction resides in his ability to distance her from ethnic tradition. I do not agree with Henry Louis Gates, who argues that Hurston presents Janie's last marriage as a critical comment on the female novel of passing: "By representing her protagonist as a mulatto, who eschews the bourgeois life and marries a dark-complexioned migrant worker, Hurston Signifies upon the female novel of passing" (Gates 1988, xxvii). On the contrary, both Janie and the heroine in the female novel of passing are similar because they both flee from their ethnic community in their feverish hankering after self-realization on their own terms.

In *Sula*, the relation between love and the heroine's ethnic awakening is more dynamic. Although they are similar in their indifference to and flight from their ethnic background, Sula is different from Janie in that she is capable of ethnic awakening in the context of her experience of true love. After a ten-year flight, Sula returns to her community, where she falls in love with a young man called Ajax. Like Janie and Tea Cake, Sula and Ajax are similar in their indifference to their ethnic tradition. Ajax is attracted to Sula because her "indifference to established habits of behavior" reminds

him of his mother, and because he finds her "the only woman he knew whose life was her own" (*Sula* 1993, 127). Being an ethnic rebel himself, he does not encourage the development of Sula's ethnic identity. However, her experience of this love relationship gives rise to her ethnic awareness, and causes her to show a growing interest in the communal rituals related to marriage. I do not agree with Jan Furman, who argues that Sula is "giving in to a nestling instinct that is new for her" (Furman 1996, 26). What Sula submits to after falling in love with Ajax is not an "instinct" as Furman claims. Rather, she begins to learn a communal tradition that requires a woman to marry and settle down. In her interview with Stepto, Morrison emphasizes Sula's communal learning experience which her love relationship triggers:

> Marriage, faithfulness, fidelity; the beloved belongs to one person and can't be shared with other people—that's a community value which Sula learned when she fell in love with Ajax, which he wasn't interested in learning. (Stepto 1977, 477)

It is evident that Sula's experience of true love initiates the development of her ethnic identity. But it is thwarted by her lover, who deserts her because he does not like her burgeoning conformity to the tradition of her community.

Abu-Jaber improves upon Morrison's achievement, and develops the learning experience associated with the heroine's love relationship into a central factor in her ethnic maturation. The instruments which she employs in order to facilitate the achievement of this objective are the character traits of both Sirine and her lover. Unlike Janie and Sula, Sirine is all along deeply interested in her ethnic roots. With this kind of interest, she finds in her lover's ethnic qualifications an effective channel for gratifying her ethnic thirst. Her lover, Hanif, is an Iraqi professor of linguistics living in exile in the United States. He is distinguished not only by his good education but also by his political sophistication. Evelyn Shakir's description of post-World War II Arab immigrants can show how Hanif's distinction is significant for Sirine's ethnic awakening. She states that, by dint of their good education and strong nationalist sentiments, the "new immigrants have helped

rekindle a sense of ethnicity in the established community and promoted a sense of kinship with the Arab world" (Shakir 1996, 9). Hanif's role in the development of Sirine's ethnic identity is analogous to the contribution of those new immigrants to the ethnic awakening of the Arab American community.

Hanif strengthens the impact of setting on Sirine's ethnic development. He gives an immense impetus to her setting-related ethnic awareness through his impressive first-hand accounts of the culture of her homeland, Iraq. I do not agree with Charlotte Innes, who argues that "the only part of *Crescent* that feels a touch forced is Abu-Jaber's delineation of Sirine's growing awareness of her Iraqi heritage" (Innes 2003, 49). Innes criticizes Abu-Jaber for associating "the transformative power of true love" (Innes 2003, 46) with Sirine's ethnic enlightenment, which she regards as unconvincing. But this argument is not valid, because it wrenches the realization of Sirine's ethnic maturation after her experience of true love from the overall structure of the novel. In fact, the heightened ethnic sense that Sirine reaches after the establishment of her love relationship with Hanif is inseparable from the cultural force of setting that has already been at work. Sirine's ethnic behaviour, which is embodied in her cooking of Arab food in the context of the novel's setting, undergoes a justifiable development into a greater ethnic awareness after she falls in love with Hanif. Her ethnic sense of the Arab food she cooks intensifies, because it becomes expressive of the ancestral homeland that her lover makes more vivid. Owing to this added force, the Arab food she cooks begins to speak a language new to her, a language that takes her to the land of her ancestors. When she cooks Arab food in her lover's presence, "she can smell oranges and lemons, cherry and wood […], the smell that she thought came from Iraq" (*Crescent* 2003, 144).

