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Women and Nation: A Study of Selected Works of Sahar Khalifeh Novels

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Abstract

This research paper analyses the complex link between women and nationhood via the works of Sahar Khalifeh, a notable Palestinian writer. Khalifeh's tales illustrate the twin fight for emancipation encountered by women under national oppression and patriarchal structures. The introduction delineates a framework for comprehending Khalifeh's creative achievements, highlighting her dual function as a writer and public intellectual who questions conventional historical narratives that marginalize women's experiences. Khalifeh's books thematically examine the stark reality of women's lives, demonstrating how their identities are influenced by social expectations, cultural heritage, and the effects of war and relocation. The study examines how Khalifeh's female protagonists man oeuvre through restrictive frameworks, highlighting their resilience and agency in the face of adversity. This study examines key works, including "Wild Thorns," "The Inheritance," and "The Last Woman," highlighting Khalifeh's substantial contributions to Palestinian literature and feminist debate, while also contesting Western preconceptions of women's role in Arab society. The research positions Khalifeh's work as an essential analysis of the interconnections among gender, identity, and nationality, elucidating the intricacies of women's experiences amid personal and social suffering.

Keywords (identity, belongs, social suffering, liberation, Nationalism and Resistance)

Introduction

Women, like many other oppressed groups, have long believed that liberation of their sex will entail the liberation of their race. For a nation state, nationhood emasculates women, as does Western-style feminism. In fact, women's political involvement, to the extent permitted, has served as bait for their assimilation into the nation. Issues pertaining to women have thus been appropriated according to these agendas. Women and Nation articulates how, amidst such conditions in the father's land, Sahara Khalifeh occupies a different political space, where liberation of her nation is going hand-in-hand with that of her sex. Khalifeh scrutinizes issues of class and culture, and writes against the grain of both in her bid to expose their oppressive authority on women. Through the lives of women that are drawn and redrawn upon the incomplete and at times dysfunctional map of the nation she examines the unseen but felt borders, the tactical everyday, psychic realities that keep women trapped in the vice of nation and honor (Curry, 2021).

The introduction offers a broad framework for understanding Khalifeh's work both as a novelist and as a public intellectual. The national liberation struggle has increased her awareness of women's oppression, aggravated by patriarchal culture, on which the politics of national identity construction, and the politics of class, wealth, and power hinge. In these novels it is specifically how literature addresses the acculturative assimilation of the everyday into a mental code entrenched by patriarchal culture that Khalifeh scrutinizes. She chastises a conception of national history that remains out-of-bounds and reverts to the cultural domicile of ethnicity and kinship, and a model of nation which in its articulation incites muzzling both in the name of anti-colonial nationhood and honor. And she exposes how the young woman's need of movement, departure and outreach is neutralized in her culture and imposed motherhood in civility (Goddard, 2021).

In 1948, the death that decimated her home-land, the expulsion of its population and destruction of much of its architecture presaged not just the loss of a national identity, but a cultural one as well. After 1948 were not just her homeland and the allegiance to it lost, but a culture that now found itself vestigial was stubbornly erased. Both aspects of rage against the destruction had been transmuted into resentment of the body and gender malady in the name of honor, which Khalifeh now writes into the collective memory of her nation with the anger of remembrance. Many of the key questions that her novels examine – the status of women, woman's place in history, the sense of identity and belonging- are, in one way or another, by-products of the destruction of the land and its effects on Khalifeh's culture (for Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017).

Gender and Identity

Exploring the gender component in Khalifeh's novels includes an evaluation of the factors that shaped women's identity in Palestine. While celebrating Palestinian heritage and struggle, Khalifeh seeks to create a new representation for the Palestinian woman. The quest for identity is inseparable from the aspects of gender, which is an intricate web that shapes women into a specific character. In societies ravaged by war, a host of factors dictates women's identity, including: a patriarchal system characterized by the oppression of women, women as a subject of violence, the daily threat to women's safety, enforced exile, the presence of the other, and tradition. The fragmented identity of the Palestinian woman comes largely in the wake of the Nakbah in 1948, when they were uprooted from the land. This exile disrupts the ability of individuals to construct the alternative identity that taps into their past. The feminist exploration of self thus becomes a survival mechanism as much as a reclamation of the original self (Hasabelnaby and Nasr, 2022).

