

**Women's Writing in the Middle East: Subverting the Image of the 'Third World Woman' in Sahar Khalifeh's Writings**

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Doctoral Dissertation

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Szeged, 2024

## Declaration

I hereby declare that all the work in my dissertation is the result of my progress, which was achieved under the supervision of Prof. Vera Kérchy. I would like to confirm that this dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or tertiary institution, and to my best knowledge, it contains no material that was previously published or written by any other people, except where the publications and due references have been listed in the text. I agree that the final version of my dissertation becomes available via the university's research repository, the university library, and the search engines.

16<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

Signature

*Hanan Alawna*

## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to express my gratitude to all my teachers who have nourished my intellectual life since kindergarten.

Special thanks to my supervisor Vera Kérchy for her valuable comments on this dissertation.

## **Dedication**

To the jewel of Palestine, the eternal capital, Jerusalem

To the pillars of my life, my dearest father Jamal, and mother Nisreen for being a source of continuous support and unwavering love from the very beginning of my academic journey

To all the courageous women out there striving for equality, empowerment, and the pursuit of a brighter tomorrow

I dedicate this work.

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## Introduction

“The observation that writing is ‘the work of suffering human beings’ suggests that literature is produced as compensation for, or in protest against, existential pain and material lack.”

(Goldman, 2007, p.87)

Literature can be best described as a quest that the novelist undertakes to record a battle erupting inside his/her mind. In other words, through literature, the novelist tries to express his/her plans explicitly without any boundaries, fears, escapes, or retreats. Such a scene will give the floor to the writer to confess his/her defeats, fears, and disappointments. In this sense, literature becomes a battlefield where freedom and triumph are the most appetizing goals. This echoes Sartre’s words who states “Literature throws you into a battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are committed, willy-nilly.” (2001, p.277) Thus, literature functions to understand how people in different parts of the world use literary language to reflect their happiness, sadness, anger, nostalgia, love, identity, desires, or needs. Notwithstanding, examining the themes prevailing in literature; in particular, the discourse on women, it is clear that the idea of women’s representation and women’s status are at stake. In other words, although the feminist movement emerged centuries ago, the female’s voice is still far away from being recognizable equally in all parts of the world. For example, in certain societies including Middle Eastern societies, the discourse on women’s representation still needs to be broadened, analysed, and included in the universal scene to make their situation more transparent and give a hand in solving the mystery around them. Thus, attempting to find fruitful answers to what the feminist activist Betty Friedan refers to in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) as “the problem that has no name” becomes crucial. Therefore, the present dissertation<sup>1</sup> aims to reflect on the feminist scene in the Middle East with a focus on Palestinian literature and to analyse its connection to the global feminist discourse.

### 1. Marginalization of Middle Eastern Feminist Writers

#### 1.1. Why Palestinian Literature

Tracing the discourse on women in literature in its early days, it is important to mention the ground-breaking book of *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-*

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<sup>1</sup> Some excerpts of the present dissertation were published as part of the PhD program requirements. The researcher will include these publications in the references list without providing in-text citations since the quoted material may be more than one page long, which the researcher believes is not practical for in-text citations.

*Century Literary Imagination*<sup>2</sup> (2000) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar since it discusses women's writings during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The authors notice that women in different parts of the world share the same experience; that is the patriarchal representation of them. Gilbert and Gubar assert, "Reading the writing of women from Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë to Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath, we were surprised by the coherence of theme and imagery that we encountered in the works of writers who were often geographically, historically, and psychologically distant from each other." (2000, p. xi) In addition, Gilbert and Gubar coined the term "anxiety of authorship" to better describe the situation of women writers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This indicates that women were afraid of "attempting the pen" and publishing their literature under their real names. In other words, Gilbert and Gubar notice that women appear only as mere objects for the patriarchal figure both in their social life and literary works, "For if the author/father is owner of his text and of his reader's attention, he is also, of course, owner/possessor of the subjects of his text, that is to say of those figures, scenes, and events." (2000, p.56) This shows that women only exist as objects to be acted upon by men, both as sensual and literary objects. Thus, 'woman' is defined as, "a creation 'penned' by man, moreover, a woman has been 'penned up' or 'penned in'." (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, p.62) Consequently, 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers reflect on this oppression in their writings using images of confinement and closures in their quest for liberating themselves from the patriarchal ink and attempting the pen. Gilbert and Gubar note, "The artists we studied were literally and figuratively confined. Enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society" (2000, p. xi). Gilbert and Gubar conclude, "Before women can even attempt that pen which is so rigorously kept from them they must escape just those male texts which, defining them as 'Cyphers,' deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them and kept them from attempting the pen."(2000, p.62) Gilbert and Gubar's conclusion could be summed up in three words, 'the madwoman can speak'.

However, the literary content of Middle Eastern literature in relation to females' representation has been ignored in Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) book; they primarily analyse literary works by non-Eastern writers like Jane Austen, Sylvia Plath, and Charlotte Brontë. The book focuses on women's portrayal and societal constraints, but does not extensively cover Palestinian female writers or those from other Middle Eastern regions. It remains a

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<sup>2</sup> It was first published in 1979. After this point the researcher will use '*The Madwoman in the Attic*' (2000) only to refer to the book to avoid repeating the full name.



significant work in feminist literacy criticism. Priyanka argues, “Palestinian literature, which is a part of Arabic literature, has been marginalised for numerous reasons in academics... Most of the English departments across the world ... have largely ignored and side-lined Palestinian literature in their curriculum when it comes to literature/s in translation.” (2017, p.2) This triggers the researcher to explore Palestinian literature in the present dissertation.

Another vital problem related to the marginalization of Palestinian feminist literary production is the patriarchal school teaching practices and curriculum design within the Palestinian educational system. As a Palestinian female, I grew up within this patriarchal context and I have been exposed to this scene since an early age, e.g. when I was at school, a student, most compulsory readings that were assigned to us at Palestinian governmental schools were mainly male texts while females’ writings were marginalized and were nearly absent from the discussion. In Palestinian schools’ curriculum, the works of Palestinian male writers such as Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Ibrahim Tuqan, Khalil Sakakini, etc., were widely discussed and analysed while female writers’ works were absent. This urges the need to publicize Palestinian females’ literary production as well namely, Sahar Khalifeh’s work, both at the national and International level alike. Therefore, Khalifeh’s feminist literary production will be the focus of the analysis in the first part of this dissertation. The research argues that the literary production of the Palestinian feminist writer Sahar Khalifeh could be read in connection with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves. The dissertation traces some concepts provided by these waves in Khalifeh’s work, for she is considered one of the most important Arab women writers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, in connection with the global feminist scene.

## **1.2. Stereotypical Representations of ‘Third World Woman’**

The term “stereotype” was adapted in the terminology of social science by Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* (1922) where he defines it as the picture that individuals form “of the world outside from the unchallenged pictures in their heads” (1998, p.273). Curtis explains that the stereotype is understood as an imperfect view and a mechanism by which “[o]ne’s mental images, perceptions, beliefs, and expectations about a particular individual or group dominates [sic] one’s outlook towards them.” (as cited in Lippmann, 1998, p. xxvii). According to Duijker and Frijda, the term stereotype “refers to a category of people” indicating that they are similar/coherent in some ways and thus leading to the formation of generalizations and judgments on them (1960, p. 115). This concept of stereotype about third world women shows that several imperfect images and stereotypical representations were crafted for the Middle Eastern female by some Western scholars who were interested in

traveling to the Orient to explore life there. This exploration results in stereotypical generalizations and depictions of the Middle Eastern female in Western travel narratives and paintings alike. The post-colonial critic Edward Said realizes this framework since he conducts his examination of Orientalism through a close study of historical texts where he identifies the repeated themes and ideas that have been carried down through the ages in those texts (Ashcroft & Ahluwali, 2009, p.49). In other words, before Said's work, the Western reader is not introduced directly to the Orient but rather to the existing discourse of the Orient that is repeated through the work of a particular author. This leads to the stereotypical imagery that locates the West (Occident) and the East (Orient) as opposites to one another, resulting in an 'us' and 'them' relationship by associating positive connotations with the West and negative connotations with the East (Kennedy, 2000, p.17, p.57).

The British Syrian cultural historian, writer, and broadcaster Rana Kabbani refers to these Western stereotypes about the Middle East as "myths". In her book *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (1986), Kabbani investigates the European narration about the Orient and highlights two most remarkably stereotypical representations that make the binary opposition between the East and the West persist, "The first is the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterised by inherent violence." (1986, p.6) Kabbani explains that in light of these stereotypical images, "the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling" (ibid). Kabbani adds, "The claim is that one travels to learn, but really, one travels to exercise power over land, women, peoples. It is a commonplace of Orientalism that the West knows more about the East than the East knows about itself; this implies a predetermined discourse, however, which limits and in many ways victimises the Western observer." (1986, p.10) In light of this, Kabbani concludes, "Oriental women were thus doubly demeaned (as women, and as 'Orientals') whilst being curiously sublimated." (1986, p.7) Thus, the first part of the present dissertation argues that Middle Eastern women, particularly Palestinians, do suffer from double oppression, the Israeli occupation, and the patriarchal system alike.

This concept of double oppression will be discussed based on Khalifeh's treatment of the woman question in her literary production, examining its connection with Western feminist frameworks and some post-colonial aspects. The dissertation will draw on Khalifeh's novels including *Heaven and Earth* (2013), *Of Nobel Origins* (2009), *The Image, The Icon and The Covenant* (2006), *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999), *The Inheritance* (1997), *Sunflower* (1980). The selection pertains to thematic considerations regarding gender issues.

In addition, these novels have been approached from a post-colonial perspective, yet the feminist aspect remains neglected. Therefore, the dissertation elaborates on Khalifeh's novels which directly tackle the woman question to help understand the feminist scene within contemporary Palestinian society. This dissertation is different from others since it aims to incorporate different aspects from post-colonial discourse and the Western feminist canon by highlighting the Western feminist waves and connecting it to Middle Eastern literature because, in most cases, the feminist aspect in Khalifeh's work and the connections to the feminist waves are neglected, thus; the discussion of the feminist aspect is still missing. In addition, although Khalifeh is a well-known author, she is still not as well-known as Virginia Woolf and other Western writers. Therefore, there is still a narrow discourse on the subject; that is why it becomes crucial to analyse her work and put it on the table for discussion. In this way, I can publicize Palestinian literature and Khalifeh in particular. I feel I can do something for Palestinian literature and Palestinian women as a scholar who should help and talk about the situation within my cultural context as part of my responsibility as a researcher.

In the same vein, Kabbani tries to demystify some myths about the Middle Eastern female by reflecting on the reasons that the Western frameworks create a misleading image of the Middle Eastern female. Kabbani inserts, "The positive achievements of the travellers have been thoroughly studied and as often praised in both West and East. But I believe that room must be allowed for a critique of their prejudices and misconceptions." (1986, p.12) Kabbani inserts that some writers who did translations about the Orient (from Oriental languages) did not do it carefully, for example, Kabbani mentions that the French writer Antoine Galland, one of the writers who were influential in forming the West's attitude to the East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "stressed the fact that he worked on them only after dinner, as a form of recreation to end a long day's more scholarly study." (1986, p.27) Kabbani believes that this is random unsystematic writing, "He himself wrote of the stories in an unceremonious manner." (ibid) By doing this, Kabbani tries to show the way the stereotypical images of the Middle East were conceived and have persisted to the present day. Furthermore, the analysis shows their influential power in shaping the attitudes of entire generations and dominating individuals' perceptions. However, the present dissertation aims to subvert some of the inherited stereotypical representations about third-world women and open the door for a communication channel between Middle Eastern and Western women; instead of, keeping them placed in this binary opposition usually created between the Eastern vs. the Western woman through applying some Western feminist frameworks in the analysis

of the Middle Eastern feminist scene. Therefore, to avoid generalizations and creating new stereotypes by treating Middle Eastern women as a coherence, homogenous group, the second part of the dissertation will conduct a comparative study on the life story of the Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh *My Story to My Story* (2018) and the Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi *Persepolis* (2000) as sisters in this struggle of women in their quest for emancipation. The dissertation argues that Khalifeh's work could be viewed in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves, while Satrapi's work is close to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> feminist waves. This comparative aspect aims to include Satrapi as a female voice from another region in the Middle East, namely Iran, alongside Palestine. In this sense, the second part of the dissertation provides an outlook on the feminist scene in the Middle East, aiming to avoid falling into the trap of creating yet another stereotypical representation of the Middle Eastern woman.

## **2. Significance of the Dissertation**

The central contribution of the dissertation and its primary goal is to bridge the gap between literary production in the Middle East and Western feminist frameworks, particularly focusing on the representation of Middle Eastern women in the selected works. By exploring certain recurring images and themes in Middle Eastern women's writing, the analysis could reveal a shared imagistic and thematic coherence among female writers from both Middle Eastern and Western contexts. As Gilbert and Gubar observed in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), "reading the writing of women from Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë to Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath, we were surprised by the coherence of theme and imagery that we encountered in the works of writers who were often geographically, historically, and psychologically distant from each other." (2000, p. xi) Thus, this dissertation extends such observation to the Middle Eastern feminist literary production, attempting to highlight the persistence of common challenges faced by women, particularly within the context of double oppression/colonization, the intersection of patriarchal systems and occupation in regions such as Palestine and Iran. In this regard, the leading African American poet and essayist Audre Lorde inserts, "As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change." (2003, p.26) In light of this, the dissertation aims at making connections and bridging the gap between women writers in the Middle East and the West through incorporating some post-colonial Western feminist frameworks in analysing Khalifeh and Satrapi's works.

By placing the analysis on postcolonial theories, the discussion aims to highlight the on-going struggles faced by women in the Middle East, offering an understanding of the way oppression manifests uniquely yet shares common threads across various global contexts. The focus on sisterhood as a unifying concept reinforces the universal nature of women's experiences, offering a platform for solidarity and cross-cultural dialogue. This echoes Lorde's words, "Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths." (2003, Pp.26-27) Furthermore, the significance of the dissertation goes beyond its application of some Western feminist frameworks to Palestinian literary production. It reveals a unique perspective coming from me as a Palestinian researcher, and an insider analyst, with personal ties to the Middle Eastern context. This connection is crucial in comprehending the nuances of the works analysed, as I draw on my cultural repertoire to elaborate on the intricacies of the novels in question. This insider perspective not only feeds the discussion but also questions conventional modes of interpretation often imposed by external scholars.

The dissertation aims to contribute to the broader frame of the discourse on postcolonial studies by tracing the universal facets of women's experiences, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. The quest for emancipation by women in the Middle East and the West, through their literary production, opens the door for a dialogue that can pave the road for solidarity and understanding among women globally. Lorde inserts, "For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection, which is so feared by a patriarchal world. For it is only under a patriarchal structure that maternity is the only social power open to women." (2003, p.26) Ania Loomba, an Indian literary scholar, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998) refers to this 'redemptive' desire as 'subversive purposes'. One of the main organizing themes in Loomba's work is the solution for challenging those colonial stereotypes/patriarchal structures. Loomba inserts that the question "whether the dominant language, literature, culture, and philosophic ideas can be turned around and used for subversive purposes, has been central to postcolonial, feminist, and other oppositional discourses." (1998, p.91) Loomba admits the centrality of this question in the post-colonial scene, yet she does not seem to offer a solution. The present dissertation tries to investigate the narrative forms both Khalifeh and Satrapi's works employ to include the Middle Eastern woman in the discussion on the post-colonial feminist discourse.

### 3. The Working Definitions of the Dissertation

The dissertation will employ close readings of the selected novels and textual analysis as a means to address the feminist aspects within the chosen corpus. Besides this, the theoretical framework of the dissertation draws on the Western and Eastern feminist waves in the exploration of the Middle Eastern feminist scene. The dissertation will place the feminist waves in a historical perspective which the researcher will apply to the analysis of Middle Eastern literature, particularly, Khalifeh and Satrapi's work. Alongside the Western feminist canon, the dissertation will draw on some important concepts in the post-colonial discourse. It is important to view Khalifeh and Satrapi's novels in light of post-colonial feminist frameworks since Khalifeh and Satrapi as female voices belong to third-world countries, namely, Palestine and Iran. Such a context entails the need to draw on the concept of representation between the West and the East based on the work of some well-known post-colonial/feminist critics. The dissertation will elaborate on the following definitions:

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1977): The term Orientalism will be used in the same sense that Edward Said employed to reflect on the binary divisions commonly related to the tensions amid the Occident and the Orient, such as Self-Other, West-East, civilized-barbarian, and feminism-antifeminism. So, Orientalism refers to the depiction of the aspects of Eastern cultures (Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian countries) by Western writers, artists, and historians. They give themselves the authority to make statements and depictions about the East. In Edward Said's book, Orientalism came to mean how these depictions portrayed the East in increasingly patronizing and polarizing terms. The dissertation will elaborate on some of these depictions/stereotypical images of the Middle Eastern feminist scene.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of Third World Woman<sup>3</sup>: In her well-known essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984) Mohanty argues that the writings of contemporary Western feminists about Third World women contribute to the reproduction of colonial discourse where females in the South are represented as the undifferentiated 'Other' (1984). The dissertation will employ this concept of third world woman to refer to the stereotypical representations of women in the Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian countries created by the Western frameworks that try to discuss Third World women's status.

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<sup>3</sup> In her essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984) Mohanty insert, "Terms like 'third' and 'first' world are very problematical both in suggesting over-simplified similarities between and amongst countries labelled 'third' or 'first' world, as well as implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchies which are conjured up in using such terminology. I use the term 'third world' with full awareness of its problems, only because this is the terminology available to us at the moment. The use of quotation marks is meant to suggest a continuous questioning of the designation 'third world.' Even when I do not use quotation marks. I mean to use the term critically." (p.354)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988): Spivak employed the term 'the subaltern' to discuss her post-colonial perspective regarding the oppressed groups including women. This concept will be incorporated in the analysis of the Middle Eastern feminist scene indicating that the Middle Eastern woman is represented as an oppressed subaltern subject.

Judith Butler's theory of Performativity (1990): The dissertation will draw on two important concepts from Butler's theory namely, 'repetitive acts' and 'subversive acts'. The dissertation will use the concept of 'repetitive act' to indicate the idea that the character in question is acting according to the expected cultural norms within his/her social context, s/he is adhering to the repetitive norms within his/her society. In this sense, s/he is performing 'repetitive acts'. In addition, the dissertation will employ the concept of 'subversive act' when the individual is acting against the expected cultural norms within his/her context. In this sense, the individual is performing 'subversive acts' by going against the cultural norms within his/her context. It will be employed in the dissertation in light of this explanation.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's concepts of 'the angel in the house' and 'the monster woman': These two terms will be used in the present dissertation in the same sense Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000) employed them meaning that if the female character is adhering and following the cultural norms and expectations within her context, then she is 'the angel in the house' but if she goes against these norms and expectations, she will become 'the monster woman'.

Homi Bhabha's concept of 'the third space': It will be employed in this dissertation as a connecting link among the narratives of Khalifeh and Satrapi. The dissertation will employ 'the third space' concept based on Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994). To subvert colonial domination, Bhabha (1994) proposes the in-between space of the cultural encounter of the colonizer and colonized which he calls 'the third space of cultural enunciation'. This space undermines "the binary thought and essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge" (p. 276). It deconstructs the binary of the West and the East, the colonizer and the colonized, or the self and the other. Moreover, it is the space of uncertainty, ambiguity, and the renunciation of colonial power (Bhabha, 1990). Bhabha claims that there is a space "in-between the designations of identity" and that "this interstitial passage between fixed identification opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." (1994, p.4) In this sense, what articulate cultural difference is defined as "in-between spaces" (1994, Pp.1-2, 38). Accordingly, 'the third space' becomes the space of negotiations between the differences. In addition, in this intercultural

and international third space, the inhabitants do not occupy an equal space and may not undergo a uniform experience of cultural negotiation.