Sirine's love relationship not only enriches her understanding of her own heritage, but also establishes the geographical dimension of her identity. Hanif tells her the story of both the glorious past and the traumatic present of Iraq, thus sending her on a figurative journey back to her ancestral homeland. Orfalea rightly observes that Hanif "offers her linkage to a land […] she hardly knew" (Orfalea 2006, 124). The void that she used to be conscious of explains the importance of this development. With the beginning of her love

relationship, she reveals to Hanif her acute sense of the missing geographical part of her identity: "I guess I'm always looking for my home, a little bit. I mean, even though I live here, I have this feeling that my real home is somewhere else" (*Crescent* 2003, 132). The lack is redressed when Hanif succeeds in establishing her permanent sense of belonging to Iraq and its heritage. Although he leaves suddenly for Iraq in the hope of helping his distressed country, 6 she continues to show a growing interest in Iraq and its calamitous condition under Western aggression. Unlike Sula, whose ethnic awakening withers up after her lover's departure, Sirine demonstrates that her ethnic maturation is irreversible.

NOTES

1 The umbrella term "ethnic" is commonly used to describe the different aspects of the ancestral heritage of minorities in the United States.

2 Morrison's account of the origin of the Bottom recalls slavery with all the injustice and exploitation that accompanied it. A white slave master promises to give his good slave both freedom and a piece of fertile bottom land after a certain period of hard work, but he breaks his promise by giving his slave barren hilly land instead of fertile valley land. When the slave protests against this breach of their agreement, the master deceives him into believing that hilly land is actually bottom land:

> A good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would perform some very difficult chores. When the slave completed the work, he asked the farmer to keep his end of the bargain. Freedom was easy—the farmer had no objection to that. But he didn't want to give up any land. So he told the slave that he was very sorry that he had to give him valley land. He had hoped to give him a piece of the Bottom. The slave blinked and said he thought valley land was bottom land. The master said, "Oh, no! See those hills? That's bottom land, rich and fertile."
>
> "But it's high up in the hills," said the slave.
>
> "High up from us," said the master, "but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven—best land there is."
>
> So the slave pressed his master to try to get him some. He preferred it to the valley. And it was done. (Sula 1993, 5)

3 Abu-Jaber states repeatedly that Arab Americans and Arabs in the United States find in the Café an image of their homeland. They like the food they eat in the Café because of "the flavors that remind them of their homes" (*Crescent* 2003, 20). The Arab American owner of the

Café, Um-Nadia, emphasizes the sense of home that the place evokes: "I see Arab men come here from far away all the time. They all come to me because we make something like a home in this country" (*Crescent* 2003, 94). The different activities that take place at the Café reflect the cultural heritage of the ancestral homeland. Arabs and Arab Americans come to the place not only to eat Arab food, but also to "play drums with their fingers, the one-stringed *rebab*, the violin, the flute, Arabic music" (*Crescent* 2003, 94).

4 Abu-Jaber emphasizes the point that the preparation of Arab food recreates Arab culture in the adopted homeland. In an interview with Luan Gaines, she states that "food has a sort of 'memory.' All whole foods are evocative of the place they were raised or produced" (Gaines 2003, 2). In another interview, she speaks of "food as a way of instructing us and containing our cultural legacy" (Field 2006, 255).

5 Janie tells her friend, Pheoby, that she has never seen her father and that she would not recognize her mother if she saw her:

> Ah ain't never seen mah papa. And Ah didn't know'im if Ah did. Mah mama neither. She was gone from round dere long before Ah wuz big enough tuh know. Mah grandma raised me. (Their Eyes Were Watching God 1995, 182)

6 Like Ajax, Hanif leaves suddenly without even telling Sirine of his intention. He returns to Iraq, leaving her only a note which indicates that the disastrous condition of Iraq has prompted his sudden departure: 'Things are broken. The world is broken. *Hayati*, it's time. I've gone. I imagine that I was never here at all" (*Crescent* 2003, 334).

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