When a country is occupied, many attributes that make up the nation suffer. This loss is a collective affliction for both genders. However, in traditional societies, females are increasingly viewed as repositories of collective memory, and their identity is a crucible for the larger cultural one. Within patriarchy, tradition rules women's emotions, desires, body, and even thoughts. This same ideology, manifested by the war that uprooted Palestinians from their lands, inflicts collective suffering on both genders through trauma represented by violence, suicide, enforced exile, and the unsafe life of the other (for Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017). Traditional societies are usually characterized by tightly enforced rules on both men and women, which are painfully rigid for the latter. In patriarchal societies, women are considered custodians of moral codes and family honour. The virtue, chastity, restraint, and submissiveness expected of females dictate their identity. Thus, women's identity becomes increasingly naturalized through the culture of honour enforced by patriarchal modes of power. Women's safety, mobility, identity, and desires become subjects of control by not only men but mothers, uncles, and brothers. If women dare to transgress this rigid code of honour, they are punished by familial violence, humiliation, and even death, as retribution for the 'inside' community (Christianson ET al.2021).

Nationalism and Resistance

Women have frequently been equal victims with their men of the ravages of wars, which have been the birthplace of numerous national groups. Wars did not bring men success alone; rather they took something from women as well. Therefore, their sense of loss should also be articulated. Palestinian women undergo much hardship, nevertheless they remain in the periphery of the written history with their problems unheard (Pappe, 2022). Nationalists devoted their efforts to fighting the occupations with weapons, while it has been overwhelmingly the responsibility of women to defend land, clan, and community, to cultivate patriotism and to perpetuate the culture. Nevertheless, Khalifeh's women possess names, faces, and stories unique enough to withstand reductive categorization. By unveiling their features and by portraying them in their quotidian experiences, their individuality is projected. Women's disenfranchisement from the liberation process stems from the culturally incorporated premises that assign them a backseat in socio-national issues as from their hubristic overreaction to cultural groundings. The espoused modeling of men races toward self-invited disregard of delicately-worked concerns, which are intricately intertwined with the essential foundations of the culture (Der-Ohannesian, 2015).

All forms of nationalism, from benign to belligerent, accept borders, usually defined by soil, language, race, and religion. It uses all resources, both visible and invisible, in the arduous task of nation-formation, yet the process also produces duality, bifurcation, self-loathing, fear, insecurity, and loss. Territorial borders cannot enfold an imaginary body. With the imposition of violence on the individual, contradictions mount into terror where its location cannot be determined. The protagonists of FOB rigorously track its cruel consequences—from discrimination to suffering, from incompleteness to death (Hassan Alwadhaf and Omar, 2011). Since the visible and audible cannot represent the demands of the imaginary Body, the focus shifts to those mechanisms that are necessarily invisibilized and inaudible. In the endeavor of creation/construction, it is the drowning of deterred territories into an essentialist perception of nation that causes glaring cleavages around the construction of the Dominican Republic; so many cleavages, that their consequences bleed arbitrarily (Parsi, 2021).

Female Protagonists

As a woman writer from Palestine, Khalifeh presents female protagonists who take off the veil of mourning and silencing and claiming their voices to express anger and protest against military control of their lives. This representation of the female protagonist emerges in the shadow of occupation, war, and enforced exile and relocation in her own writing. Khalifeh's drawing of the picture of women under occupation in her novels is universal in the description of the collective suffering of women everywhere. The feminist writing in Khalifeh's novels adopts an understanding of gender relations as cultural practices that are re-inscribed by states in turn as women are embedded in socio-spatial networks created by these institutions (for Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017). As a Palestinian woman writer expressing her anger and radically reversing the sad fate of her people as ethnic cleansing and refugee status, the female body links her gender with her nation. Khalifeh writes in Arabic, the language of the occupiers, and adopts Western storyteller techniques. This is a conglomerate tactic of politics and art, as it denies the power and legitimacy of the Western hegemony and makes a parallel jump across languages. Khalifeh's representations of female characters draw attention to the preventive measures taken against their gender across national, ethnic, or cultural boundaries (Curry, 2021).

The approach taken from Baldwin in understanding the world from the perspective of Black and/or other minority races is deployed to disclose the perceptions of women in Khalifeh's texts. Questions of perception in Khalifeh's work towards women's bodies focus on the politics of clothing as it was bequeathed since Antiquity, as the fear of revealing and exposing the body on the one hand and the power to invade, view, and control the body on the other hand were common in the understanding of women in these texts. Khalifeh expands this textual space in terms of Middlelist colonial and post-colonial manifestations towards the body of women across religious boundaries. The influences of the West are successful in controlling and invading women's bodies in the Middle East which are similar to the imposed preventive and restrictive steps taken against women's bodies and space (Joseph and Zaatari, 2022).