In light of this, the dissertation attempts to elaborate on the concept of sisterhood between women in the Middle East and the global feminist scene as sisters in pain, who come to share the patriarchal oppression and patriarchal representation of them, regardless of their geographical location with an eye on the perception of identity as a cultural construct that is always in progress, it is not something stable, one can add and shape his/her identity based on his/her life routes in this post-colonial era. Drawing upon these postcolonial concepts and feminist frameworks relevant to the analysis, the forthcoming sections will delve deeper into these theories related to the Middle Eastern feminist scene, and those key terms will be supported with examples from the selected corpus in the following dissertation chapters.



## Chapter One

### Contextualization

#### 1.1. The Four Feminist Waves in the West

After centuries of women's voices being silenced, a glimpse of hope emerged with the rise of the feminist waves. Despite the on-going struggles, these waves represent significant progress in the journey toward gender equality, acting like rays of light in the darkness of oppression. In non-Eastern societies, a feminist movement began to flourish and developed into four phases; each with its focus and agendas regarding women's rights up to the present time. This section will discuss these waves, placing them in a historical context and highlighting the works that will be employed in the analysis of the selected corpus. The feminist waves in the West are divided into four waves commencing with the first wave around 1848 which primarily focuses on very basic needs for women. This wave is concerned with opening up opportunities for woman by focusing on their suffrage. Thus, first wave feminists ask for women's right to vote, work, gain proper education, own a property and have social agency over their behaviour. A clear example about a feminist critic who preaches such basic rights for women is the British feminist critic Virginia Woolf who tackles the woman question in her well known book *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf's book "has come to be canonised as the first modern work of feminist literary criticism" (Goldman, 2007, p.81) for it emphasizes the impact of fiction on the rise of women. In other words, Woolf's understanding of the world as a text and all human beings have the right to participate in is implicitly a feminist perspective since it rejects the authority of male figures such as Shakespeare, Beethoven, etc.

By devising an imaginary sister named 'Judith Shakespeare' in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) who wishes to cross into the theatre and compare her deadly fate with her brother Shakespeare, Woolf manages to emphasize the way social norms impede women from writing fiction and achieving progress in their lives. Thus, "Woolf's room metaphor not only signifies the declaration of political and cultural space for women, private and public, but the intrusion of women into spaces previously considered the spheres of men." (Goldman, 2007, p.85) In addition, Woolf encourages women to be financially independent stating, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." (1929, p.4) However, Woolf's perspective is not inclusive for all women since she excludes black women from the category of women stating, "It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can

pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her.” (1929, p.42) This opens the door to debate on Woolf’s feminist ideas since Goldman states, “This has become the crux of much contemporary feminist debate concerning the politics of identity. The category of women both unites and divides feminists: white middle-class feminists, it has been shown, cannot speak for the experience of all women.” (2007, p.91) Thus, the present dissertation aims to broaden the global feminist scene by discussing the woman question in Middle Eastern women’s writing mainly, Sahar Khalifeh’s writing.

Feminist critics go further in scrutinizing the social fabric that deprives women from standing on equal footing with men which, in turn, leads to the second wave of feminism. This wave extends between the early 1960s to the late 1980s and is concerned with understanding the social roles of women within both the family and the society. Thus, a distinction between sex and gender is made to emphasize that the former is biological and the latter is a social construct that varies from one culture to another. A clear example about a feminist activist during this wave is the French critic Simone de Beauvoir who in her influential book *The Second Sex* (1961) inserts, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (1961, p.249) In addition, themes like sexuality and reproduction rights start to appear on the surface. For example, de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1961) tries to demystify and refute a number of myths that position women as inessential objects who only exist to satisfy the pleasure of the man. De Beauvoir attacks the social institutions that confine women within the role of motherhood which, in turn, blocks women within the borders of the family. The British academic Fallaize summarizes de Beauvoir’s framework stating, “In her view, myths of ‘Woman’ have been invented by men for the specific purpose of keeping women in their place, and in her deconstruction of them she indicates clearly how cultural myths operate in conjunction with economic and social factors to reinforce the oppression of women as a group.” (2007, p.88) Thus, myths operate to sustain the patriarchal supremacy over females. De Beauvoir states, “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.” (1961, p. xvi)

In addition, during this wave, feminist activists encourage all women including women of colour and women in developed countries to talk about their experiences of patriarchal oppression, discrimination, and race and class oppression. Thus, mottos like ‘sisterhood is powerful’ and ‘the personal is political’ start to be adapted. The famous French

critic Hélène Cixous in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976) encourages women to talk about their own selves; in particular, their bodies. Cixous calls for women to write and challenge the way the conventional man represent them as dreamy, sensitive, intuitive, etc. Cixous insists on a positive representation of women within the feminist discourse believing that language could be employed as a tool to subvert the monstrous images of women created by the patriarchal pen. Accordingly, in light of the present dissertation, such feminist views would help the researcher to describe the literary and social constructions in the Middle East and the way they affect women’s status on the one hand, and include the Middle Eastern woman within this concept of sisterhood after being captivated for centuries within the patriarchal system’s cage on the other hand.

However, the woman question persists and it leads to the third wave of feminism that extends between the late 1980s until the 1990s. This wave could be described as a self-oriented wave. In other words, during this era, a shift from focusing on the surroundings of the female to the female self per se takes place. Thus, the term ‘intersectionality’ functions as a pillar in this wave since it does not only discuss the differences between women in terms of class, race and ethnicity; yet, it tackles the differences between their personal preferences. In other words, ‘intersectionality’ is concerned with how the individual’s identity/self is shaped by the interaction of different factors and that these interactions take place within a context of connected structures and systems of power. The struggle within this wave is seen as individual since each individual’s identity has to be negotiated with the surrounding context. This is clear in Judith Butler’s theory of performativity (1990) where she highlights the fact that the individual is denied the right to choose the role s/he wishes to perform. Butler criticizes the way the female identity is shaped by the projection of the societal patriarchal norms which function even before her birth/existence. Butler states:

The performance of a gender is also compelled by norms that I do not choose. I work within the norms that constitute me. I do something with them. Those norms are the condition of my agency, and they also limit my agency...gender performativity is not just drawing on the norms that constitute, limit, and condition me; it’s also delivering a performance within a context of reception, and I cannot fully anticipate what will happen. (An interview, 2004)

In addition, Julia Kristeva in her essay “From One Identity to Another” (1980) preaches for women’s uplifting within the society believing that man and woman could complete each other; in lieu, of oppressing the woman all the time. Kristeva distinguishes between two elements within the system of language. The first one is the semiotic element

that is associated with the rhythms, tones, etc. This element is associated with the maternal body since the mother starts talking to her child using these rhythms and tones. This semiotic language is feminine. However, the second element is the symbolic element that is associated with the grammar and structure. This is the masculine language. The symbolic element is what controls and makes understanding possible. Kristeva concludes that without the symbolic part, all communication would be babble and without the semiotic, all significations would be empty and have no meaning in our lives. Thus, communication requires both the semiotic and symbolic; there is no exclusion of the other. This could indicate the idea that individuals should negotiating and renegotiate their sense of the self in relation to the world around them. This process involves both conscious and unconscious elements, as well as the influence of language, culture, and social norms. Thus, 'intersectionality' opens the door for the individual to be in a continuous state of change. In other words, Kristeva in her essay "From One Identity to Another" (1980) refers to this state as 'the subject in process' which rejects the idea that the subject is a fixed entity assuming that the subject comes to realize its existence only through the interactions with other structures by using the medium of language. The subject acquires its essence only from the interactions with the surrounding context. Such approaches support women in their quest to establish their position within the patriarchal system both in real life and literature.

Finally, the fourth wave of feminism which still holds some disagreements starts around 2007 and continues until present day. This wave benefits heavily from the social media platforms spreading all over the world to reveal the misogynist practices against women in different cultures. Thus, it aims at revealing sexism not only in literature but in adverts, films, and the media, among other mediums. The popular motto of this wave is the #MeToo movement which encourages women to share their experiences of sexual violence and social injustice and reveal who is responsible for them, besides educating women all over the world about their rights. Accordingly, all these waves initiate the need for a research about the Middle Eastern woman to include her within this global feminist discourse.

## **1.2. The Feminist Movement in the Middle East**

### **1.2.1 Challenges and Obstacles**

Understanding the seeds of the feminist movement in the Middle East is essential for approaching the woman question there properly. Thus, tracing the development of this movement in this region, it is clear that this movement encounters many obstacles since its appearance by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. For

example, there is still no fully agreed upon or acceptable term for feminism or feminist activists in Arabic. Abu-Lughod maintains that there is still disagreement about how to refer to this concept “like feminism in the Middle East, for which at least in Arabic there is still no fully acceptable term” (1998, p.22). In addition, Al-Bogami, a Jordanian researcher, asserts “she is confused whether to use feminist criticism or feminist literature to refer to this theme in literature,” concluding that she prefers to use feminist literature since “it is deep and more encompassing.”<sup>4</sup> (2014, p.631)

This debate occurs because the emancipation efforts were only employed for the sake of nationalism. That is to say, feminism had some political agenda in its early days in the Arab world. This is clear in the case of the school of Midwives that was established in the 1830s by the Egyptian modernizer Mohammad Ali. His sole purpose behind establishing this school for women was to show to visiting Europeans how modern and developed he was on the one hand, and to improve the efficiency and enhance the health of his army, on the other hand. This echoes Abu-Lughod who asserts, “The sphere of women was localized as a sphere of backwardness to be reformed, regenerated, and uplifted for the benefit of the nation.” (1998, p.10) Thus, nationalism is viewed as both a male phenomenon and a masculine project per se in which women appear as mere objects for manipulation and reformation.

The Middle Eastern man is still reluctant about accepting this feminist approach in the Arab world. This controversy in the East could be attributed to the patriarchal beliefs as Rahbari, Longman and Coene assert, “Feminism was ... understood, treated and criticized as a Western phenomenon and product, as well as a tool in the hands of Western colonialism to extend their versions of femininity.” (2019, p.1431) Terms such as alien and Western import could appear when referring to the woman question in the Middle East. In addition, the identity of the feminist language is still vague. This entails the absence of a proper language that reflects the Arab feminist ideology for Abu-Lughod argues, “The language of rights that promised equality to women could be seen as problematic not only because it was actually unavailable to women but because of the assumptions about personhood and subjection to the state it carried.” (1998, p.8) In the same vein, the Iranian female writer Muniru Ravanipur comments on the hard journey of women and their participation in literary endeavours. In an interview, Ravanipur states:

No one takes us seriously before we publish a work. Until then we are lonely women ... and then they say, ‘Oh, a woman is writing!’ As if they are saying a disabled person is writing. And then everybody wants to help

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Bogami’s text was originally published in Arabic and the translations here are provided by the researcher.

as if a blind person is crossing the street. Yes! A woman is writing, someone who was supposed to keep her mouth shut. (An interview, 1990)

Arab women's writings are devalued by male authors and marked as immature art. In other terms, male writers dismiss the idea of women's writings since they have ignored and marginalized them as authors. The Syrian political and media advisor Bouthania Shaaban in her book *Voices Revealed: Arab Women Novelist 1898-2000* (2009) mentions that Dakrub, an Arab Lebanese critic, answered frankly when he was asked about the absence of Arab female novelists, "the only reason I can think of is that male writers (myself included) must unconsciously believe that the literature written by women is insignificant." (p.34) In addition, the Lebanese-American writer Malti-Douglas writes about the negative perception of Arab women's writing stating, "It is difficult to understand how the male critic Sabry Hafez, writing in 1989, could argue that from her first novel, ... to her then latest novel, ... Nawal El Saadawi's fiction has not undergone any 'artistic and intellectual development'"(1995, p.16). Arab women's writing is described as adapting what Amin Malak calls a 'mimetic mode' of writing, where the social problem are literally reproduced for the reader (2000, p.159). Such attack on women's writing makes their quest of putting pen to paper problematic.

In some cases, the Middle Eastern man resorts to employ religion as a means to defend his patriarchal treatment of the Middle Eastern woman; thus, it is important to mention that religion; in particular, Islam which is the most widespread religion in the Middle East, does not place women in an inferior position compared with men; instead, it respects women and refutes all the stereotypical connotations associated with them as wicked and worthless subjects, "God says, '[b]ut Satan whispered to Adam, saying, Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that never decays? and they both ate from it [. . .]. Adam disobeyed his Lord and was led astray." (Ta Ha 20. Trans., Abdel Haleem, 2010, Pp.120-121) Thus, the Arab man is concerned with imposing his patriarchal traditions on the Middle Eastern woman more that applying the instructions of God. The Palestinian researcher on the woman question's topic Bilal Hamamra summarizes the scene stating:

The construction of women as untrustworthy, morally inferior and wicked is incompatible with the Qur'an which does not represent Eve as a temptress. According to the Qur'an, Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden was not because she was a seducer, but rather because she was a participant. It was Adam who disobeyed God's word and listened to Satan and Adam's sin led to the downfall of Eve. (2019, p.7)

However, there are a number of Arab critics who try to give hand for women in their quest of moving out of this system of symbolization yet their attempts end in reinforcing the patriarchal images and roles associated with the Middle Eastern woman. For example, the Egyptian critic Qasim Amin in his book *The Liberation of Women* (1899), despite his attempt of advocating women's right, he falls in the trap of reinforcing the role of the female in her scientific child rearing. Abu Lughod criticizes his views stating:

Although he spoke of women's rights, education and work, what he ultimately was most interested in promoting was the modern bourgeois family with its ideal of conjugal love and scientific child rearing. This is a form of family that some Western feminists, Marxists and social theorists of the second half of the twentieth century have now come to criticize as a source of women's subjection because of the way it divides women from one another, gives them new tasks, places them under the control of their husbands and opens up the family to capitalist exploitation, state control and new forms of discipline. (1998, p.256)

These obstacles that face the woman's movement in the Middle East affect the way the female is being treated. The Lebanese writer Evelyne Accad, for instance, in one of the early ground-breaking works on the subject, states "the general condition of women in North Africa and the Arab world [as being] deprived of personal and social freedom, subjected successively to the will of their fathers, husbands and sons, economically dependent and intellectually circumscribed." (1978, p.31) Thus, the images employed to represent women in literature were dyed with patriarchal control. Priyanka, a researcher on Palestinian feminism, comments, "The symbols used in literature are gilded frames which encourage and preserve the role of women which is accepted in a patriarchal society." (2017, p.190) Fayad, a Lebanese intellectual, in her article "Reinscribing Identity: Nation and Community in Arab Women's Writing" (1995) summarizes this package of obstacles that impede the Middle Eastern woman from taking part in the feminist discourse stating:

One of the most difficult tasks confronting Arab women writers in inscribing themselves as subjects lies in resisting and renegotiating their role within a master national narrative that not only homogenizes the concept of national identity itself, but also assigns woman a fixed role as an historical metaphor buried deep within the foundations of the narrative. Through this historical metaphor, woman is appropriated as signifier of traditionalism. (1995, p.147)

This patriarchal scene paves the road for the emergence of three feminist waves in the Middle East that will be discussed below.

### **1.2.2. The Three Middle Eastern Feminist Waves**

The existing amount of ignorance and abstraction regarding Middle Eastern women derive them to de-veil themselves through attempting the pen and getting rid of their fears. This, in turn, leads to a feminist action in the Arab world that parallels with the four feminist waves in the West. In other words, the feminist movement in the Middle East consists of three stages as follows: The first generation or what is called ‘the pioneers’. This stage extends roughly between 1860-1920. During this period, women start their feminist activism within restricted circles such as, private homes or women’s charitable organizations. These circles signify the legitimate gathering places for women in conservative societies. Badran and Cooke label this stage as “invisible feminism” (1990, p. xxi). In addition, the publishing industry during this period was controlled by men; however, some women by the end of this stage manage to have their own publishing houses and work as journalists. Feminist activists of this period such as, the Lebanese Wardah al-Yaziji (1838-1924), Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914) and the Egyptian A’ishah al-Taymuriyyah (1840-1902) among others, ask for gender equality, education for women and breaking the rules that confine women within the harem/domestic sphere. The pioneers resort to use mostly prose and poetry to express their views. However, the researcher on Palestinian feminism Kifah Hanna concludes, “the first generation of women writers in the Mashriq, the pioneers, though master mostly poetry, is not really recognised as having an established poetic production. It is the second generation of women writers who established an acknowledged Arab feminist poetic legacy.” (2010, p.48) Thus, it is important to reflect on the second wave of feminism in the Middle East.

The second wave or what is called ‘the inward-looking generation’ extends between 1920s-1960s. This stage includes authors such as, the Palestinian writer Mayy Ziyadah (1886-1941), the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), the Lebanese feminist lecturer Nazirah Zeineddin (1908-1976), the Iraqi poetess, writer and critic Nazik al-Mala’ikah (1923-2007) among others. During this period, conscious raising campaigns and public organized movements start to flourish in different regions in the Middle East, and the first public manifestation of Arab women as feminists coincided with the establishment of the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. The feminist output during this period is self-centred since it focuses solely on women’s issues ignoring other political, social or national causes. Thus, women start writing short stories and novels that talk about their struggle during World War I and their quest for emancipation. Despite the effort women invested in making themselves visible during this generation, “It was not until the third generation that Arab feminists managed fully



to challenge the hegemony of the male dominated field and their feminist writing managed to acquire greater recognition.” (Hanna, 2010, p.57)

The third generation or what is referred to as ‘the avant-gardes’ continues to reveal the quest of the Middle Eastern woman from 1960s-present. According to the British researcher Elisabeth Kendall, ‘the avant-gardes’ indicates “a work or writer is advancing away from dominant norms of taste and style towards a new literary future.” (2006, p.4) This period includes names such as, the Egyptian feminist and doctor Nawal El-Saadawi (1930-2021), the Palestinian author Liyanah Badr (1950-Present) the Lebanese Huda Barakt (1952-Present) and the Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh (1941-Present). The female experience of war in different parts in the Middle East and her survival of the war derive her to reflect on this experience. Hanna reflects on the scene during this wave stating:

It was this generation of writers that witnessed the outcomes of al-nakbah, ‘the disaster’ of 1948 and al-naksah, ‘the setback’ of 1967, the rise and fall of many political parties through different coups in many Arab countries, and most recently the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinian Intifada. All these events are carefully reflected in the literary works of writers of this period, especially women. (2010, p.65)

Thus, women tend to reflect on their experience using new styles and techniques such as, realism and existentialism; in lieu, of using repeated techniques like imitation or assimilation. Hanna reflects on these means stating:

Women writers of the third generation express a clear desire to transcend the traditional feminist themes of women’s relationships with men and their oppositions to patriarchy while reflecting these harsh political realities. Therefore, they endeavour to expand and enlarge the thematic concerns and literary styles of their predecessors in order to forge what we might call ... integrated feminist and nationalist causes. (2010, p.65-66)

Accordingly, based on the detailed analysis of the feminist movements in the West and the Middle East, it becomes clear that the feminist movements in both contexts do share some fundamental similarities, particularly in their initial stages. Both movements start with advocating very basic rights for women such as education, employment opportunities, and the right to express themselves through writing and different forms of media. In the West, the first wave of feminism focused on securing legal and political equality for women, primarily through campaigns for suffrage and access to education. Similarly, in the Middle East, early feminist waves, despite facing major challenges due to colonialism and societal restrictions,

stressed on the importance of education and the empowerment of women through literary expression.

