The Interplay of Identities in Jamal abu Hamdan's Novella *The Blood Line*

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Abstract:  
This paper argues the construction of identity in Jamal abu Hamdan’s novella *The Blood Line* (خيط الدم). It is argued that identity is the product of many things other than the typical blood line. The novella, we contend, dramatizes the interplay of different identities within individuals and the multi-dimensional nature of identity. Although religion is a primal aspect of identity constitution, history, language, and past experiences are other factors that aggravate or mitigate the religious makeup of identity. Moreover, identity is often influenced by factors like gender and place. Hence, identity is the product of its sociocultural and sociopolitical environment, which should explain our claim that is a construct rather than fixed or essentialized. Alternatively, this novella shows that one's sense of self, i.e. one's individual identity, is different from group identification, i.e. the collective identity. They often clash, with the latter proving to be stronger than the former—as the novella's end shows and since social demands are stronger than individual wishes. Past heritage, i.e. a common past, rather than acting as a marker of difference among people, can unify polar identities and bring the best out of them in a loving relationship, even if this relationship is doomed to fail due to sociocultural norms. The novella, thus, explores the contested nature of identity and its gamut from the personal—selfhood—to the collective—selflessness.

Keywords: Contemporary Arabic Novel; Identity; Jamal abu Hamdan; Jordanian Literature; World Literature