First-Person vs. Third-Person Perspectives

Looking at Khalifeh's novels from the perspective of the narrative voice one deals with first-person and third-person perspectives. Khalifeh seems to prefer the first-person perspective when presenting a real-world identity such as Palestinian or an abstract one like a woman or a mother. In contrast, when shifting to one universal entity or character, Khalifeh reverses this use, turning to the third person. Khalifeh employs this multifaceted perspective in both the early and later novels, with the exception of which relies heavily on first-person narration, employing it throughout the novel. Khalifeh seems to have written as a type of personal writing in response to the circumstances surrounding it, and this may have made it difficult for him to leave beyond the confines of first-person perspectives. The rest of Khalifeh's translated novels testify to these statements. are told from a limited first-person perspective confined to the female characters' personalities and lives. However, Khalifeh at times seems to wish to consider the spirit of abortion as general and tried to adopt an inclusive perspective about it. In after a lengthy and expressive presentation of the subject and the abortion completion, a difficult transition takes the readers to the voice of the abortion spirit, which Khalifeh adopts as a main character. As for this difficult transition, Khalifeh chooses to present a dead silence via a fully black landscape and the abortion spirit's thoughts to establish a firm boundary between the two realms this character seeks to bridge (Parr, 2023).

Symbolism and Metaphor

Symbolism is a conventional literary mechanism that a writer uses, a sign, device, or trope that can be translated into its intended meaning. The assumed symbolic weight rests on the significance of the symbol itself (for Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017). Metaphor, as a concept, refers to a mode of thought as well as a mode of expression (salah saleh, 2016). It becomes a ubiquitous form of symbolic reasoning and mapping system employed to comprehend larger concepts in terrestrial experiences.

The nabka (the catastrophe in 1948), as a political, historical, geographical, and national term, carries a plethora of meanings and symbolisms. In its usage in the pieces of literature written by Palestinians, it is represented as a slew, and also as slaughtering 'the Orchid' as a home, a husband, or a beloved. The nabka carries varying meanings in each and every literary piece produced by the pen of Palestinians, where it becomes subjected to metaphorization, abstraction, and personification. The nabka becomes a 'she,' a heart, a woman, a woman with a connotation similar to the fate of the Palestine it remains unelaborated, yet contained in huge signification, just like a continuing stream of water in a huge dam, that cannot reveal its content unless it is broken and released out of the dam. A feminine character is intermingled with the semantic of the nabka revealing a tradition, culture, mindset, and underground female labor working behind the curtain of tragedy. When sleep closed the lids, dreams took them into that land, and feeling time was flowing backward. They were running back to the nabka, to their beloved Orchid. The reader will see the nabka as a woman stained by the blood of innocents in slaughter houses, slaughtering all that is precious on Mother Earth. Women's rejection for killing on this earth might not eliminate it from the surface of earth, yet the 'Orchid' of life will remain an invincible fate.

Water, as a conglomerate reflecting a pool of meanings, grows and penetrates the texture of the language and wordings. Transcending its connotation means the fall of hundreds of palaces of meaning. The use of it in its different meanings shows how the weight of the words shadows the beauty of nature. Every woman's inner world who lives or have ever lived on this earth is uncovered and shown naked in front of thousand eyes. It means childhood, childhood in every inch of this world, mother tongue, womb, breast, life, death, purity, honesty, tenderness, softness, fragility, beauty, and love. It is a mad person and the treasure of masculine regardless of consummation. Women cry for it, yet they can neither touch it nor possess it. Every odor, taste, and sound of 'L-column' make women looks in fabrication. Their complicated body language is beyond the inept hand of the writers. In contrast to the nabka, where womanhood is a victim of tragedy; yet water, river, rain, desire, and crying add more beauty to the text. Everything seen or untouched becomes a tragic source of happiness.

Sahar Khalifeh and Feminism

Sahar Khalifeh was born in Nablus in 1943. She studied at the Latin Convent Secondary School and obtained her B.A. in Philosophy and Sociology from the American University of Beirut in 1967. Khalifeh worked as a teacher and then the Chair of the Sociology Department at the Al-Najah National University in Nablus. After the Israeli invasions in 1982, Khalifeh moved permanently with her family to Amman, Jordan. Khalifeh is a novelist and a prominent Palestinian feminist and a founding member of the General Union of Palestinian Women and the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center. She has published eight novels so far most of which have been translated into different languages. Khalifeh's work addresses women's relationship with nation questioning the image of women as passive followers of men, bereft of voice and agency, limiting female character to the roles of mothers and lovers in the homeland quest. Female characters in her selected novels are presented as marginalized and peripheral, stripped of their monetary rights,

relegated to the womb, but simultaneously as active agents participating in resisting the occupier, demanding land and giving it even a human face (Shijila, 2021).