However, as the feminist movements evolved, notable differences emerged between the Western and the Middle Eastern feminist scenes. Early Middle Eastern women expressed their feminist concerns primarily through literature, engaging in private discussions on women's issues and their experiences as colonized subjects living in the third world. This form of activism in the Middle East led to what is termed "invisible feminism" Badran and Cooke (1990, p. xxi), contrasting with the more public demonstrations for economic and wage rights initiated by women in the West, yet it was particularly for white women, in Guy-Evans' terms "a feminism for exclusively white women" (2024). In addition to their employment of the press to disseminate their ideas more openly, many of the women in the movement would use racial prejudice as fuel for their work, many arguing that men of color should not be allowed to vote before white women (Davis, 1980 as cited in Guy-Evans, 2024). In the field of literary production, initial Arabic contributions were primarily limited to translating Western literature. This limitation stemmed from the region's history of political conflicts; shaped by colonial powers such as the Ottoman Empire, followed by British and French mandates of post-World War I, alongside inner conflicts, predominantly religious in nature. As a result, literary production often occurred secretly, with women resorting to pen names like Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), who published poetry under her brother's name due to paternal objections. Thus, while the Western movement progressed to address issues related to female sexuality, identity, and broader social and political issues, the feminist discourse in the Middle East remained focused on securing very basic rights and challenging oppressive socio-cultural norms. This difference again can be attributed partly to the historical and geopolitical contexts in which these movements emerged. Middle Eastern feminists often faced more hostile conditions and struggled against deeply rooted patriarchal systems, intensified by the historical impact of colonialism and the on-going political conflicts.

The rise of the feminist waves in the Middle East has not always paralleled that of the West. Despite developments in some areas including the increased access to education and employment opportunities for women in certain Middle Eastern societies, many fundamental rights are still being fought for under challenging circumstances. This shows the on-going quest for gender equality in the Middle East, which still does not parallel with the progress achieved by Western feminists. In this regard, the Iranian critic Haideh Moghissi inserts, "It is troubling and revealing that the new generation of Middle Eastern feminists are still struggling for [these] rights under the same if not more hostile conditions in societies which

are much more developed, socially and economically, than in the 1930's." (1999, p.130) Nonetheless, there is potential for bridging the gap between Middle Eastern and Western feminist frameworks by emphasizing the shared experiences of oppression and advocating for solidarity among women regardless of geographical location, echoing the concept of sisterhood promoted during the second wave of Western feminism. This difference indicates the possibility that the feminist literary production of Sahar Khalifeh could be discussed in light of the early stages of the feminist movement in the West, namely the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> waves. Such connections between the Middle Eastern and the Western waves could make it possible for the present dissertation to fill the gap in the theoretical Middle Eastern scene and employ some Western feminist frameworks in the discussion of the Middle Eastern woman's status. In particular, the wave that holds the motto of 'sisterhood' since this second wave preaches for making connections between women and sharing their experience of the oppression imposed on them regardless of their geographical location.

### **1.3. Post-colonial Approaches to Third World Woman**

Drawing on this second wave feminist's motto of 'sisterhood' reveals that the investigation of Middle Eastern women's writing becomes a must. A number of post-colonial feminist critics attempt to reflect on the relationship between the Western woman and her Middle Eastern sister; however, this leads to a controversy around some issues. A critical reading of the well-known text entitled "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) by the Indian critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows that the problem of one side representing the other is far from being settled down since Spivak criticizes the Western typical frameworks which assume that any subaltern (colonized) group cannot represent itself; thus, it needs to be presented by the powerful side (colonizer). Spivak hints implicitly that applying such a framework unthinkably on third world woman would preserve her stereotypical image as a subaltern category that can neither represent nor speak for herself; thus, according to Western frameworks, she needs to be saved and represented by her Western sister who stands in a superior position compared with hers. Spivak's text describes the scene as "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (1988, p.296); thus, the third world woman appears as the brown woman that needs to be saved from the brown man by the white man/woman.

Apparently, Spivak criticizes the way Westerners try to give voice to the oppressed subaltern woman since their attempts lead to sustain the oppression on her; instead of ending it. According to Spivak, the 'act of saving' from the Western side seems to be illusionary since two interpretations could be derived from this act: First, saving the third world woman

means elevating her as 'the other', the uncivilized to the West, civilized realm. Second, saving the third world woman entails leaving her out/excluding her from the world of men. In both senses, Spivak believes that the ideological interests are the motives behind such act of saving, although it appears as a tolerant gesture at first glance. Spivak believes that such a gesture will always remain illusionary since giving voice to the subaltern and speaking for them still means projecting the Western cultural values on the other, which is the Middle East. In this regard, Kabbani in her analysis of the stereotypical representations of the Middle East inserts, 'The image of the European coloniser had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener.' Thus, travellers from Europe "were the seeing eye, and the recounting voice" (1986, p.6). Kabbani indicates that "The Eastern woman was a narrative creation that fulfilled the longings of Western imagination ..." (1986, p.22) since "Europe's feelings about Oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage. Oriental women were painted as erotic victims and as scheming witches." (1986, p.26) This stereotypical framework of the Middle Eastern woman, according to Kabbani, resulted in "All women were inferior to men; Eastern women were doubly inferior, being women and Easterners." (1986, p.51)

Such approaches still lead to the silencing of the other. In this regard, Spivak elaborates on her perspective regarding the impossibility of the subaltern to represent themselves through indicating the lack of people who would be interested to learn about the third world woman and her suffrage. In other words, Spivak hints to the fact that even if the subaltern could speak, probably no one would listen to them because they are using their own language as colonized subjects, a medium that is not familiar to the hegemonic group. This means that no one would understand their status and they would continue to exist at the margin. Thus, it could be the responsibility of the intellectual to represent the subaltern and speak for them, the same mission I am trying to do as a Palestinian researcher in the present dissertation. Spivak's views continue to be controversial until present day. She is misperceived by some Middle Eastern feminist critics including the Egyptian feminist writer Nawal El Saadawi who criticizes an unnamed post-colonial critic (apparently Spivak) stating:

S/he has a love-hate relationship with poor oppressed women and men who are struggling to live. S/he worships them, calls them the 'subaltern', glorifies their authentic identity or culture, but at the same time looks down on them, considers them as docile or struggling bodies unable to produce philosophy or as local activists but not global thinkers. S/he abolishes subaltern philosophies and replaces them on the global intellectual scene; s/he becomes the philosopher of the subaltern who knows more about them than they know about themselves (1997, p.169).

In the same vein, the Indian post-colonial critic Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay entitled “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”<sup>5</sup> (1984) reflects on the issue of representations between the East and the West. Mohanty tries to summarize the drawbacks that make the Western frameworks for representing the Middle Eastern woman incomplete as follows: First of all, Mohanty argues that such frameworks assume women as an already constituted coherent group with identical desires and needs regardless of their ethnic, class or racial locations. Secondly, Mohanty believes that the improper use of the methodologies to provide proof for their claims lead to a homogenous notion of the oppression of women as a group. For example, the West views the veil as a kind of oppression imposed on women. Mohanty shows that in Iran the veil has historically two functions, “opposition to the Shah and Western cultural colonization in the first case, and the true Islamicization of Iran in the second” (1984, p.347). This misinterpretation of the use of the veil is due to the fact that the West views things according to their own values. Mohanty summarizes it as “the uncritical use of particular methodologies in providing ‘proof’ of universality and cross-cultural validity” (1984, p.337). This creates a distinction between the Western feminist representation of women in Third World countries, and the Western feminist self-presentation. That is, the image for the third world woman becomes an image that “read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.” while the Western woman is viewed as “educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.” (ibid) Mohanty concludes that if representations aim to uplift the Middle Eastern woman, then it should take into account the differences between groups of women. Mohanty concludes that the historical, cultural and ideological contexts should be taken into consideration when tackling the question of women representation in the Middle East. In the same vein, Kabbani concludes, “Such portraits, in wishing to convey the East, described more accurately, Europe. They portrayed the repressiveness of its social codes, and the heavy hand of its bourgeois morality. The gaze into the Orient had turned, as in a convex mirror, to reflect the Occident that had produced it.” (1986, p.85)

The Iranian critic Parvin Paidar in her sophisticated analysis of the Western stereotypes about women in the Middle East elaborates on the same issue Mohanty discussed. In her study about the role of Iranian women entitled *Women and the Political Process in*

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<sup>5</sup> After this point, the research will refer to Mohanty’s text as “Under Western Eyes” (1984).

*Twentieth Century Iran* (1995), Paidar identifies three characteristics of feminist Orientalism.

The Iranian researcher Bahramitash summarizes them as follows:

First, it assumes a binary opposition between the West and the Orient: The Occident is progressive and the best place for women, while the Muslim Orient is backward, uncivilized, and the worst place for women. The second characteristic of feminist Orientalism is that it regards Oriental women only as victims and not as agents of social transformation; thus it is blind to the ways in which women in the East resist and empower themselves. Therefore, Muslim women need saviors, i.e., their Western sisters ... The third aspect of feminist Orientalism assumes that all societies in the Orient are the same and all Muslim women there live under the same conditions (2005, p.222).

These characteristics recall the well-known post-colonial critic Edward Said's views about how the West perceive the Middle East as a place of backwardness, mystical religiosity, irrationality, corrupt despotism, and the ill-treatment of women (1977). However, Said makes the process of representing the Middle Eastern woman problematic. In other words, despite the fact that Said refutes the images associated with the Middle Eastern woman as "she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history" (1977, p.6), Said's framework of correcting the stereotypical images associated with the Middle East as being characterized by "backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights" (1977, p. xiv) does not tackle the woman question in details. This echoes the Turkish scholar Meyda Yeğenoğlu's words who faults Said for dealing with "images of woman and images of sexuality in Orientalist discourse" simply as "a trope limited to the representation of Oriental woman and of sexuality." (1998, p.25) In other words, she challenges the way Said and other critics marginalize gender and sexuality to a subfield in their analysis of colonial discourse. In addition, the Palestinian-American anthropologist and feminist critic Abu Lughod adds, "Orientalism opened up the possibility for others to go further than Said had in exploring the gender and sexuality of Orientalist discourse itself." (2001, p.101) Despite Said's highly influential framework of dismantling the scene where "There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated" (1977, p.36), his framework does not dig deep into the status of the Middle Eastern woman. This makes the access to information about the Middle Eastern woman challenging which; in turn, affects her representation.

In light of the present dissertation, one would assume that applying post-colonial frameworks on Middle Eastern women's writing who have their peculiar conditions may be problematic. However, there are a number of critics who believe that the application of

Western frameworks on answering the Middle Eastern woman question is still possible. Anastasia Valassopoulos, a senior lecturer in post-colonial, post 1945 World literatures in English at the University of Manchester, in her book *Contemporary Arab Women Writers* (2007) opens the door for the possibility of viewing Arab women's writing in light of Western feminist frameworks. Valassopoulos argues:

These texts should be read for their experiences of location, cultural influence, the expression of national identity, the experience of sexuality, the performance of gender roles and the interrogation of and responses to colonial discourse and post-colonial theory. It is within these broad parameters that the most productive and enlightening negotiation can take place (2007, p.4).

Valassopoulos believes that "Testing the theories in the context of the Middle East will hopefully delineate the pitfalls as well as the usefulness of the application of this transcultural technique" (2007, p.16). In addition, Valassopoulos asserts, "reading the work of contemporary Arab women writers alongside contemporary popular culture such as cinema, music, news media, television and other popular cultural forms. This then enables an interdisciplinary approach where the literature can be accessed from a variety of fields." (2007, p.25)

In the same vein, Gyan Prakash's "Orientalism Now" (1995) highlights that post-colonial studies, inspired by Said's work, create room to challenge and subvert the authority of the Western discourse on third-world societies. This leads to the questioning and deconstruction of the dominant knowledge and representations formed by Western scholars about regions like the Middle East, "Denounced as an uncharitable poisonous attack on the integrity of Orientalist scholarship, it opened the floodgate of postcolonial criticism that has breached the authority of Western scholarship of the societies." (1995, p.199) In light of this, Prakash's devised the concept of "dislocation of the West" in his discussion on the lasting influence of Orientalism (1995, p.211). Prakash's concept shows how Orientalism has de-veiled internal divisions within Western self-representation and hegemony. Through its critique of the Western representations and the discourse it generated, Orientalism revealed a Western self-image interconnected with the "passive" Orient, challenging notions of Western universality. Prakash explains:

It is a West whose self-representation is crossed by the "passive" Orient in which it expresses its universality. The Orient also comes to exercise pressure on the West as its founding disciplines appear with a colonial genealogy. The Orientalist venture ends up distorting the West's own self-image as it is shown to reach out to the crutch of Sanskrit and the

“Aryan race” in order to bleach its heritage white. Not only racism but sexism and misogyny also emerge interwoven into the hegemonic culture of the modern West. (1995, p.211)

This attack reveals how Orientalism distorted the West’s self-image by revealing colonial agendas in its founding disciplines and by exposing racism, sexism, and misogyny woven into the Western culture, “The hallowed image of the Orientalist as an austere figure unconcerned with the world and immersed in the mystery of foreign scripts and languages has acquired a dark hue as the murky business of ruling other peoples now forms the essential enabling background of his or her scholarship.” (1995, Pp.199-200) In light of this, the present dissertation aims to dislocate some stereotypes about Middle Eastern women in general and Palestinian and Iranian women in particular.

Furthermore, the professor of Comparative and World literature at Illinois State University Wail Hassan in his article “Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application” (2002) states “Postcolonial studies and Arab literary studies have much to offer each other. Postcolonial studies can add valuable dimensions to Arabic literary scholarship-interdisciplinary inquiry, theoretical sophistication, and historical contextualization- that are lacking in older models of Orientalist scholarship and the current area studies model.” (p.59) Hassan believes that the present gap in post-colonial discourse could be filled by adapting a comparative approach. Hassan asserts:

The current impasse in post-colonial studies may therefore be overcome by opening the field to comparative literary studies and to comparative critical methodologies that rigorously interrogate the limits of postcolonial theory’s founding discourses from the multiple perspectives of Arabic, African, and Asian philosophies, realities, cultural worldviews, and cultural memories (2002, p.60).

Another important concept that could be relevant in reflecting on Middle Eastern women’s status is Spivak’s “Strategic essentialism” (1996). It refers to the strategic deployment of essentialist or simplified identities for social or political aims, particularly in situations where marginalized groups are striving for empowerment or recognition. Spivak suggests that in certain circumstances it could be helpful for marginalized groups to adopt essentialist identities temporarily by stressing shared experiences/characteristics for the sake of becoming visible in dominant discourses. However, this does not indicate that this essentialized identity is taken to be unchanging or accurate; instead, this identity serves as a means to achieve certain goals, including challenging oppression or advocating collective rights. Spivak is critical about the use of this term since it may reinforce some stereotypes or exclude some



voices within marginalized societies. Although this concept can be an effective strategy in certain contexts, it is important to employ it critically with an awareness of its complexities and limitations. In light of the Middle Eastern feminist context, it is important to mention that “Tradition and Modernity. Harems and Freedom. Veiling and Unveiling. These are the familiar terms by which the East has long been apprehended (and devalued) and the West has constructed itself as superior.” (Abu-Lughod, 2001, p.108) Accordingly, the present dissertation aims to elaborate on Khalifeh and Satrapi’s life stories as two Middle Eastern women writers who come to share some essentialist characteristics including their life experiences in the Middle East under the double colonization of being third world subjects and living under the patriarchal system. Thus, Khalifeh and Satrapi as ‘sisters in pain’, attempt to dislocate some stereotypical images about the Middle Eastern woman using their shared experiences as women living in the same region, the Middle East.

Beside this Middle Eastern essential identity, the dissertation aims to discuss Middle Eastern women’s writing in light of Western feminist frameworks in an attempt to re-bridge the communication channel that once existed between the West and the Middle East since the Egyptian researcher Maysa Abou-Youssef Hayward states:

How did we get to this place where the Arab identity is so much that of the Other? How did the boundaries between East and West, as well as boundaries between various countries in the East become so rigid? It has not always been so. In the past, for example, in the years up through the early 1970s, those in the Arab world felt close to the West and felt a sense of shared identity with one another as well. Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and Baghdad all seemed very western cities and literary salons in those capitals were as well aware of Western writers as they were of writers from the Arab world. But somewhere along the way, these conversations ceased (2003, p.6).

In light of all this debate on post-colonial studies, the dissertation attempts to provide insights from Middle Eastern women’s writing to de-veil the Middle Eastern woman in front of the post-colonial scene. Thus, the following sections will elaborate on Palestinian literature as a representative for the feminist scene in the Middle East.

## **1.4. Patriarchal Representations of Women in Palestinian Literature**

### **1.4.1. Woman as Homeland**

Tackling the woman question in Palestinian literature requires mentioning both the Israeli invasion of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967 and the Palestinian intifada that took place in 1987 against the Israeli occupation for they are considered the most significant turning points

in the Palestinian history regarding the woman question. In other words, during the intifada women were asked to join the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation and defend the land; however, when the war was over, women were asked to go back to their traditional roles as mothers and wives. The Palestinian critic Suha Sabbagh in her book *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* (1998) inserts an example about the Palestinian writer Yusif Shhadeh who writes “We won.... All victories and glory are for the men” (p.101); thus, examining the representation of the Palestinian woman in the literary works of the Palestinian male authors, it is clear that her image is represented from a patriarchal perspective, “Although male poets include images of women’s participation, they still focus on such biological attributes as long, flowing hair, a small waist, and other ‘feminine’ characteristics when they could have portrayed women as equal partners in the struggle.” (Sabbagh, 1998, p.13) During the intifada, Palestinian poets tend to use the imperative form when addressing women. Sabbagh mentions the poet Yusuf Naser who gives the following order to a woman in his writing “Don’t be afraid ... stay by my tomb ...” (1998, p.104) The poetic language focuses on the physical attributes of women like the eyelashes, the voice, the hair, etc., alongside giving orders more than viewing women as simply ordinary individuals who are equal to men.

The surveillance of women continues to prevail since most male writers tend to represent Palestinian women by stressing on the familial concept; a concept that emphasizes the role of women as being essential to war. In other words, women are required to give birth, nurture and educate children to become soldiers for the sake of liberating the nation. This is clear in the poems of the well-known Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish who “has created a connection between the nation and women with various characters, especially the love and mother, ..., and lots of evidence reveals that women occupied the highest position in the poetry, making it a sacred symbol - the homeland.” (Yu & Alhartani, 2018, p.3) Male writers tend to associate women with symbols that stand for the land, fertility and martyrdom. Thus, in other words, women continue to function as metaphors for the country. The Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani in his novel *Umm Sa’d* (1969) describes his female protagonist as “she rises from the womb of the earth, as an arrow held by mysterious destiny escalating endlessly ... She walks high as a flag carried by unseen hands ... She is solid as a rock, patient as a prophet. She has grown ten years older trying to win clean bread for her family.” (Pp.10-12, p.27) Kanafani’s portrayal of Um Sa’d is always associated with symbols such as, the womb, the flag, the rock, etc. He neglects all the characteristics that are independent of the male value system in her. In the same vein, the Palestinian novelist Yahya Yakhluuf in his

novel *A Lake Beyond the Wind* (1991) which talks about the 1948 war, writes the praise of the protagonist female figure using male attributes such as ‘the sister of men’, an Arab attribute that stands positively for courage and bravery. Her praise is reflected in masculine terms. This shows that women cannot appear as heroes on their own; instead, they have to be associated with men since their womanly characteristics will not qualify them to be presented as heroes.

It becomes clear that the concept of nationalism occupies an important scope within the Palestinian literary production. One plausible interpretation of this nationalist aspect is that Palestinian literature “can be studied as a subgenre of war literature. War literature in this respect is categorised as any literary production, whose six pillars of writing, including characters, setting in time and place, plot, theme, climax and ending, directly or remotely, depict the context of war. War is defined as a state of conflict, fighting, or animosity, large- or small-scale between people, states or nations.” (Tahboub, 2009, p.179) As a result, the reader of the Palestinian literary production is encountered with political metaphors and tropes related to armed struggle, and statehood, besides the trope of the stone as a sign of resistance and the olive tree as a symbol of steadfastness. The main themes being discussed in Palestinian literature include issues such as war, sacrifice, victimhood, martyrdom, homeland, exile, return, national solidarity and communal identity, peace, and security (Abdel Malek, 2005). This devotion to the Palestinian national cause led to the marginalization of the Palestinian female. This scene is manifested in Yasser Arafat’s<sup>6</sup> words, “Our main problem is that of liberating our land, not liberating the human being.” (1973, p.220) It is clear that the feminist aspect and women’s roles are absent from the Palestinian literary scene, and even though when they are present, they are linked to the national masculine frame.