Khalifeh condemns women's oppression saying, "To me, a woman without sovereignty is like a nation without land." Women's sexual oppression in patriarchal societies is paralleled with colonized nations' oppression by a foreign occupier. Male production/male exile strips woman of her land/nation. Sun, Asur and Ameenah narrate their experience of oppression and resistance in note books as a means of asserting their subjectivity. This domestic space is turned into ethno-national consciousness through territorialization of domesticity. In opposition to the home as blind eyes at the forefront of national pause/decay sun is presented as sterile voyeur. Home remains a site of defiance within besiegement unlike the public space that compromises agency and honour. Eventually the occupied collectivity exists through women's sacrifice and endurance. Khalifeh celebrates the family as a national collectivity through the defence of its land dossier, in the crafting of matrilinearity, in the jeopardising of its honour through matrimonial stratagems, and in the production of Palestinian children and continuity. In the exilic otherness memory serves as a means of preserving the counterparts. Writing becomes an act of resistance to death; refusal to conform to the victim-narrative and to surrender to the fiction of vanquished people. Khalifeh emerges as a transgressive feminism asserting the impact of polysemy and heteroglossia in performing a national become that expand the boundaries of discursive resistance (Yousfi, 2021).

The Role of Women in Palestinian Literature

Women's role in Palestinian literature cannot be imposed on a society that has already heightened the role of women in its past. Women writers devoted little or no portion of their work to defend the roles that might be achieved by their women contemporaries. They rather seek a feminine identity in language and thus create a language that inscribes experience that is exercised through a more internalized role than the one imposed by men. They are engaged to build gender inverted cultural paradigms, to ponder that being female in altered standpoint can employ more difference (for Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017).

Khalifeh's women characters deliver a sophisticated mix of home bond seriousness with occupational plight as a source of humor and tragedy at once, as warnings of the destructive march of modernization in Palestinian community. Above this humor, it is Labib's testimony on Khalifeh's skills as a storyteller in conveying the tension of war cities abstracted from foreign points of view in space. It is first a comparison to highlight that feminist interpretation is to the chagrin of trusting heart on the good governor's lookout against global destruction.

Next, it is Naila's glance at her land from a co-ed school bus on bombarded Jabalya, a fulcrum of her memories. Both plot devices are clever adjustments of the time and allow juxtapositions of innocence and guilt. They make possible to increase the awareness of Jaba's plight in a personal yet engaged manner while de-naturalizing the homey PWiAs in political discourses. Along with a portrayal of mother and daughter visiting a still war memory, they put forward the human side of death in a most polemic conflict zone torn by the actors' insatiable gain with lots of common ground left to encompass the innocent outsiders.

Conclusion

In Sahar Khalifeh Novels, there are similarities and differences between their ideals of women and nation. The course of events shifts in such a way that leads an oppressed Palestinian feminine individual toward progressing and rising above her tragic destiny. The woman in Sahar Khalifeh's writing is both a lover of her own world and rejects its darkness, and the presence of the textual coherent images in the arrangements of

the events makes this tension most visible. Her women gain awareness of their tragic role in the conflict from deep sorrow and melancholy and progressively turn into revolutionary, fighting agents for love and mud. Sahar Khalifeh's novels draw the portrait of the Palestinian conflict in a diachronic order of time, extrapolating the historical roots of this epic love and tragedy. Along the turbulent and tragic course of nationhood, Sahar Khalifeh's woman emerges as both national and gendered. She stands as a symbol for the Palestinian land in varying approaches. More importantly, close emphasis on the sensuous reality of this woman sheds light upon her historical agency, specifically in disproving and reconfiguring oriental stereotypes about the oppressed ethnic other.

Sahar Khalifeh's spotlight on the woman-in-analysis's sensual perspective and perception of home, land, and body loops her history back to the Era of Jahiliyyah. This view offers a fresh concept of homeland, closely bridging both the female and the national in the search for an authentic self against colonial discourse. As a comprehensive model, Sahar Khalifeh's proud Arabic woman stands on the verge of nation and gender—a spatial representation of cultural and gendered identity construction marked with innocence, flow, and virginity—and a constantly altering corporeal model in the coalescence and collision of semiotics, spatio-temporalities, and identities. She offers her listeners a satisfying self-representation in prose poetry and at the same totally dissatisfying self-representations in the mass media exoticisms. Khalifeh's models resonate with the pivotal notions of "episteme" and "elegant analysis" against colonial/imperial discourses of history. Together with the close textual reading, eclectic frameworks from postcolonial scholarship, feminist theory, body studies, and critical multiculturalism approach this complex model for a comprehensive analysis of women and nation in Sahar Khalifeh's works. (For Translation & Literary Studies and Muhammad Alqahtani, 2017).

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