Nahla Abdo in her article “Nationalism and feminism: Palestinian women and the intifada-No going back?” (1994) reflects on this national frame within the Palestinian context. Hasso summarizes her views by explaining that, “Consistent with most nationalist narratives, Palestinian male nationalist narratives have frequently valorized women as biological reproducers of the nation, analogized the land of Palestine to women’s bodies, and represented the appropriation and occupation of Palestine as the sexual violation and appropriation of women’s bodies.” (1998, p.442) In the same vein, Nira Yuval-Davis, Professor and Director of the Centre for Research on Migration Refugees and Belonging, in

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<sup>6</sup> Yasser Arafat was a Palestinian political leader. He was chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization from 1969 to 2004 and president of the Palestinian National Authority from 1994 to 2004.

The present sentence by Arafat is (Quoted by Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, *Dirāsa Naqdiyya li Fikr al-Muqāwama al-Filastīniyya [A Critical Study of the Thought of the Palestinian Resistance]* (Beirut: Dar al-’Awda, 1973), p. 220. Original source is a Fatah guerrilla training manual).

her book *Gender and Nation* (1997) argues that women reproduce the nation biologically, culturally, and symbolically. Her book outlines “the main dimensions of intersections between gender and nation ... moving from the more ‘naturalized’ roles of women as biological reproduces of the nation, through their roles in the cultural constructions of nations, to the ways civil constructions of nationhood, via rights and duties of citizenship, are gendered.”(1997, p.15) Yuval-Davis concludes that the relationship between feminism and nationalism is complex suggesting a “transversal politics as a model of feminist politics, which takes account of national as well as other forms of difference among women, without falling into the trap of identity politics.” (ibid) Consequently, it becomes crucial to reflect on the way the Palestinian woman responded to this patriarchal representation of her.

#### **1.4.2. The Palestinian Female Reaction**

Such patriarchal frameworks serve as a transformation in women’s consciousness of their roles. In other terms, this patriarchal representation of the woman triggers Palestinian women writers to refute those images representing them as ‘angels in the house’ and try to subvert them in their writings. Palestinian women accept Hélène Cixous’ call for challenging the representations men use for women. For example, the Palestinian writer and journalist Raymonda Tawil attacks the patriarchal traditions in her book *My Home, My Prison* (1983) asking “Was I then free?” Tawil adds, “I am a wife in a society that has made men into gods and women into submissive dolls.” (Pp.44-45) In addition, the Palestinian poet Fawda Tuqan reveals in her autobiography *A Mountainous Journey* (1990) her struggle to be visible in a male dominated society. Tuqan wonders, “since I was not socially emancipated, how could I wage war with my pen for political, ideological or national freedom?” (p.110) This question continues to resonate within the Palestinian feminist context and is being answered in different ways.

Leila Khaled or ‘the commando fighter’, who was a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in her autobiography *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (1973) offers a ‘double critic’ for the Palestinian man cultural beliefs regarding women on the one hand, and the attitudes of the West towards the sufferings of the Palestinian women on the other hand. Abdel-Malek comments, “the book challenges the “cultural constructions of ‘women’ and ‘terrorists’ as mutually exclusive, according to which women are constructed as passive, caring, nurturing, and pacifist, whereas terrorists are represented as aggressive, evil, and violent. Yet both of these categories have been applied to Leila Khaled.” (2005, p.96) It is clear through Leila Khaled’s political

engagement with the struggle against the occupation; she succeeds in presenting a model for the Palestinian woman who can stand on equal footing with the Palestinian man in all spheres of life without giving up her feminine attributes. Katharine Viner writes about a picture for Leila Khaled in *the Guardian* (January 26, 2001), “In a way, the whole story is in the ring, ... the gun held in fragile hands, the shiny hair wrapped in a keffiah, ... But it’s the ring, resting delicately on her third finger. To fuse an object of feminine adornment, of frivolity, with a bullet: that is Khaled’s story; the reason behind her image’s enduring power. Beauty mixed with violence.” This kind of mixture makes a woman a ‘monster’ in the eyes of patriarchy, an image that Cixous encourages women to rewrite in her text “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976) suggesting a positive representation of figures like the Medusa, perhaps portraying her with a smile. Khaled believes that “a woman can be a fighter, a freedom fighter, a political activist, and that she can fall in love, and be loved, she can be married, have children, be a mother.” (ibid) Khaled’s contributions become a symbol for female power and Palestinian resistance. However, the Palestinian critic Suha Sabbagh asserts “Several Palestinian fighters, such as Leila Khalid, became known for their militancy; however, the majority made their contribution in traditional ways.” (1998, p.15)

After these individual reactions against the double oppression imposed on the Palestinian woman, a Palestinian writer named Sahar Khalifeh comes to occupy the scene when discussing the woman question within the Palestinian society since Khalifeh tries to tackle the woman question in her novels over a span of 30 years which extends from the publication of her first novel *We Are No Longer Slave Girls for You* (1974) until her most recent novel *Heaven and Earth* (2013). Khalifeh becomes “widely acclaimed for being the first Palestinian feminist writer.” (Abdel-Malek, 2005, p.112). Khalifeh comes to be known as the ‘Virginia Woolf of Palestinian literature’ and her work is being translated into many languages including: English, French, German, Spanish, Hebrew, etc. Khalifeh has won a number of Arab and international prizes including: the Naguib Mahfouz Prize for Literature in Egypt in 2006, the Cervantes Award Prize for literature translated into Spanish in 2003, the Alberto Moravia Prize for International Fiction in Italy in 1996, and the Simone de Beauvoir Prize (the French readers’ prize) among others. Based on this influential impact of Khalifeh, this dissertation will draw on her treatment of the woman question in her novels. The dissertation will present some insights from her life and the way it helps shape her feminist views before starting to analyse her literary production.

### **1.4.3. Sahar Khalifeh as a Model**

Sahar Khalifeh was born in Nablus, Palestine in 1941 and is considered to be the most translated writer after the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Khalifeh starts writing shortly after the 1967 Israeli invasion of the West Bank and Gaza. Khalifeh published her first novel in 1974. She obtained her PhD in women's studies and American literature from Iowa University, USA in 1988. When Khalifeh returned to Palestine, she founded the Women's Affairs Center in Nablus in the same year, the Center opened a branch in Gaza City in 1991, and in Amman in 1994. In addition, examining some interviews and autobiographical works about Khalifeh's life, it is clear that her personal life affects her writings since some useful insights about her feminist reputation show up. Khalifeh was forced to get married at the age of eighteen to a husband chosen by her parents, a marriage that resulted in two daughters. However, Khalifeh had a miserable marriage since her husband prevented her from using the pen. Khalifeh described her marriage as "miserable and devastating" since "her husband went so far as to tear up her writing" (An Interview, 1980). When she was a child, Khalifeh eagerly wanted to become an artist. However, her family objected to her decision believing in what Khalifeh describes as "Oh, art is unacceptable, it is connected with looseness" (ibid). In addition, Khalifeh refuses to be named Françoise Sagan of the East, who is a French author, since Khalifeh believes that Sagan "would not express the problems of life relevant to the third world people-people who suffer from exploitation, from imperialism, from colonialism, sickness, backwardness, all these sorts of things. She did not write about them, she was not aware of them." (ibid) This derives Khalifeh to establish her own feminist approach in Palestinian literature, an approach which favours the treatment of the Palestinian woman within real life situations under the motto of 'sisterhood in pain'.

Khalifeh's work is worthwhile to be investigated; in particular, for the following reasons. First of all, the novel as a literary genre is considered to be more expressive since Priyanka concludes, "litterateurs have expressed their opinions about the novel as the best genre to deal with the travails of human struggle rather than poetry or other forms of literature." (2017, p.18) Khalifeh states:

It's not because I was a bad poet. It was because I needed a wider atmosphere, a wider scope, more social and more down-to-earth ... dealing with other people. ... This is why I shifted from poetry. I wanted a big atmosphere which is challenging and deals with everything. So I began writing novels. I tried a draft; it wasn't good artistically. Then another trial and another, and the third one was published (An interview, 1980).

Secondly, in her writing, Khalifeh uses the language of everyday life; in lieu, of the language used by the elite since she writes against putting boundaries and establishing meaningless hierarchies between people. Khalifeh states, “I’m absolutely against elitist literature, and my conviction is that literature is from the people, towards the people. And the majority of people in our society are simple and poor, and even illiterate...I admit and realize that the illiterate will never read what I write. But it matters to me that those who could read are going to read for those who can’t.” (An interview, 2009) Khalifeh writes in Arabic language since she believes that her language symbolizes the idea of rejecting subordination. This echoes Priyanka’s words, “The language she chooses is significant as English is encoded with the ideology of power and dominance...Her writing in Arabic runs against subordination to hegemony.” (2017, Pp.32-33) Thirdly, Sahar Khalifeh lives in Palestine; thus, she writes about women and for women who live in Palestine as well. In other words, “Khalifeh is a special writer who dared to face multiple ideological opponents..., even as she continued to live within the Occupied Territories.” (Priyanka, 2017, p.4) As a result, analysing her works could add to the authentic value of the present dissertation since it will investigate real life situations which, in turn, would help in feeding the scene when talking about women representation in Palestinian literature.

Finally, Khalifeh’s work treatment of the female image is a realistic one since she wants the image of the individual woman to be presented in literature, the image of the human being that consists of flesh and blood. Khalifeh’s work stresses that the real experience played by women to be presented in literature; that is her role as a human being who does the basic things like eating, sleeping; in lieu, of associating women with symbols that stand for the land, fertility, generosity, etc. Khalifeh’s novels probably reject these connotations since the Palestinian land is occupied; thus, the land is waiting for the male to save and liberate it. This again places women in an inferior and subaltern position compared with the men’s superior positions. Therefore, such typical images associated with women including the mother of the martyr, the symbolic motherland, and the mother of the nation are absent from Khalifeh’s work. It is important to mention that the concept of nation is derived from the Latin word “natio” which means “to be born”. In light of this etymology, it could be argued that just as mothers give birth to individuals, they do metaphorically give birth to the nation as well. Such interpretation suggests a direct connection between the birthing and nurturing roles of mothers and the formation and growth of nations (Tahboub, 2009, p.185). Such connection is the main focus that Khalifeh’s work tries to subvert. Tahboub inserts, “An example of the counter narrative produced by Palestinian female writers is provided by the works of Sahar Khalifeh.

In her novels there is always a focus on the internal battle with men and institutions of patriarchy more than the battle of the Palestinians against the occupation, and a call for the freedom of women prior to the freedom of Palestine.” (2009, p.188) Khalifeh’s literary production aims at subverting all the patriarchal roles and images associated with women in Palestinian male narratives through allowing her female characters to live and revolt against the patriarchal system in her novels. Accordingly, the present dissertation will present Khalifeh as a model for subverting these patriarchal images that confine women within inferior positions.

Moreover, since Khalifeh is highly influenced by Western feminist critics who had a great influence on her writings including, Woolf, de Beauvoir’s, and Cixous, the dissertation claims that the themes provided by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves could be referred to while analysing the novels. Such frameworks are capable of feeding the dissertation with fruitful insights since it is important to draw on the works that place much emphasis on the socio-political context in which women manoeuvre. Such a context highly affects the quest of establishing the female identity since the dissertation studies the representations of women and such representations are highly affected by the socio-political factors prevailing within the society. Such contextualization could feed the discussion regarding the Middle Eastern woman representation; in particular, the Palestinian woman as the next chapters will reveal.



## Chapter Two

### Voicing the Female Experience: A Feminist Reading of Khalifeh's Novels<sup>7</sup>

#### 2.1. Patriarchy as an Inherited Ideology: The Patriarchal Figures in Khalifeh's Novels

Sahar Khalifeh's literary production could be described as an inclusive medium where both male and female characters are present in the plot. In other words, Khalifeh's novels provide a scope not only to discuss feminist issues but masculine issues also come to occupy an important scope in her feminist approach. A detailed analysis of Khalifeh's work reveals that the patriarchal representations usually created between the male as 'the real subject' and the female as 'the imagined object' are questioned. Khalifeh's work tries to dismantle this opposition between the male and the female. In other words, Khalifeh's work aims to subvert this scene where men are often portrayed as assertive dominant protagonists, while women persistently find themselves relegated to the status of constructed passive objects rather than acknowledged as empowered active agents. Accordingly, this chapter starts with discussing the masculine aspect in Khalifeh's work since studies on Arab masculinity has been marginalized. This echoes the Spanish scholar Bosch who states, "Gender studies about the Middle East have traditionally focused on femininity, and only lately have studies about Arab masculinity started to appear and still, this has been rare. Even rarer has been the reference to fatherhood in these studies, which have focused more on religion, power and sexuality." (2008, p.101) Accordingly, this chapter discusses the representation of the masculine figures in Khalifeh's work including: the father, the husband and the brother/son respectively.

The chapter then moves to discuss the female representation in Khalifeh's work including female figures within the Palestinian society such as the mother, the daughter, the educated figure, etc. in an attempt to de-veil the Palestinian woman status. Such analysis is important to understand how patriarchy works within the Palestinian society. Thus, the present chapter aims to highlight the cultural patterns that exist within the Palestinian family which, in turn, lead to women's oppression and suffrage. The structure of the family is a very crucial element within the Palestinian social fabric and analysing the relationships within this institution would reveal how patriarchy is inherited between men within this familial context. Such analysis is important since the Palestinian family serves as the nucleus of the Palestinian

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<sup>7</sup> The researcher will provide English translations for the excerpts to be analysed from Khalifeh's novels. The original texts from Khalifeh's novels written in Arabic will be included in the Appendixes.

society and the diagnosis of this institution's health, that is of patriarchal nature, is important if to help lifting the oppression imposed on women within the Palestinian context. Thus, analysing how Khalifeh's work represents the patriarchal figures as elements that control the Palestinian family from a feminist perspective and the reaction of Palestinian women to this oppression becomes a must.

### **2.1.1. The Father**

The father occupies the centre within the Middle Eastern family. That is, he comes to occupy the top of the pyramid within that social structure. In addition, within the Arab society, the father is associated with reason and wisdom. Such traits give him the privilege to exercise his power over his family subjects. The professor of anthropology and the director of the Middle East and Islamic Studies program at the University of Louisville Julie Peteet highlights the characteristics of fatherhood from a Middle Eastern perspective stating, "the figure of the father is central in Arab culture as a means to preserve the honor of the family ..., becoming a man means acquiring reason, Aql, which is the faculty of understanding, and is characterized by rationality, judiciousness, prudence and wisdom. A father, then, must be wise, prudent, and understanding, according to Arab ideals." (1994, p.34) From a Middle Eastern masculine perspective, such characteristics give the male the privilege to control his family and make the father appear as a superior figure who expects from his family members including: the wife, the daughter and the son, to obey and carry out his orders without objection. Based on this representation of the father figure in the Middle East, this section claims that Khalifeh's work portrayal of the father is of two paradoxical layers. The father appears as a patriarch on the one hand, and as a defeated colonized subject on the other hand.

In other words, Khalifeh's novels mostly portray the father as a patriarch, a dominant figure, which is a stereotypical representation; however, there are few cases where Khalifeh's work associates the father with subordinate images including the Palestinian man who is forced to sacrifice his life and become a martyr for his land's sake. Such a situation places the Middle Eastern man in a paradoxical scene where he appears as a 'subaltern patriarch'. Accordingly, the upcoming discussion aims to provide examples from Khalifeh's work for both images that she wants to communicate as part of her feminist approach of revealing the obstacles that impeded the emancipation of the Palestinian woman. Thus, understanding the role of the Palestinian father as a patriarch who victimizes and oppresses women on the one hand, and as a defeated subject who comes to be victimized by the oppression of both his social traditions and the Israeli occupation, on the other hand becomes important since the father is

the first male figure in every female's life and is capable of affecting her life greatly. This echoes the Danish professor Linda Nielsen who states that, "the father influences his daughter's academic and vocational success in both direct and indirect ways. Indirectly, by promoting her self-confidence, he enhances her chances for success. Directly, he mentors her, conveying and modeling skills that promote her success at school and work." (2012, p.77)

A close reading of the patriarchal representation of the father figure and his authority in Khalifeh's work reveals that such representation is clear in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) where the text describes the way the children greet their father when he comes back home at the end of the day, "When the father comes, they line up on the stairs like the soldiers do, the eldest, then the youngest, and Hussam, of course, is at the bottom of the line. The elder daughter says with awe: Good evening, Father" (p.51). This scene reveals the patriarchal structure within the Palestinian family. What is interesting in this scene is that the female daughter is always expected to come first of the line when there is obedience to be submitted while the male son occupies the last position in this aspect. The father expects from his daughter to be the initiator to show respect and submission. By doing this, the daughter learns that she should behave as a sacrificing figure while the father places himself in the position of receiving. Such upbringing helps the father to enforce the idea of the 'self' while the daughter perceives herself as 'the other, the inferior and the absolute' if to use de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1961). It is important to mention that this representation of the father as a patriarch is a recurrent image in the Western discourse on patriarchy as well. This is clear in Gilbert and Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000) where the authors elaborate on 'the metaphor of literary paternity' using the figure of the father, "But of course the patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization." (p.4) Gilbert and Gubar add, "For if the author/father is owner of his text and of his reader's attention, he is also, of course, owner/possessor of the subjects of his text, that is to say of those figures, scenes, and events ..." (p.7). Gilbert and Gubar conclude, "In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis." (p.6) In this sense, the Palestinian man 'fathers' his women family members. This shows that the father's image as a patriarch who has the final say is similar between the Middle Eastern and the Western discourse, a figure that has the final say when it comes to his family members in real life and their literary representation as objects for him in the fictional world. Kabbani inserts, "All women were inferior to men; Eastern women were doubly inferior, being women and Easterners." (1986, p.51)

Such practices could affect the female's personality since she does not enjoy the pleasure of having her own self-value compared with the patriarchal figure. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) criticizes this way of patriarchal upbringing which prevents the female from becoming a separate independent individual. This also recalls Freud's of the Oedipus complex (1900) and the psychosexual development of the individual where this development shows that the daughter starts to be attached to her father during her early development as the first male in her life since the father could provide her with love and emotions as a compensation for her lack of the penis. The father distinguishes himself with his superiority over the female who is placed in a subordinate position since her early development as an individual. Freud's theory places the male figure as the centre and the female as 'the other', weak and lacking. This idea of placing the man at 'the self' position is patriarchal and should be subverted and changed within the Palestinian family since it is the first encounter of the individual where s/he comes to witness the way the father and the mother behave for the family is the place where the psychosexual development of the individual unfolds. The current structure within the Palestinian family is still centred on the father who serves as a controlling figure that prevents his daughters from recognizing their own value and does not support them emotionally. Such unhealthy relationship would affect the development of the female since Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, a professor in English and gender and women's studies at the American University of Sharjah states, "It is the dilemma that women face when wanting to rebel against the very source of their oppression, only to find out that the first people they are estranged from are family members, those supposedly closest to them." (2003, p.121) *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) emphasizes the importance of reconstructing the structure within the Palestinian family, or what Khalifeh describes in her article "My Life, Myself, and the World" as a "rotten tree" (2002).

Khalifeh's novels discuss the contradictory behaviour of the father in some circumstances with his sons. In *The Image, The Icon and The Covenant* (2006), the male protagonist Ibrahim has a sexual relationship with a Christian woman named Mariam; however, the son realizes that he does not have enough money to pay for the hostel where he slept with her. Ibrahim decides to ask for money from his father and his father accepts to give him the needed amount to solve this issue. Such incident when taking place within a Middle Eastern context, that is traditional, conservative and religious, one expects that the father will be furious and angry with his son for having such a relationship outside marriage. In other words, within the Middle Eastern society, much emphasis is placed on women's virginity and honor. However, the father's reaction comes against the cultural expectations, or what

Butler's (1990) terms 'repetitive acts', since he is happy that his son does this and he praises him, "He (the father) stared for a moment then laughed loudly ... How is everything? All is good? You are smart! I thought you are only good at reading books! Take this sir, show me your smartness. Tomorrow we will marry you and open the largest project for you there." (p.65) The father adds, "I was intending to take you with me to the noon prayer! Take a shower then follow me there (to the mosque)!" (ibid)

This scene demonstrates the double standards that the Middle Eastern father adopts, while he functions as a guardian/represser for his daughters' virginity and reputation, he does not mind if his son has a sexual affair with a woman whom he has no legitimate relationship with. Within this cultural context, Freud notes, "In the male, the libido normally becomes masculine and manifests itself as an interest in the female sexual object; in the female, on the other hand, the same libido has as its result an inhibition of activity, a passivity of the sexual life ..." (1953, p.214). The father is open-minded and proud as long as his family's honor is preserved. This contradictory perspective of the father's figure is manifested in the text with the word 'noon prayer'. The father is going to the mosque, the house of God, which represents the Islamic teachings and laws that stress on the virginity of both man and woman alike. The father is contradicting himself by still going to the mosque while violating its regulations. In addition, the novel shows the superior position that the father still occupies within the family since the son resorts to his father to borrow the money to solve the hostel payment issue. Having money could be a factor that enables the father to exercise his authority over his family members.

Khalifeh's work continues to discuss the frequently practiced behaviour of double standards by the Palestinian father; in particular, *The Inheritance* (1997). The novel presents the father as an immigrant who comes to settle down in the United States, that is a place outside the Middle East. The novel presents Zayna's father, named Hamdan, as a Middle Eastern figure who succeeds in establishing his own business abroad by using his Middle Eastern identity as a means of making an income. The novel presents the father's skills in selling his goods through convincing people that his goods are from the Holy Land using their language. The novel inserts a scene where Hamdan is ironic in his self-representation, an Arab man who is still attached to his cultural roots and assumes that people know every single detail about his Arab cultural context and values. Hamdan is promoting for his goods using some stereotypes, such as the camel that is connected with the Arab region, as a means of attracting the customers:

He had trouble speaking English but managed to communicate in a typical Middle Eastern glib manner. He would display his wares-shiny clothes, pins, and threads-and say to the American housewife, Look, lady, how beautiful it is! This caftan is hand embroidered in Arabia, far away, do you know Arabia? The land of sand and camels, dates and incense, gum and the Quran. Do you know Mecca? (p.12)

Despite the fact that the father gets an American wife and has a daughter, he still appears as a victim for his Middle Eastern social traditions since he wants his daughters to adapt the Arab traditions in their behaviour and that is why he decides to go back to Palestine. The father wonders, “What are we waiting for, friends? Haven’t we had enough of America and its trash? We all have boys and girls; do you want your daughters to be loose like American girls? Do you want to protect your girls, keep them pure, and bring them up strictly and marry them well?” (p.16), from the father’s perspective, the American culture does not suit his way of living; Hamdan addresses his friends with some feminist questions, but he never gets an answer. He is discussing a female issue while still excluding his females from the freedom to decide for themselves. Hamdan uses the words ‘protect’ and ‘keep’ while claiming that he is attempting to protect his women. In this sense, Hamdan comes to play the role of the white man whose Spivak criticizes for marginalizing the third world woman by claiming that he is elevating her up and uplifting her from her subaltern position within her social context, at least apparently. Hamdan adopts some aspects from the American culture to serve his own needs and interests, such as drinking alcohol.

Hamdan is contradicting himself; on the one hand, he wants to preserve his honor and his daughter’s virginity according to the Arab norms, and on the other hand, he is violating these norms when it comes to himself by drinking alcohol, which is a forbidden practice in the Arab world. The father drinks ‘araq’ in front of his daughter Zayna while having a conversation with her about the meaning of life. Zayna inserts that life is, “A path to the afterlife, to the Prophet and his Companions, and the believers, both men and women and the pure men and women,” (p.20) the father replies, “Great, my daughter, great. May God protect you in this world, smooth your way and cover it with good intentions and good deeds. Come sit beside me and eat this. Be careful with the mezze and don’t spill the araq. What’s wrong with you my daughter? What’s wrong?” (ibid) By the end of his life, Hamdan goes back to Palestine and dies there. This contradictory behaviour could be summarized as, “[b]etween the Islamic pious masculinity and the modern liberal model, men practice a masculinity which defines itself as first and foremost Arab ... Arab masculinity is thus said to be an especially hybrid and contradictory type of masculinity.” (Monterescu, 2006, p.142) Through this

contradictory behaviour of the father figure, Khalifeh's work highlights the problematic image of the father within the Palestinian society that should be taken into consideration when looking for solutions to the woman question within the Palestinian society.

Khalifeh's novels reflect on the Palestinian man's status as a victim living under the occupation. *The Inheritance* (1997) provides an example about the father figure who refuses to sell his land in return for money. The novel shows Hamdan's brother priceless love for his land. Hamdan's brother refuses to sell his land as his sons ask him to do, since they need money to establish their own factory for waste-water recycling. The father replies, "As long as I live on this Earth, it is forbidden to sell this farm. I inherited it from my grandfather and since then it belongs to Hamdan's family. If you dare to sell it, I will be angry and my soul will curse you even from my grave." (p.121) Although, this scene shows the authority and power of the father figure as the one who has the final say within the family, his image as a colonized subject which dictates on him to protect his land until his last breath is obvious. The scene reveals the importance the Palestinian patriarchal context devotes to the land as a symbol of male honor; the Palestinian proverb says 'land is honor' in the sense that a man should defend his land from being confiscated by the occupation. The land is a masculine tool and if one loses, he is no longer a man. This again recalls Gilbert and Gubar's 'metaphor of literary paternity' which entails that, "if a woman lacks generative literary power, then a man who loses or abuses such power becomes like a eunuch-or like a woman." (p.10) Within the Palestinian context, if a man loses his pen/penis, which is metaphorically his land in this scene, then he is no longer a man. Hamdan inserts, "This is non-sense. You are asking me to sell my land after this age and all the sufferings we have come to witness for its sake?" (ibid) For Hamdan's brother, the land is not comparable with money according to his patriarchal nationalist perspective. Hamdan's brother associates his decision with the faculty of understanding 'Aql' which, in turn, is a male attribute; thus, if one does not judge his 'Aql' when it comes to his land, then he does not deserve to own it, meaning that he does not deserve to be a man. This makes it clear that Khalifeh's work representation of the father is of double layers; one as a patriarch and the other as a colonized subject/victim who has to sacrifice for the sake of his land and national cause.

### **2.1.2. The Husband**

The husband in Khalifeh's work occupies the same position of the father and, in some cases; his authority exceeds the father's supervision over the female. Khalifeh's work represents the husband as a second oppressing figure in the Palestinian woman's life. In other words,

Khalifeh's novels represent the relationship between the husband and his wife as the relationship between the prisoner and his guard. The husband exercises his physical and mental power over his wife within the institution of marriage. This negative representation of the husband in Khalifeh's work could be traced in *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) where the text describes the relationship between Widad and her husband whom she gets married with after her mother convinces her of the importance of marriage for the woman. The novel represents marriage as a cage that blocks the woman inside and prevents her from practicing her life as an ordinary individual. Widad's husband spends most of his time away from his wife and she just stays inside waiting for his return. In most cases, he does not return and spends his night outside. The wife is expected to accept this way of life and stay a quiet 'angel' in her marriage's cage. The novel describes Widad's situation:

She wakes up in the morning. She looks at the sea and the ships sailing in that blue. She hears the chats of the fishermen. She starts dreaming about going down to the sea and flees to that blue space. She rides a ship with the fishermen, immerses herself with their jobs, she casts the nets and catches some fish, then she sells them and buy a ticket to flee to Beirut, to Cyprus, or even to Hell to get rid of this prison. Marriage was like a prison, and her husband in particular is the guard ... She feels like a bird in a cage, and he is the hunter. (p.107)

This image of the imprisoned Widad recalls the themes discussed by 19<sup>th</sup> century non-Eastern female writers since they tend to employ images of enclosure to reflect the patriarchal oppression imposed on them in their writings including the image of the imprisoned princess in fairy tales who is waiting passively for someone to rescuer her. Khalifeh's novel representation of Widad status suggests that Khalifeh's feminist perspective could be discussed in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves. Such waves come to employ the same images of enclosure when reflecting on the status of the Western woman. In this regard, Gilbert and Gubar (2000) state:

Almost all nineteenth-century women were in some sense imprisoned in men's houses. Figuratively, such women were, as we have seen, locked into male texts, texts from which they could escape only through ingenuity and indirection. It is not surprising, then, that spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterizes much of their writing. (p.83)

What adds to this unhealthy relationship between the husband and his wife and enforces his authority over the female is the way the society reacts to this oppression. *Sunflower* (1980) describes Khadra's relationship with her first husband where the latter used to beat her every day, "the early days of my marriage when I used to eat my share of beating,



I used to shout oh my father! When my father comes, he; instead of helping me, used to sit and cry like women. He used to tell me ‘learn to be patient Khadra’, ‘learn to keep your life secret.’ Keeping the feeling of pain inside yourself is better than making your life scandalous and exposed to other people.” (p.126) The scene shows how both the father and the husband are in the same circle when it comes to oppressing women. The father does not accuse the husband of doing something wrong to his daughter; instead, he is only concerned with what people would say if his daughter’s suffrage is revealed to the public more than her safety. In addition, the father does not indicate his intention of talking to the husband about his behaviour towards his daughter, by doing this, the father declares the husband as an individual who has the final say over his wife and no one has the right to intervene in her personal life.

The father does not release his daughter from this cage of marriage although his daughter is suffering, this shows that the destiny of the woman is her husband’s kingdom and she cannot leave this masculine space unless the husband agrees she does so. This recalls the Palestinian proverb that highlights two reasons when the female leaves her domestic sphere; firstly, she leaves her parents’ house to move in with her husband, and secondly, when she dies and is being carried to her grave. Otherwise, the Palestinian woman is destined to spend the rest of her life within the threshold of the house. Within the Palestinian context, the more the time the woman spends in her domestic sphere, the more she becomes honourable since she does not have to interact with other males. In this regard, Bilal Hamamra inserts, “One might hear a Palestinian villager boast that his wife’s ‘youth was spent in entire seclusion’. To my grandfather, the domestic sphere of the house and his wife, signified his honour and reputation.” (2019, p.4) Hamamra explains this view adding, “In Palestinian rural areas, doorways and windows are erotically charged sites. Even the appearance of women at windows, blurring the lines between the domestic and public spheres can be taken to signify sexual immorality.” (ibid) If the woman crosses that threshold, she will become a target for social criticism.

Khalifeh’s work discusses the way the society perceives the husband’s role in the woman’s life. In other words, the husband is believed to stand as a protector for the wife from other men within the society. *Sunflower* (1980) discusses this traditional role of the husband when Shehada addresses the widow Sa’diya who loses her husband and is forced to work to gain a living for her kids. Shehada comments, “You need a man to protect you.” (p.107) Shehada wants to seize the chance to promote himself to Sa’diya and convince her to accept his marriage proposal. Shehada believes that if a woman has a husband, then no other man

would dare to annoy her. Khalifeh's work reflects on this stereotypical image that the husband is the protector of his wife and his authority over her sometimes equals that authority of the father's or even surpasses it. The husband is among the male figures that could influence the life of the female and her destiny in different aspects like, for example, getting a job, travelling, etc. *Sunflower* (1980) reflects on this obstacle for women by inserting an example about what happens if a woman needs to get a job outside Palestine, "Men migrate and women stay in their homelands. According to this social fabric, the man is much more liberated and able to move from one place to another easily." (p.272) *Sunflower* (1980) adds, "Most oil countries refuse to hire the female unless she is accompanied with a guardian, regardless whether this guardian is a teenager, a disabled, or a fool, he is still a guardian."(p.272) A man should exist in the woman's life if she is to survive within an Middle Eastern Palestinian society.

Khalifeh's work elaborates on the duties that the husband expects his wife to perform to make him feel comfortable within his kingdom. Gilbert and Gubar insert, "It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters." (2000, p.53) Within the Palestinian context, the husband expects his wife to be a servant for him and take care of his children. If the wife fails to fulfill these duties, she will be punished. In *The Image, The Icon and The Covenant* (2006), when Tawfiq, Sukainna's son, had an accident, Sukainna had to suffer the consequences from her husband. Although Sukainna does not permit her son to drive the bus, he takes it secretly and while driving, he has an accident that could end his life. When Sukainna's husband learns about this, he beats her all night. The novel inserts some words from the narrator Ibrahim as a witness, "I escaped from the atmosphere and my mind. I went outside to breathe and I heard the shouting of a woman. It was at night and the woman was shouting: for "God's sake!" I felt shocked by that sound since it was accompanied by slapping and wailing. Beside this, a dog was barking like an owl." (p.138) It is clear that this scene describes Sukainna's physical punishment from her husband for failing to perform her 'constructed' maternal roles.

The novel inserts that this is the normal result if a woman fails to fulfil her domestic duties since a number of people witness this scene, yet they do not react or try to help Sukainna. One man laughed and said sarcastically, "For sure it is Sukainna's being beaten now, but I hope he will not divorce her." (ibid) Another man replied, "How do we know if Sukainna was in the kitchen or she was at the neighbour's house?" (p.139) One more man added, "She was chatting at the neighbour's house and she let the boy drive the bus. This is a

habit/norm for women. They commit the mistake and we have to fix it.” (ibid) This incident shows the authority that the husband enjoys within the Palestinian society. In other words, when the men hear the shouting of the woman at mid-night, no one could dare to go and help the woman who is being beaten like an animal; they do not even dare to condemn the husband for his violent reaction towards his wife. What is worse is that, men start to look for explanations that condemn the wife for not fulfilling her duties in the right way and they do not blame the husband for his reaction at all. In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir’s has commented that the human male’s ‘transcendence’ of nature is characterized by his ability to hunt and kill, just as the human female’s identification with nature, ... Thus, authority or superiority, “has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.” (1961, p.58) In such a social fabric, the husband could end the life of his wife and no one would accuse him of being guilty.

Khalifeh’s work continues to elaborate on this figure of the husband and his ignorance of his wife’s personal needs. The husband expects his wife to obey him and carry out his orders silently. This is clear in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) which represents the husband as a figure who does not fulfil the very basic needs of his wife. Um Azzam asks her husband for a new pair of socks, but he gets angry with her request and starts investigating and questioning her, “Where did your socks disappear?” and “What happened to your socks?”(p.50) along with this investigation, Abu Azzam would spend the whole night ignoring his wife and abandoning her in bed. This situation would last for several days or even months before he decides to buy his wife the pair of socks she asks for. The patriarchal practice in Um Azzam’s situation is that the husband prevents her from going to buy her stuff alone from the city and he swears that he would divorce her if she goes to buy her stuff without his permission, “He swears to divorce her if she reaches the downtown or walks in the streets of the old city.” (p.49)

The novel portrays Abu Azzam as a miser husband who does not like to spend money on his family members, even though his villa indicates that he is a rich person. The novel continues to describe the husband’s failure to buy the fruits and vegetables for his wife: “But when he buys food for the house, he chooses the vegetables of the least quality in the market. The cucumber looks fat like potato, the eggplant is too ripe, the zucchini contains a lot of seeds like a pumpkin ...” (ibid) If Um Azzam wants to ask for something from him, she should wait for the appropriate moment to make her request, she should wait until her husband is in a good mode again, then she should address him as if she is performing a

prayer, “Abu Azzam, May God bless you! A pair of socks!” (p.50) After doing all these rituals, her request may be rejected. This shows the social fabric within the Palestinian society and the authority it attaches to the husband even when only a pair of socks is needed.

Khalifeh’s novels elaborate on the way the family insists that the woman should get married to serve her husband even as a second wife. *The Image, the Icon and The Covenant* (2006) represents Sarah as a woman who accepts to be a second wife, even though she has not got married before. Sarah’s father manages to marry his daughter to a man who comes to know him during one of his business journeys. The man asks Sarah’s father, “Do you have a bride?” (p.32) The father replies, “A good woman, a little bit old around 35, but she is mature enough and is good for you and your kids. She will take care of you since she got all good traits, she is beautiful, her family is respectful and she is a good housewife, a tailor, and a great cook.” (ibid) The man could not believe that he gets such a chance in his life; he asks, “Will she accept to marry me? I have devilish kids!”(p.33) The father assures him that his daughter will accept his proposal to become her husband, “She is the devil herself.” (ibid) When Sarah tries to reject her father’s proposal, the father replies, “You are old now Sarah. Do you have an alternative?”, “Sarah remains silent and whispers with three sons?” (ibid)

Sarah does not meet the husband in person; instead, her father shows her a photo of the groom. This incident could explain why Khalifeh’s novel includes the word ‘image’ in the title; an image of the woman that is framed according to the patriarchal institution. In this sense, the image of the female becomes a male construct. Sarah finally agrees to marry that man and live in the Gulf States. This incident shows that the society insists that the woman should have a husband at a young age and if she does not have that chance in her life then she has to accept any man who propose to her whether she likes his profile/image or not. The existence of the husband in the woman’s life is not a voluntary practice that the female chooses to do; instead, it is something imposed on her as she without this patriarchal figure by her side, her life will be lacking and it will not be complete as long as the husband is absent. In Khalifeh’s work, both the father and the husband cooperate to play an important part in oppressing the woman. Thus, it is time to reflect on the third masculine element within the Palestinian family that is the brother to examine whether this figure stands on the same side of the father and the husband or he has a new perspective towards the woman question. The representation of the brother will be the focus of the next subsection.

### 2.1.3. The Brother/Son

The brother could be viewed as the second generation within the Palestinian family who is influenced by the first generation that is represented by the father figure. In Khalifeh's work, the brother is represented as an object for the patriarchal power of the father. The father exercises his authority over the son and, in some cases; the father interferes in taking decisions on his behalf. *The Door of The Courtyard* (1999) represents this aspect when the father Abu Azzam insists that his son Hussam be enrolled at an engineering or medical faculty. The father even goes further in convincing his son to pursue his studies abroad; however, his son chooses to study Philosophy and History at a local Palestinian university. The son's decision could be a sign where Khalifeh's work tries to reflect on the conflict that exist between the father and his son as part of their psychosexual development as males. Khalifeh's novels try to demonstrate two things: First, the way the son starts to challenge his father's patriarchal pattern and authority through refusing his orders. Second, the way the son comes to adapt the same patriarchal role as his father. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) reflects on the scene:

His father told him to study engineering or medicine, but Hussam chose to study Philosophy and History. He told him study abroad since a certificate from abroad would be highly prestigious. However, Hussam studied at An-Najah University. After he got prisoned for the first time, his father suggested that he go to the United States or Britain. He promised him to sell a plot of land and transfer its money to him abroad if he agrees. However, Hussam answered: give the money to my uncles who have the right to take it or give it to your sister as a compensation for her stolen share of the inheritance. (p.48)

Hussam, the son refuses all the means the father tries to come up with to impose his opinion and affect his choice. The situation ends where the son resists his father's proposals. Such encounters between the father and the son show that the brother starts adapting his father's patriarchal pattern. By insisting on his opinion, Khalifeh's work demonstrates how the son comes to be trapped within the inherited patriarchal system again. Thus, the image of the brother as a victim is reshaped again since he appears as a figure that is influenced by the patriarchal behaviour of his father. He becomes a copy of the father who exercises his authority over the weaker side within the family that is the woman. The brother falls in the same trap of duality of standards that the father figure experiences during the practice of his patriarchal role. This recalls Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1953) again where the development of the son is shaped in relation to his father, "In the Oedipus complex, the son harbors hostile feelings toward his father, often manifesting as fantasies or dreams of

aggression or competition with him.” (p. 523) The ‘Oedipus complex’ entails that the son starts to challenge his father to take over the mother. The son develops a feeling of envy and jealousy toward his father. Later on, the son accepts his father’s superiority over the mother; in this sense, the father becomes a role model not a rival. This complex is resolved only when the son starts to identify himself with his father; thus, the son comes to internalize his father’s attitudes, values and patriarchal behaviour. In addition, he decides to project his feelings to other women. That is, he starts looking for an alternative in other women. The son’s attitude to his father is not merely a rebellion; it is an affirmation of his own identity. During this struggle, the son often comes to recognize the value and wisdom of his father’s guidance, ultimately taking his father’s side. In this case, the patriarchal system keeps shifting from one generation to another.

*The Door of The Courtyard* (1999) inserts an incident where the eldest brother uses to exercise his physical violence over his sister; justifying his behaviour that his sister is ill-mannered and she needs someone to monitor her behaviour. This scene is clear when Samar, the anthropologist, asks Nuzha about her childhood. Samar addresses Nuzha, “Did you have a good or bad childhood?” Nuzha answers, “If I told you it was a good one, then, I would be a liar. And if I told you it was depressing, I would be a liar again. But, my eldest brother always used to beat me,” Samar asks, “Your brother who is in America now?” Nuzha replies, “Yes. He is indeed!” Samar goes further and asks, “Why did he used to beat you,” Nuzha mentions, “He used to say that I am a rude and ill-mannered girl.” Samar wonders, “Why did he used to say so,” Nuzha asserts, “He is jealous. I was beautiful like the moon and I used to attract all men who see me.” (p.94) This scene describes the representation of the brother as a patriarchal figure who projects his power over his sister and treats her as his property in the same way, “a writer ‘fathers’ his text, his literary creations ... are his possession, his property. Having defined them in language and thus generated them, he owns them, controls them, and encloses them on the printed page.” (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p.12) Khalifeh’s work tries to subvert this situation in an attempt to free the Palestinian woman from the man page/control.

The brother appears as a copy of the father. Although he used to enjoy his childhood, Nuzha’s brother does not allow his sister to do the same. Nuzha inserts a story from her childhood where she used to steal a very attractive dress from her mother’s stuff who used to be a tailor; Nuzha then puts on the dress, plays the music loudly and starts dancing. When her brother goes back home and witnesses this scene, he starts beating her and calling her several bad names. This dancing act could be a feminine tool that Nuzha adopts to free herself from this oppressive system of patriarchy. Nuzha does not utter a word, she remains silent,

however; she employs her dancing as a language that could be more telling than words. Nuzha's dancing could be read as a semiotic language as opposed to the symbolic language usually associated with masculinity. In this regard, Elia maintains that "the venue left for these women is the preverbal-physical expression, movements, sounds, trances and dances-functioning outside the reach of any symbolic discourse and which can thereby communicate the inducible." (2001, p. 22) In this sense, dancing becomes a language that all women, including Nuzha, can use to challenge men's attempts to silence them. The Algerian novelist Assia Djebar defines dancing as, "The fourth language for all females . . . remains that of the body: the body which male . . . eyes require to be deaf and blind . . . the body which in trances dances or vociferates in fits hope or rebels" (1985, p. 180). What is problematic in Nuzha's story is that when her brother used to enjoy his childhood, no one would ruin his days. Nuzha comments, "He made our life tasteless and he used to behave as the Sheikh<sup>8</sup> of the sheikhs . . ., he used to work in Israel and bring some girls with him. They used to sit in our garden and drink the whole night. He used to enjoy his life to the lees and monitor our life at the same time." (p.95) However, when it comes to his sister, then he has the right to ruin her day upside down. Through this comparative scene between the man and woman status, the novel reveals that the brother is trapped within the patriarchal behaviour that is of dual standards. Such a patriarchal pattern constitutes an inherited practice within the Palestinian family and is being practiced systematically from the top of the pyramid occupied by the father, the husband, and the brother unto the bottom of the pyramid that is represented by the Palestinian woman.

Khalifeh's work continues to emphasize this duality of standards in the representation of the male figure; in particular, the brother figure. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) inserts another example on the violent behaviour of the brother towards his sister, where Samar is late to go back to her family home due to a curfew in Nablus city. Her brother becomes angry with her absent since she has to stay at her friend's house, Nuzha's house. Samar is absent for nine days from home and when she gets back home, her brother beats her violently because according to his patriarchal concept, the woman is not allowed to be absent from her home for that long duration regardless of the reasons for that absence. If the woman crosses the threshold of domesticity, she will become a prey for social criticism. Accordingly, Samar's brother, "starts beating her unconsciously, he beats her on her face, on her head and on her

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<sup>8</sup> Sheikh is the Arabic word for a clergyman.

I would like to draw attention to the translation issue in the provided examples. Some words when translated into English lose their connotative meanings. For example the phrase "sheikh of the sheikhs" which means a religious man sometimes is used in Arabic to criticize someone/blame him so people say "he is acting like a sheikh". In this context, sheikh refers to the opposite meaning of a religious person, meaning he is corrupted; he is totally the opposite of what he shows. This is a negative trait within the Arabic context.

back.”(p.136) What Khalifeh’s novel tires to demonstrate is that the oldest brother occupies a powerful position within the family when the father is absent. While Samar’s brother is beating her, her youngest brother is watching the scene motionlessly without making any kind of reaction to this painful beating of his sister, even though Samar is supportive to her youngest brother:

She has a feeling of disgust, from him, her mother and her youngest brother who stood there without trying to give a hand or even utter a word. He forgot all the secrets and chats between them. She used to give him the books to read. She used to tailor the clothes for him to wear. She used to help him translating some texts. Her youngest brother was an audience in the show and her eldest brother was fighting with his muscles. (ibid)

The presence and power of the eldest brother could silence those who are weaker than him including the mother and youngest brothers. This shows the unstable relationship between the brother and his sister, where she all the time stands as the provider, the giver and the sacrificer, while he only expects and awaits for obedience from her side.

This patriarchal behaviour of the brother extends to his relationships with women who are not his relatives. *The Inheritance* (1997) represents Mazen as a male figure who has a relationship with a woman named Violet, “You know that Mazen is dizzy with her, dizzy with them. He goes there to drink, eat and enjoy to the lees.” (p.69) Mazen has a sexual relationship with Violet since *The Inheritance* (1997) describes his character as, “Mazen loves all women. This is part of his nature. He cannot give up his freedom even for you. He loves every beautiful and smart woman and he expects her to love him. He keeps courting with her until she falls in love with him. When she does so, he starts running from her and avoiding her ....”(p.134) Mazen’s behaviour is contradictory since he does not accept that women in his family have relationships with other men, at the same time, he believes that he has the right to do whatever he wants with other women as long as they do not belong to his family circle. He is a liberal brother in this case. However, when he realizes that his sister Nahleh has a relationship with an old man, he wants to end her life since when it comes to his sister’s honor, he has to be conservative again.

Khalifeh’s work demonstrates some cases where the brother may go too extreme in maintaining his patriarchal power. In *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999), when Ahmed discovers that his mother Sukaina is collaborating with the Israeli officers, he has to end her life to preserve his reputation. This behaviour places the brother figure in a problematic position. On the one hand, he has to punish his mother for collaborating with the colonizers.



On the other hand, he has to end the life of the first female he comes to have affection towards her, his mother. Khalifeh's work does not blame the mother for her deed since the novel does not insert clear evidence about Sukaina's misbehaviour. It employs only gossip between females as a means to place the reader in the scene. The reader comes to know about the mother only through conversations held secretly behind her daughter, Nuzha's ears. One woman wonders, "Who discovered her issue and caused her death?"(p.27) Another woman questions, "Is it possible that a rose brings forth a thorn?"(p.29) Through this representation, the novel tries to look for justifications for the mother's behaviour. The choice of Nuzha's name here is functional since it means honourable in Arabic, which Nuzha's upbringing contradicts with. This could be a tool in Khalifeh's feminist technique that reveals the contradictions within the Palestinian society through Nuzha since she, "tells a story that is not usually told by the dominant nationalist narrative: a story of a divided, cruel, hypocritical, patriarchal society that exploits poor women like her then scapegoats them'."(Amireh, 2003, p.761)

The mother may resort to this non-repetitive act of collaboration since life under occupation in her time is unbearable. There is a room where the mother is trying to bring up her children without the need to ask for help from others. While doing this, she is trapped in this collaboration issue as an uneducated poor woman who could be easily trapped. In other terms, the Israeli soldiers sometimes trap women in sexual issues and spoil their reputation then use it as a threat to put pressure on women to achieve political agenda, In this sense, Khalifeh's novel indicates that Sukaina is a victim of both occupation and social criticism. Thus, she could be described as a social martyr. However, Ahmed appears as a masculine figure who accepts the death of his mother with no tears. The mother might try to protect his life and guarantee that her son and his sister Nuzha live happily. Ahmed does not appreciate this sacrifice that his mother has done for his sake. When his mother is being executed, he is a witness to the scene. Sukaina is being executed and hanged in the courtyard in public with a knife in her chest. Ahmed's mother is being exposed to the public; thus, in an attempt to preserve his manhood, he joins the guerrilla fighters to wash the shame caused by his mother to the family's reputation. He chooses to hold the gun opposite to the knife that ended his mother's life. It is important to mention that the concept of martyrdom is a key term within the Palestinian context, "Martyrdom has sacred and secular meanings. While the sacred is associated with religious discourse and afterlife, the secular sense of martyrdom is linked to heroism and defending one's homeland" (Hamamra, 2018, p.224). Within the Palestinian context, martyrdom is considered, "the ultimate honour and pride" the individual can achieve

(Hamamra, 2018, p.229). Nuzah continues to take care of her brother Ahmed until the moment he becomes a martyr. When Nuzha decides to join the struggle to destroy the door of the courtyard that the colonizers imposed on the citizens of her neighbourhood, she inserts, "It's for Ahmed's sake not for the ogress," (p.222) referring to the Palestinian land which eats and never gets enough, in the sense that it keeps swallowing martyrs. This indicates the double burden placed on the Palestinian man as well since Ahmed becomes a martyr for both the social system and occupation.

Khalifeh's work tries to reflect on the possibility of having an intimate relationship between the brother as a patriarchal figure and his sister. In some circumstances, Khalifeh's novels show that there could be a close relationship between both sides as long as this relationship benefits the brother. *The Inheritance* (1997) inserts a situation where the brother addresses his sister using a flowery language instead of using a threatening tone just to get his request fulfilled by his sister. When Said wants to get some money from his sister Nahleh, since he has to take care of his big family, he has to use a friendly language loaded with emotions to please Nahleh and convince her of giving him some money. He used to start his speech by addressing her with expressions such as, my lovely sister, my dear sister, etc. Nahleh contemplates, "In the beginning, when they needed my assistance, they used to send me massages and call me, oh my dearest sister, my soul-mate, my eyes, my queen, the most beautiful Nahleh, I am in need and I need some money. It is fine my brother. Here is the money." (Pp.70-71)

This scene shows that the brother starts to behave nicely with his sister as long as she accepts to help him and stands by his side. In this case, the sister stands as a provider; however, the Palestinian woman is placed again in her subordinate position as soon as the brother succeeds in fulfilling his purpose. Thus, the brother shifts Nahleh to her stereotypical position of being a subject under his supervision when he discovers that she has a relationship with an old man. Said totally rejects this relationship, he becomes furious and threatens to end her life. He forgets the sacrifice that his sister makes for him and does not reciprocate the supportive feeling his sister has given him. Thus, Said appears as a patriarchal brother. It is clear that Khalifeh's novels emphasise the layers of oppression imposed on the woman. In other words, if the female decides to escape the oppression imposed on her from the father and the husband to take a shelter by the brother's side, this will not work since the brother is also engaged in this system of patriarchy that is shifted and inherited from one layer to another and from one kin to another. The victim in all these chains of communication remains one unchangeable subject, the woman.

Khalifeh's novels representation of the practices of the patriarchal system as an inherited practice within the Palestinian family is clear in her portrayal of the male figures in her novels; in particular, the father, the husband and the brother. Khalifeh's novels represent the male figures as flat characters who stick to the patriarchal pattern in their behaviour; their characters do not pertain to any development or change in relation to their patriarchal treatment of women. In this regard, Abu-Manneh inserts, "The Palestinian novelist Yehya Yakhluḥ complained about Khalifeh's 'negative symbol' for a *fidā'i* and wondered why she didn't portray more 'positive and revolutionary types' from the history of armed resistance in the West Bank." (2016, p.126) Khalifeh's novels try to elaborate on the superiority of the male figure over the female as he functions at the centre of the family where every move needs to be decided in relation to his authority.

The scenes mentioned in the discussion show that Khalifeh's portrayal of the male figure could be described as a realistic one. This is clear in the language used by the male characters which, in turn, demonstrates the way those masculine figures interfere and impede the quest of the Palestinian woman towards recognizing herself as a worthy subject. The examples inserted about the male figures along with their female counterparts show that the males tend to use colloquial language to communicate their ideas; however, this language is of a threatening mode and it tends to emphasize the cause-effect relationship regarding the female behaviour such as, when Said discovers his sister's relationship with an old man, he threatens to kill her. This way of addressing the woman could affect her since she will be worried about the consequences that she will face, which in some extreme cases, may end her life.

The patriarchal figures also tend to use bad names to threaten the female such as, you are a whore, and you are rude. This is clear when Nuzha's brother catches her dancing while playing music loudly, he calls her a whore. Khalifeh's characters tend to speak the everyday language with all its polite and rude words. The novels include dirty words such as, 'whore' and 'bitch'. In this regards, Khalifeh states, "I am one of the first, even among the men writers, to use a lot of words which are supposed to be dirty like 'shit' and 'bitch'." (An interview, 1980) Such a way of addressing the female shows the patriarchal authority over the female, that is not only mental, physical but also emotional which may affect the development of the female as an individual. Such patriarchal language is employed when the male believes that the female does not act according to the patriarchal/symbolic norms and cultural expectations.

It is important to mention that the male figures in Khalifeh's novels are ordinary individuals; they are neither political figures nor famous icons who enjoy a highly social status within the Palestinian society. Thus, the male figures represent the daily practices that the majority of Palestinian men adopt in their interactions with women; these interactions take place within the family that is the first medium where both man and woman start to interact with each other. The selection of the characters and the place of their interactions are functional in Khalifeh's feminist approach since Khalifeh believes that the reconstruction of this social fabric within the Palestinian society should start from the bottom; the change should be gradual from the small circle (the family) to the big one (the country). Khalifeh believes that if Palestinians as colonized subjects need to get their emancipation, they should start by liberating the individual first; one cannot talk about freedom as long as there is still one imprisoned individual on this planet. Khalifeh's diagnostic approach of liberating the Palestinian land insists on liberating the individual within the family first. Khalifeh states:

I could see very clearly that the debacle of 1967 was the fruit of a rotten tree that needed a cure— the internally defeated do not triumph. The cure must start with our households and with those in power, with our social values and ties, with the fabric of the family, with the rules and basics of the upbringing of the individual at home, in school, and at university, and then progress to the street. (An interview, 2002)

Accordingly, it is important to discuss the female's representation in Khalifeh's work after the discussion of the male's representation to get more in details with Khalifeh's feminist approach. The following section traces whether Khalifeh's novels keep this patriarchal representation for the male or she is trying to reconstruct it. The upcoming part will be devoted to the discussion of the Palestinian female representation and her interactions with the male figures within the Palestinian context.

## **2.2. Palestinian Women in the Narratives of Sahar Khalifeh**

The war and the patriarchal pen contribute in blocking Palestinian women's roles within only one place, that is the home in both real life and literature since Palestinian literature is loaded with images dyed with patriarchal control that aims at oppressing women and emphasizing their domestic roles. Khalifeh takes on her responsibility the mission of rejecting all these typical representations of women by devising an anti-colonial socialist feminist approach that puts the individual at the centre of attention. Khalifeh refuses to adapt the same techniques employed by early Palestinian male novelists such as, Ghassan Kanafani and Yehya Yakhluif. Her novels are progressive since, "Male writers completely ignored women's activities and

their political and social agency; they were reduced to symbols and passivity. Khalifeh's writings express her disappointment with the symbolic representation of Palestinian women as land-like trope and ignoring the real experience and voice of the women in Palestinian resistance movement." (Priyanka and Koudur, 2018, p.22)

Khalifeh's work does not aim at recreating the binary opposition between man and woman; instead, it paves the door for a conversation between both sides while seeking an answer to the woman question. Khalifeh's work aims to re-construct the patriarchal social structures prevailing within the Palestinian society through re-defining women's roles as active participants in the structuring of the Palestinian society. Khalifeh's female characters are mostly round characters, which are always in move since Khalifeh chooses them from all walks of life and makes them act and develop under the social traditions, morals, and conventions that work to impede their quest for emancipation. Khalifeh puts her female characters in leading roles since she is familiar with many roles played by her characters. Her realism is derived from her experience of the roles she assigned to her characters which makes her work reflexive and realistic at the same time. This section represents Khalifeh's novels as a successful model for highlighting the obstacles the Palestinian woman suffers from on the one hand, and subverting the stereotypical images associated with her in literature on the other hand.

Khalifeh's work refutes the patriarchal images established about women by male writers' ink through adapting a socio realistic approach that comprises two main points. First, the novels represent the main characters in everyday situations. That is, Khalifeh's portrayal of the characters is not romantic since the characters are not engaged in love relationships. Khalifeh's characters are not represented as objects of love; instead, they are represented in everyday life situations where all Palestinian women could encounter in their lives. Khalifeh's female characters are represented as individuals who have their dreams, professions, flaws and mistakes, etc. This makes the novels realistic and adds to the authentic value of her work when it comes to addressing the woman question in Palestinian literature. Khalifeh's work is the first to start putting women at the centre of the narrative as an individual not a commodity within Palestinian literature; thus, her approach de-centres the nation as a frame when reading Palestinian novels, shifting them from resistance literature to radical/revolutionary feminist themes. The novels demonstrate that Palestinian women are victims of double colonization. In other words, the Palestinian woman remains defeated by her conventional social customs, restricted traditions and the authority of the male figure practiced over her by her father, husband, etc., on the one hand, and the colonization imposed on her as a third world subject

on the other hand. Such patriarchal institutions are represented as obstacles that prevent the Palestinian woman from getting her emancipation. The following sub-sections aim at elaborating on Khalifeh's feminist approach by providing examples from her novels to discuss them from a feminist perspective to understand the female journey within the Palestinian context.

### **2.2.1. The Mother/Wife**

The mother in Khalifeh's novels comes to occupy a marginal place within the Palestinian family, she is either represented as a marginal figure who lacks the authority to control the familial affairs within her family or a traditional conservative mother who serves as a supervisor over her women family members to make sure they adhere and satisfy the cultural expectations of the patriarchal family. In this sense, the mother stands as a guardian for the patriarchal cultural expectations. Khalifeh's novels discuss this subordinate position of the mother within the family in different scenes. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) describes Samar's mother as a traditional figure who carries out all the housework chores on her own shoulders:

She heard the sounds in the kitchen. She stood at the door contemplating her mom who was washing the dishes. She was standing on one foot and she raised the other to rest. She felt so bad when she remembered that she left her mom all that long to do the entire housework alone. The brothers do not move a finger unless they want to eat or play cards. Many times she argued with them uselessly. One becomes angry, the other starts to mock her, and the latter turns the argument into a joke which leads Samar to end the conversation. At the end, Samar runs and hides on the rooftop. (p.131)

In this regard, Gilbert and Gubar insert that 19<sup>th</sup> century females become, "Literally confined to the house, figuratively confined to a single 'place,' enclosed in parlors and encased in texts, imprisoned in kitchens." (2000, p.84) By analogy, the mother appears merely as a servant for the male members of the family which is a stereotypical role.

In addition, the societal pressure put on the mother's shoulders derives her to take wrong decisions when it comes to her daughters' life. For example, the Palestinian society encourages the woman to get married believing that marriage could save her life. The mother believes that by adhering to this societal norm, she could save her daughters' life from suffering. Khalifeh's work demonstrates that such a way of thinking from the mother's side would make her daughters' life even worse than hers. The mother; instead of, solving the problem, she adds salt to the wound by making her daughters victims for her decision that is

affected by her subordinate position within the Palestinian patriarchal context. In this sense, the mother appears as a shadow of the man who helps in keeping this rusty chain of patriarchy and extends it to her daughters.

This could be connected to Spivak's "Can the subaltern speak?" (1988) and the interpretation of the act of 'saving' the female's life, that is protecting and enhancing the daughter's life. In Khalifeh's novel, such an act of 'saving' from the mother side is a negative one since it leads to denying the female the right to decide what she wants for herself. This recalls Spivak's discussion of the sati practice where the widow who 'chooses' to burn herself is being perceived positively as a warrior who dies in a battle and feels no pain for the sake of remaining loyal to her husband. However, such practice is still patriarchal since the female becomes a victim of both the cultural norms and the powerful patriarchal fantasy of female devotion. In this sense, the male assumes that it is better for the female to end her life and prove her devotion to him; instead of living a miserable life without him. Such perceptions about the sati practice and women sacrifice continues to place the female in a subaltern position.

Similarly, the mother thinks that she is protecting her daughter while, in fact, she is excluding her from experiencing life the way she wishes. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) reflects on this behaviour from the mother's side highlighting that her decision is derived by factors such as poverty and illiteracy, which the mother suffers from. It is important to mention that Khalifeh's novel employs conversations exchange between the female characters as a technique to de-veil their status. Such a technique could be supported with the cover page of the novel which includes an image of three females behind the bars and a key hanging to the hair of one female<sup>9</sup>. In light of Khalifeh's feminist approach of de-veiling the woman status could be a key to pluck what Khalifeh terms a "rotten tree" within the Palestinian society. (2002)

The conversation between Samar and Nuzah in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) proceeds as follow: Samar asks Nuzha, "Your mother married you?" Nuzha replies, "When my father passed away, we were left with nothing to survive. My mom married us to whosoever knocks the door regardless of his conditions. She simply wanted to get rid of us." Samar comments, "Maybe because of poverty", Nuzha explains, "Not only poverty but also illiteracy. She did not learn the lesson from what has happened to her. She just scattered us. She married my sister Sabiha as a step-mother, my other sister Amina got to marry a monster,

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<sup>9</sup> Check Appendix No.1, *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) cover page.

and she married me to an old stupid man.” (Pp.89-90) In this case, the mother figure represents the first female generation who is traditional since this generation considers the female as a burden whose only destiny is marriage. Khalifeh’s novel employs the verb in the passive form ‘married me’ to indicate that the mother has authority over her daughters only to satisfy the society’s cultural expectations and the patriarchal fantasy about the female’s domestic role regardless of her daughters’ choice. In this case, the mother appears as a passive figure whose main role is to perform the norms as dictated by the society without objection or any attempts for change.

The other representation of the wife is her role as a guardian for the family lineage and inheritance within the society. This relationship is expressed between Futna and her mother. Futna is Zayna’s step mother in Khalifeh’s *The Inheritance* (1997). Futna is nearly of the same age with Zayna. Her skin is fair and she takes care of her appearance a lot. Zayna’s first meeting with Futna takes place at the hospital where her father is taking his last breath. At the first sight, both women did not like each other, Zayna comments, “I looked at her and she did the same but she did not attract my attention. For an unknown reason which I didn’t understand, I felt sympathy with her.” (p.55) Later on, Zayna and Futna get engaged with each other, in a conversational mode again, about who will inherit the father after his death since *The Inheritance* (1997) tries to present the way the society oppresses women and forbids them from taking their share of the inheritance just because they are women. Futna tells Zayna, “You are a female,” (p.61) then she adds, “If destiny had another say, I would compensate you and give birth to a male heir.” (ibid) Zayna, who spends her life living in the United States, does not get the point in Futna’s speech; thus, Futna explains, “The male blocks the others to inherit and without a male brother, your uncle would inherit. Do you understand what I mean?” (ibid)

This situation derives the wife Futna to look for a solution to win the inheritance. She goes to an Israeli hospital to get a male heir; Futna undergoes an artificial insemination process in an Israeli hospital. After Zayna’s father passes away, she announces that she is pregnant. At this point, Futna has two challenges; on the one hand, she is afraid of her mother’s reaction since she is an old fashion woman who is too strict in issues related to honor and God. On the other hand, her insemination process is done at an Israeli hospital that is in a colonizer’s space. This stands against Futna’s mother national views. Zayna asserts, “From Futna’s mother perspective, her daughter is smart since she got married of my father and this secures her daughter’s life until death.” (p.87) However, the mother becomes furious since she doubts the method her daughter employs to get this child, Futna assures her mother,



“I didn’t do anything that would make God angry. It’s only a surgery that the doctor did at the hospital wearing gloves and a mask and there was a nurse assisting him.” (p.90) Futna’s mother shock is of double reasons: on the one hand, her daughter’s body/honor is exposed to a male figure, and on the other hand, this male figure is an Israeli figure, a colonizer. This affects the Palestinian traditional standards that consider the doctor an oppressor and colonizer in this case. In other words, Futna violates the codes of behaviour regarding her honor since her body is being exposed to a male who is a colonizer. However, after negotiations with Futna’s mother, she finally accepts her daughter’s pregnancy. Futna starts the preparation to welcome her son; everything she prepares is in blue since she is sure that she will have a baby boy who would preserve the inheritance.

Futna’s labour approaches when there is a festival to inaugurate a project for water recycling in the town. People are gathering to join the festival; however, this creates a mess that requires the Israeli soldiers standing at the checkpoints surrounding the area to interfere and prevent people from going to the festival, fearing that they may smuggle guns and other weapons that would threaten their security. During this mess, Futna is lying down on the ground and shouting, she is in the process of giving birth to her long-awaited baby boy. People are shouting at the Israeli soldiers to let the ambulance reach Futna; however, their request is rejected and Futna is left waiting and suffering until she gives birth to her baby boy then she leaves the world. Futna becomes the bride of Palestine in terms of the patriarchal national representations where, “The Palestinian female martyr/witness is represented as a bride who is wedded to Palestine and married in heaven” (Naaman, 2007, p. 945).

At the end, Futna’s mother holds the baby towards the soldiers addressing them, “Thank you very much, this is your share.” (p.316) At this point, *The Inheritance* (1997) shows the double oppression exercised on the Palestinian female. Women are victims of the patriarchal traditions that deny them the agency to control and own their bodies as Hélène Cixous calls for; thus, Futna loses her life to get a baby boy to win the inheritance. In this regard, Rothman inserts:

Our bodies may be ours, but given the ideology of patriarchy, the bodies of mothers are not highly valued. The bodies are just the space in which genetic material matures into babies. In a patriarchal system, even if women own their bodies, it may not give them any real control in pregnancy. Women may simply be seen to own the space in which the foetuses are housed. (1994, p.151)

In addition, the Palestinian female is a victim of the occupation which also plays a major role in impeding her from being alive. This is part of Khalifeh’s feminist approach

which entails that Palestinian women are victims of the occupation and not only males suffer from this oppression. Palestinian women get their share of victimization from both traditions and occupation. *The Inheritance* (1997) shows that the current situation within the Palestinian society is not comfortable and this is clear in the final scene in the novel where it ends at the airport with Zayna who has interacted and exposed the life details of the Palestinian women within her father's society. Zayna realizes that she could not live within this atmosphere. It does not suit her ambitions as a young modern woman. *The Inheritance* (1997) does not shut the door in front of the society to change, there is still a room to fix this system, Zayna's uncle while saying goodbye to her affirms, "It's true that the male inherits the double compared with the female, yet, your share is still reserved for you." (p.317) Zayna nods her heads and walks towards the plane after a journey full of knowledge about traditions and women's stories within the Palestinian society.

### **2.2.2. The Daughter**

The daughter comes to occupy the bottom of the pyramid within the Palestinian family. Khalifeh's work discusses this subordinate position that the Palestinian daughter suffers from through her representation as a burden whose only destiny is supposed to be marriage. Khalifeh's novels demonstrate the patriarchal perspective towards this female figure since the existence of the daughter figure in males' life is stressful. *The Image, The Icon and The Covenant* (2006) reflects on the male attitudes towards having females in a conversation between some males in the novel. It is important to mention that the protagonist of this novel, Ibrahim, is a male unlike Khalifeh's other novels where the female comes to narrate and occupy the scene. Thus, the novel comes to share the masculine perceptions about the female. One male shouts, "Women are the biggest curse. They don't understand. They neither have mind nor faith. If God is angry with a man then he gives him a daughter. It would be better for that man to bury her if to get rid of his worries about her." (p.135) Another man with a sad heart said, "Nothing is gained from females expect worries. Five daughters dear! What did I do? I pray, fast, and worship God. This year I went to pilgrimage and I prayed for God a lot and when I came back, they received me with bad news 'Congrats! She gave birth to the fifth baby girl!'" (p.136) These incidents Khalifeh's novels insert represent the stereotypical beliefs about the daughter as an unwanted, unwelcomed new-born baby. Burton inserts, "Orientals are aware that the period of especial feminine devilry is between the first menstruation and twenty when, according to some, every girl is a possible murderess. So they wisely marry her

and get rid of what is called the ‘lump of grief’, the domestic calamity- a daughter.” (1885, p.212)

The patriarchal perception about having many daughters is taken as a sign of God’s wrath on the male. In such a case, the daughter is viewed as a punishment for the man as if he were a sinner. Khalifeh’s work emphasizes this burden from the male perspective to demonstrate the extent the society places rules on the female behaviour which makes her unable to satisfy her needs alone; thus, she needs a man to help her in every step and move. In this sense, she becomes a burden that the male comes to worry about her future all the time. Khalifeh’s novel is clearly criticizing this patriarchal perception since it employs three religious verbs in the man’s speech, “What did I do? I pray, fast, and worship God.” (ibid) The selection of these acts, ‘pray, fast and worship’ is functional since both men and women are required to perform these rituals alike without any difference in Islam.

Khalifeh’s novel reveals the man’s contradictory behaviour since he claims that even though he performs those religious rituals, he still gets female daughters. His efforts will remain useless as long as he considers himself superior to the female, for Islam does not hold such an inferior look at the female. It is important to mention that Khalifeh was attacked in the streets and there was an attempt to assassinate her by the Islamists after she speaks against the veil stating, “[t]hey veiled her, they minimized her,” Khalifeh inserts, “They named me at the Friday prayer at Al-Aqsa Mosque, saying that I had to be stopped. They also spoke against me in two mosques in Nablus. I was scared.” (An interview, 2002) Khalifeh’s novel does not provide answers to the question raised by the man, “What did I do? I pray, fast, and worship God,” (p.136) indicating that the key to the answer will be missing as long as women continue to be marginalized. Khalifeh’s novel entails that if the society welcomes the daughter and gives her the chance to grow up to become an independent individual, then men will not have to worry about her future. What is ironic in those scenes is that the male is the one who creates this burden/fake image about the female, and he starts complaining about it.

Khalifeh’s work continues to discuss this oppression imposed on the daughter as a burden. The daughter is not only viewed as a burden from the male’s side, but she also comes to be viewed as a burden from the female’s side who is, in most cases, the mother. In other words, since the mother is a victim of the patriarchal rules, she comes to transfer and perform these rules on the daughter to satisfy the cultural expectations of her maternal rule. The mother is successful if she manages to get husbands to her daughters regardless of their opinion; thus, the daughter is viewed as a passive figure. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) reflects on this passive position of the daughter when it comes to her marriage, where the mother is

trying to marry her daughter to one of her cousins. When the son Waheed asks his mother, “Did you discuss it with Widad?” The mother replies, “The girl is still young and she doesn’t know what is good for her.” (p.43) This scene shows the very marginal position of the daughter within the Palestinian family. The mother and her son are discussing a decisive thing in the life of every woman, that is her marriage, and they are excluding Widad, who is supposed to be the most important one to discuss this issue with, from their conversation. The mother is trying to decide what is good regardless of her daughter’s opinion, to prove for people that her daughters attract suitors.

The novel reflects on this passive position of the daughter Widad, “What people say is the centre. Those people are: her brothers, her mom, her neighbourhood and the town. People talk, and she listens. People ask, and she serves. People order and she obeys.” (p.46) The selection of the verbs, ‘listen, serve, and obey’, here is functional since they indicate silence and submissiveness. When Widad attempts to refuse to carry out her mother’s plan, her mother threatens her that she should not say such things since being a divorced woman is not a good reputation for the female, “She told her that she should not say such things ... so what people would say if she ends her engagement? They will say is she a divorced unwanted female? Is she worthless?” (p.101) Under such circumstances, the daughter continues to be marginalized within the family. This is what Khalifeh’s work tries to highlight as an important aspect when it comes to liberating women. Khalifeh’s work shows that a woman may become a victim of another woman while attempting to satisfy the patriarchal cultural expectations within the family. It is important that women become aware of not recreating the patriarchal rule over each other; instead, they should stand and empower one another before addressing the patriarchal oppression imposed on them as a subordinate group.

### **2.2.3. The Educated: Empowered Voices**

#### **2.2.3.1. Mono-culture Education**

Khalifeh’s novels devote a great attention to the educated female figure that comes to be influenced by the social context either within the Palestinian society or abroad, that is outside Palestine. The first category of the educated female who comes to manoeuvre within the Palestinian context is clear in Khalifeh’s early novel *Sunflower* (1980). In this novel, Rafif stands for the educated, intellectual girl. She is a journalist who works in a magazine and she is the only woman among the magazine’s committee. Rafif is represented as a rebellious girl against the masculine domination that exists within the Palestinian society. It seems that the

narrator comes to voice Khalifeh's own ideas that the Palestinian woman suffers from double colonization. Khalifeh's narrator comments on Rafif's situation stating:

Yet the Arab man is still sick, suffering from dualism as he wants one thing and performs another. The Arab man is still attached to the past and chants the future. She learned this from her experiences, her female friends' experiences, and the woman's column. Arab men are victims, exactly like Arab women. Yet their situation is worse as they are the strongest and the haughtiest. This is the truth. She will not be a victim of the victim. But then, there is loneliness. (p.24)

Rafif is viewed as an ambitious girl who attempts to surpass the limitations imposed on Palestinian women and preventing them from practicing their lives as ordinary individuals. Early in the novel, Rafif is represented as a rebellious figure against the agreed-upon rules of traffic. She crosses the road while the traffic light is still red; however, she does not get injured. Rafif's justification for this breach of law is that, "the street is not only for car drivers but for pedestrians as well." (p.11) By breaching the law, Rafif tries to claim authority over her life. Rafif is a subject who has the right to decide on which way to choose to manoeuvre on this planet. Rafif believes that lights are misleading; thus, each woman should have her inner light that guides her to the correct destination. Rafif comments, "I wanted to say that the lights are a trick and a conspiracy. Who put the lights and set them a system? Dull minds are those who believe them. I do not believe them, that is why I cross the street whenever I want. I am free. I cross the street whenever I want, so I don't wait for light from them. I make my own." (ibid) As an individual, Rafif wants to experience different feelings such as, risking her life, being in danger, escaping it, etc. These acts would empower her and make her more courageous since she will move outside the traditional images associated with women such as, being passive and lacking will. Crossing the red light could symbolize Rafif's rebellious attitude for refusing to end in the same destiny with Woolf's 'Judith Shakespeare' whose life is being confiscated for the sake of keeping the social norms and red lines un-breached.

Rafif believes that freedom is associated with the red colour since crossing the red light is something unusual. This is a call for women to move out of the domestic and traditional spheres that they are normally confined within, and explore and try new places. This echoes Woolf's ideas when she was asked about why women live longer than men, Woolf states:

Women and clergymen and gardeners live longer than other people. Remove that protection, expose them to the same exertions and activities, make them soldiers and sailors and engine drivers and dock labourers, and will not women die off so much younger, so much quicker, than men

... Anything may happen when womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation. (1929, p.34)

Moreover, as part of Khalifeh's project to help women speak and gain agency over themselves, Rafif is represented as a journalist who is doing her best to find a room for women in the magazine she works for, since the magazine devotes only a small column for women that addresses issues related to them. These issues emphasize the traditional roles of women and serve the patriarchal agenda. The magazine addresses topics that focus only on cookery, nursery and beauty such as, "Raisin cake recipe, My lady: a dish that enters a man's stomach and accordingly will let you steal his heart, How to breastfeed your baby without going through the painful stage of split nipples, How to be an attractive modern woman ..." (p.213) since Rafif is the only woman among the magazine's committee, she insists on a necessary change in the way the magazine addresses women by changing that sexist material into educational topics that feed women with solutions to their problems and provide insights towards the establishment of a better society.

Rafif is protesting against the way the magazine addresses women by focusing only on domestic roles. Rafif is looking for a collective solution to the situation of women in Palestine. She is thinking collectively of women not only of herself. Moreover, she is not satisfied with the space that the magazine devotes to women's issues, it only counts two pages from the whole volume, and this is not enough to tackle the woman question. Rafif is insisted on women being devoted the half of the magazine as a room for addressing women's issues. Her belief is derived from the fact that since women constitute the half of the society, then, they must be given half of the magazine and be equals with men's share of the same magazine. Rafif addresses women, "You, half of society, is greatly oppressed, but we believe in your freedom and we are working to reach it, so be comforted." (ibid)

Rafif goes further by rejecting the division made between male and female readers since she believes that women and men have the right to read about the same topics as equals and that women should not be treated as an alien social group with special needs or topics. This is part of Khalifeh's approach in treating women as solely individuals of equal rights with men when it comes to issues such as, education and employment, a first wave demand. Rafif argues, "If the magazine is modern, we should immediately stop treating women as if they were an alien social group. She is a human. She can read what men read and she has the same interests like him. So why should we devote a corner for her? Silly this thing is. I will not continue this issue any more." (Pp.157-158) Rafif's representation tries to assert an approach of treating women as individuals. This image suggests that women should be treated

as ordinary individuals who enjoy the same rights and freedom that men do within the Palestinian community. Rafif appears as a friendly character, an echo for Khalifeh's ideas. Through her usage of the monologue, Rafif comes to share her feminist thoughts with the readers; instead of, proceeding with the narrative through a conversational tone as highlighted in the previous sections, Khalifeh's novel comes to employ the monologue as a channel to reveal Rafif's views. Rafif speaks to herself:

I feel and I think and I know the alternative. I know my history and carry its burden. Since the beginning of your time, I have been living for others and not for myself. I cooked, you ate. I planted, you harvested. I carried your seeds in my belly ... And when your hands grab the newborn, he takes your name instead of mine ... And when my energies have subsided, you reproached me for ignorance. And when I awoke, you reproached me for my anger. (p.311)

*Sunflower's* representation of Rafif as a journalist is purposeful since the feminist movement in the Arab world starts to flourish by female writers who were journalists before becoming feminist writers such as, the Syrian writer Ghadah al-Samman and the Lebanese novelist Huda Barakat. This echoes Cooke's words, "Women's early journalism became the platform for social protest as well as for literary expression." (2006, p.447) Thus, journalism and using the pen could be employed as means to get rid of the oppression imposed on women. Using the pen is important since this will lead to empowering women economically. This echoes Woolf's ideas (1929) which emphasize that if women want to gain their freedom, they should have both their own space to practice writing and put money in their purse if they want to publish their work. Khalifeh's representation of the educated female is purposeful since through this close connection made with the readers, she calls all educated figures to take part in emancipating the Palestinian female.

### **2.2.3.2. Hybrid Culture Education**

After the discussion of the educated figure in Khalifeh's early work such as, *Sunflower* (1980) that comes to focus on the social context which Woolf is trying to deconstruct in her feminist approach, the following paragraphs will reflect on the progressivity of Khalifeh's later work since it will tackle post-modern themes such as, the third space beside Woolf's feminist views. This could reveal the heterogeneity of Khalifeh's work which allows her to continue writing over the span of 30 years. Khalifeh's later work elaborates on another representation of the educated female that is a hybrid educated female

to be precise who gets the chance to manoeuvre outside the Palestinian social context. This representation is present in Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* (1997).

Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997) makes it clear from the very beginning that this novel is set for a new context, a new generation. The dedication reads, "To the little granddaughter, Sahar al-deci, hopefully she discovers the inheritance." (p.7) This is emphasized with the cover photo<sup>10</sup> of the novel since it shows a little girl with a key hanging with her hair. Again, the motif of the key appears in Khalifeh's work indicating that improving the female status could be the key to emancipation. Khalifeh's approach is manifested through Zayna's character that is the main narrator of the novel and is the one who tries to make connections and reconciliations with other female characters during the course of the events taking place in the novel.

Zayna is half Palestinian, and half American since she was born to a Palestinian father and an American mother. From Zayna's perspective, this is a problematic situation. Zayna is confused about adhering to the cultural norms of her father (Palestinian roots), which could be described as a first space, or following the cultural norms of her mother's side (American roots), which could be described as a second space. However, to solve this problem of cultural difference, Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) suggests the concept of 'the third space' where the individual comes to negotiate his/her identity. Bhabha (1994) suggests the existence of an "interstitial" space of cultural encounter where negotiations and cultural interactions occur between the colonizer and the colonized, resulting in hybridity in culture (p.4). Zayna is confused about which side she should choose for herself. This is manifested when Zayna's grandmother, Deborah, comments on the situation of America during the 1990s, the era of the war between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, stating, "Oh God! What happened to America and the Americans? What happened to us?"(p.27) Zayna contemplates:

It was 'We' that hurts me. What is the meaning of us? Who are we? We are the Americans? I am not American. 'Who are you then?'... I didn't say I was Arab because I wasn't. Who am I then? Despite my mother's citizenship, my birth certificate, my school certificate, my books, my accent, my clothes, and everything about my life, I was not truly American. The depths of my mind were inhabited by visions and pictures, love songs, those Arabic mawals moving like the passage of a breeze, the scent of violets, the fragrance of memories, all leaving behind a honey-sweet solution in the heart. (Pp.27-28)

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<sup>10</sup> Check Appendix No.1, *The Inheritance* (1997) cover page.



This proves that Zayna is stuck between the standards of the two spaces which are totally the opposite of each other, the West that is represented by her maternal American roots and the East that is represented by her paternal Palestinian roots. This gap between both sides affects Zayna's behaviour both as a teenager and as a mature person. To understand Zayna's behaviour as a teenager, it is important to reflect on her familial surroundings.

*The Inheritance* (1997) represents Zayna's father as a traditional Palestinian male figure. He wants his daughters to follow his steps and inherit the Palestinian traditions that put much emphasis on the virginity of women. Zayna's father inserts, "I want my daughters to be brought up as Arabs, clear and transparent as a candle." (p.17) However, during her teenager, Zayna gets pregnant and her father wants to end her life, "he was chasing me in the street, holding the longest knife. I was fifteen years old." (ibid) In this situation, Zayna's father appears as a typical Palestinian man who wants to wash the shame caused to him by his daughter's pregnancy outside marriage.

The father is acting according to the Palestinian traditions that treat the female honor and virginity as concepts that are constituents for the male reputation. According to Zayna's father patriarchal perspective, his daughter makes the light of his candle blurred and this, in turn, affects his reputation as an Arab man. Zayna decides to escape to her American grandmother to help her survive this situation. Her father shouts angrily, "Daughter of a bitch, by God I will suck your blood!" (p.23) Her grandmother tries to help her, yet the father insists that he ends her life, "It's over; consider her dead. She must pay for her mistake. I must wash away my shame and hers." (ibid) While chasing her, *The Inheritance* (1997) describes Zayna's father as a "smashing monster, without mind or sense. He wasn't the father I knew but a total stranger." (ibid) At this moment, Zayna's grandmother grabs a hunting rifle and starts threatening Zayna's father that she would shoot him. Finally, her father puts the knife aside and they help him by treating his bleeding hand. Zayna's grandmother addresses him, "calm down ... Zayna is staying here. You can go to your people and tell them that you acted like a man and killed her." (p.25)

*The Inheritance* (1997) employs the verb 'tell' to convey the idea that the Palestinian culture is an oral one; thus, the father's image as a man would be preserved if he spreads the news orally that he already punishes his daughter. When Zayna's father leaves the house for the last time, Zayna shouts, "Dad Forgive me!" (ibid) At this point, *The Inheritance* (1997) communicates two important things: First, the male figure within the Palestinian society acts as an authority who has the right to confiscate his female's life if she violates the moral codes of behaviour and morality, by doing so, the male figure believes that he could

correct his image in front of his male peers and preserve his manhood qualities. Second, the novel proves that the burden of the inherited traditions within the Palestinian society could drive the male figure to become an extremist to the extent that he could kill his kin of the same blood, just to satisfy the masculine codes of behaviour.

*The Inheritance* (1997) shows that the father is a victim of the social traditions, which means that he tries to find an escape from these patriarchal traditions by inflicting harm on the weaker sex; that is the Palestinian female. *The Inheritance* (1997) does not put all the pressure on Zayna's father alone; instead, it tries to make the door open for change within the Palestinian society since the novel does not allow the father to slaughter his daughter. Instead, he stops the chasing and leaves the grandmother's house going back to his roots, the West Bank in Palestine. In addition, Zayna's grandmother even though she is an American, she knows about the cultural expectations, at least when it comes to men's reputation and honor within the Palestinian society. Deborah tells Zayna's father to go and tell his people that he ends the life of his daughter and that he becomes a man now. These incidents takes place in autumn where the yellow leaves are falling down and a new life is about to emerge and bloom. Hopefully, the decaying patriarchal societal traditions would disappear and be replaced by non-biased gender equality norms, "autumn was in its last days and the leaves were falling down." (ibid)

The second stage in Zayna's life where this hybrid space becomes problematic for her is manifested in adulthood. Thus, firstly, it is important to highlight the way *The Inheritance* (1997) represents Zayna as a mature female then discuss the impact of this hybrid space on her behaviour. Zayna, as an adult female, is portrayed as a successful female figure at the professional level. She becomes an anthropologist who is interested in studying the nature of human beings and their social affairs. Zayna now is in her thirties and she is economically an independent woman. Zayna reveals, "My mother died so I inherited her, I have two apartments, one in Washington and the other in San Diego. I have two cars, yacht..." (p.30). After all these achievements, Zayna feels that she is still missing something. Thus, upon receiving a letter from her uncle telling her that her father is about to die and she has to go back to Palestine if she is to claim her share of the inheritance, Zayna decides to accept her uncle's letter and make her first lifetime visit to Palestine to meet her roots, "Come quickly before the thread breaks and you lose your claim to the inheritance." (p.43) Upon her acceptance of the letter, Zayna will shift from the position of the West to that of the East.

Zayna is threatened not to get her share of the inheritance since Palestinian women are being denied the right to get their shares of the inheritance just because they are females.

The female figure is not entitled to have any access to financial independence within her society. This is clear when Zayna describes the way one of the villagers welcomes her, “and he starred at me for some time trying to discover if I am as a ‘female’, deserve all this inheritance.” (p.52) It is important to mention here that within the Palestinian society, in some cases, women are being killed because the family does not want to give the woman her share of the inheritance; thus, the concept of honor killing is used as a veil to justify and cover up their violence and ill-treatment of women. From this patriarchal perspective, women’s honor comes to have a slippery definition, sometimes, it is a symbol for the male figure’s reputation and his manhood qualities; however, in other circumstances, the same concept is used as a veil to hide the patriarchal desire and drive for money and power.

*The Inheritance* (1997) tries to de-veil the way the Palestinian society treats its educated females through Zayna as a subject who comes to act within this hybrid, ‘in-between’ space since she grew up as a female without being exposed to all these discriminating cultural practices. However, Zayna does not want to give up any of her roots, she wants to keep both. In this sense, Zayna could benefit from Bhabha’s (1994) concept and stay in this hybrid third space, that is a space of negotiations between the first place, her Palestinian roots, and a second place, her American roots. It is important to mention that this place is characterized by temporality, confusion, uncertainty, and in-betweenness. Furthermore, *The Inheritance* (1997) doubts the concept of ‘Third World woman’ as a coherent group that Mohanty (1984) criticizes, since it includes women characters with different stories/challenges, and it provides a clear demonstration of the necessity of taking into consideration the peculiar socio-economic conditions for each group of women in different parts of the world. In addition, it is important to reflect on the way Khalifeh’s work places the reader in a gradual image regarding Zayna’s life story from her birth until she becomes a successful educated woman. Khalifeh’s novel provides the necessary information about Zayna’s life including, her mixed roots, her teenager, and her relationship with her family members, before it places her in scenes that reflect her identity crisis. Such background information about Zayna helps the reader understand the reasons Zayna comes to face such an identity crisis. In this regard, Khalifeh states:

You cannot let the characters behave according to your own ideology or your own way of dealing with things. You have to present them in the state in which they live. Then gradually you present them with many experiences and through these experiences their awareness is raised ... I don’t shift from complete unawareness to complete awareness – this would be false. No reader can be convinced by this. (An interview, 1980)

Thus, Zayna, the anthropologist, will be more familiar and educated about the patriarchal system that oppresses women through her interaction with other female characters within the Palestinian society.

#### **2.2.4. The Widow**

Khalifeh's *Sunflower* (1980) represents Sa'diya's character as an example for the uneducated, yet hard working, lower middle-class woman. In the novel, Sa'diya is represented as the widow who is left to survive after the death of her husband. In the absence of her husband, Sa'diya is left to take the responsibility of bringing up her children; that is a stereotypical role, a single woman who has to survive financially and socially by herself in a traditional occupied Palestinian community for the sake of her family. In *Sunflower* (1980) Sa'diya does not stop at her maternal duties' threshold since she is represented as a hardworking woman who has to work in a factory to feed her children. She starts working as a seamstress for an Israeli textile company to earn a living. Sa'diya needs to gain money if to compensate the death of her husband. However, since the Palestinian society is conservative in the sense that it does not accept that both men and women work at the same place even if only occasionally, Sa'diya finds herself in a hard situation. On the one hand, she has to commute to the Israeli factory every day and pass through many check points on her way, and on the other hand, she has to face the criticism from her society as a working woman. Sa'diya contemplates, "What a country! Shall we bear the occupation or the black tongues talking behind us?" (p.31) It is clear that the Palestinian patriarchal society rejects the idea that women invade the places usually set for males since they consider this invasion as something unusual. Sa'diya tries to challenge this division of places by insisting on her work at that factory to elevate herself up the social ladder. She reaches this conclusion after her experience of being a widow. In other words, the absence of her husband stands as an awakening moment for her situation, the absence of the male figure enables her to gain autonomy over her life. Sa'diya comments:

What did I get from this country? Nothing will benefit you in this life except your penny. I stayed at home for eight months and no one even give me some fruits for my children. I put on black clothes, I tied a scarf around my head and I sit near the window crying over the death of my husband. What happened is that neither the black clothes bring my husband back nor the scarf makes me honoured among my people. (p.32)

Such a statement from Sa'diya refutes the patriarchal belief about women's devotion to her husband, what Spivak refers to as 'Sati practice'. For Sa'diya, it is her work that shapes her female personality with strength and confidence not her sadness over the death

of her husband. Sa'diya goes further since she aims at moving from her current space that is located near the valley to the mountains where the social standards are better and more supportive to women. This indicates that she is not satisfied with her current space since this space limits, confines and prevents her from making progress in life. Sa'diya contemplates, "Mountains are for the rich yet the rest stay at this gloomy rusty, rotten valley. When God will bless her and rise her with those who are high up there?" (p.45) She refers to her current place as a place of backwardness and restrictions; thus, she wants to replace it with one that is more open to change and less conservative to traditions. Changing the place would shift Sa'diya from incomplete unawareness to complete awareness about her value as a female. Her movement is a positive one since it will transform her character and lift her from the bottom of the social ladder to its top, a movement that will make her life better and meaningful than before and the key to this successful leap for Sa'diya is having a profession.

Sa'diya is trying to surpass her hard situation by depending on herself. She is working hard to get out of her current state as a poor widow in positive means such as, having a profession and becoming an active model by playing a double role, the husband and the wife. In this sense, Sa'diya's character could be described as a round character that comes to develop in the course of events in the novel, from a female living in the shadow of her husband to an individual who manages to uplift her family alone. Beside this, in *Sunflower* (1980), Sa'diya is represented as a human being who has his own wishes and dreams in this life. She dreams of buying a plot of land that she will use to build her own house where she will decorate it the way she wishes. She dreams of having a room for her own where she can enjoy her privacy and shape her future. *Sunflower's* narrator comments, "She [Sa'diya] will have a house, not like any other houses. She will have a room for her oneself, two rooms for her children and a big living room where she can put a dining table with its chairs." (p.94) Sa'diya dreams of saying farewell to her old back-warded neighbourhood and starting a new chapter in her life.

However, by the end of the novel, the Israeli occupation confiscates the land from Sa'diya and her dreams go in vain. Sa'diya's character shows again that Palestinian women are victims of double colonization, the occupation and the masculine society. These two factors prevent and impeded women from manoeuvring properly during their journey of finding their own identities and confiscating their dreams. However, liberating the individual comes first since one cannot talk about the liberation of the nation while its individuals are oppressing and controlling one another. This is part of Khalifeh's approach in emphasizing the importance of treating women as individuals if Palestinian people want to get rid of the

occupation. Khalifeh states, “real nationalism means to know and to love the nation with its rights and its wrongs, its sweet and its bitter, because without diagnosis there can be no prescription.” (An interview, 1980)

Sa’diya’s character emphasizes two main points. First, it assures Khalifeh’s realistic representation of women in her novel as individuals not symbols since Sa’diya’s character is represented as an ordinary individual who has his own wishes and dreams in this life. This proves Khalifeh’s approach which becomes clear later in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1990) where the female character Sahab declares, “[w]ake up, clever boy, I’m not the mother of the land or the symbol. I am a person, I eat, drink, dream, make mistakes, get lost, get agitated, suffer, and talk to the wind. I’m not a symbol, I’m a woman.” (p.176). Second, it supports Woolf’s assertion that, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (1929, p.4) By analogy, for women to be independent, they should have both their own space and they should have money if they want to be free individuals. *Sunflower* (1980) calls that the widow’s life should not stop after the death of the husband; instead, the female should surpass this loss by staying alive and active.

### **2.2.5. The Prostitute**

Khadra, in *Sunflower* (1980), represents the uneducated woman living under Israeli occupation. She belongs to a humble rural family where her father married her just to get a good dowry that enabled him to buy a wheeled carriage. Khadra’s husband used to beat her for no reason. Khadra’s life is not easy since she is being passed from the possession and control of one male figure to another as if she were a speechless doll. Khadra uses her Palestinian dialect; instead of, the classical language to reflect on her life describing it as shit, which is not an appropriate expression to use within the Palestinian literary context. As a researcher with a translation background, this could be a challenge for me when addressing Khalifeh’s work within a non-Eastern context, since such words may be offensive to use. Khalifeh comments on her choice of such words stating:

Well, when you deal with characters coming from the slums, what would they talk about? silk, jewels? This is the way they express their lives. And why do we think about the word ‘shit’ as being a dirty word? What shall I say then? ... so why destroy the literary atmosphere in order to give you the word which you like and not give Khadra the same opportunity of using her language, of choosing her vocabulary? (An interview, 1980)

Khadra contemplates, “Hey, they’ve beaten me, God! A good beating that went to my head. So what? I’ve had as many like it as the hairs on my head. The father beats, the

husband beats, the Jews beat. If I have to be beaten, by God, to be beaten by the Jews is better. At least one feels respectable.” (p.119) From a historical perspective, beating the wife is a masculine privilege, Woolf refers to this frequently practiced phenomenon during the Victorian Age stating, “‘Wife beating’, I read,’ was a recognized right of man, and was practised without shame by high as well as low.” (1929, p.35) The Middle Eastern woman comes to experience this practice from two sources alike, the Middle Eastern male and the occupation. This shows the different social experiences of the Middle Eastern woman compared with the Western one. Such a difference in the cultural context of the third world women is what Mohanty encourages scholars to take into consideration when discussing the woman’s status in the East.

Wife beating here could be compared with Spivak’s analysis of the Sati practice. In other words, besides the Sati being described as a barbaric practice, it also comes to function as a colonial tool since some Western texts written about the topic tend to represent the female who performs it as a hero. In light of this, within the Palestinian context, beating could stand as a sign of resistance to the occupation since the occupation beats those who try to defend their homelands. Thus, beating could symbolize the sacrifice/struggle for a respectable life, at least from the Palestinian male writers’ literary perspective where resistance is their main theme. In this sense, the female who bears the beating of the occupation is a heroin/bride. Within this patriarchal framework, the female’s life ends as a social and national martyr. However, Khalifeh’s work represents Khadra as a brave woman who decides to escape this masculine torture by running away. She gets married for the second time, this time Khadra is satisfied with her new marriage since her second husband treats her well, a treatment she has never experienced before neither from her father nor from her first husband. Khadra has to work hard since her new husband is a sick old man. Thus, she decides to become a prostitute.

Khadra’s reaction to the bad treatment she receives from the male figures in her life derives her to become a prostitute. She tries to surpass this masculine oppression through breaking the social norms that prevent Palestinian women from being engaged in taboos. Khadra liberates herself by violating moral and social customs. However, it is clear that she is represented as a victim of the male violence. In other words, through Khadra’s character, *Sunflower* (1980) highlights the effects of violence on women since violence could have serious impacts on them, it derives them to react negatively by breaking the established social norms. Accordingly, the novel, does not blame Khadra for becoming a prostitute; instead, it tries to emphasize the idea that women should be treated as autonomous individuals who are

not only expected to behave according to a certain set of traditional rules and colonial powers, yet they may deviate from these norms, they might even commit mistakes for committing mistakes is part of the human nature in general for to err is human. This representation of Khadra's character with its flaws and points of weakness, along with the language she uses to reflect on her life emphasizes Khalifeh's realistic approach in treating women as individuals not myths or symbols.

### **2.2.6. The Unmarried/Spinster**

Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997) represents Nahleh as a scarifying female figure who spends her whole life working in Kuwait as a teacher to support her family financially, a family that consists mainly of males, her five brothers: Jaber, Jamal, Mazen, Said and Kamal. However, during the Iraq-Kuwait war in 1990s, Nahleh loses her job and is forced to go back to the West Bank again. Nahleh is not satisfied with this shift in her life since she realizes that she is left alone, "I woke up to find myself old, without a husband, without a house, and no one to call me mama." (p.71) Nahleh feels that her family does not appreciate her efforts in helping them to survive, "I worked in Kuwait, being milked like a cow, teaching and bringing them up, but they paid no attention to me and did what they wanted." (p.70) *The Inheritance* (1997) hints to the fact that the family allows the female to change her place and cross the threshold of domesticity as long as that place brings them profit. It treats women as toys who are deprived of feelings and they only do what serves the patriarchal agenda. *The Inheritance* (1997) assures that this is one of the fundamental themes Sahar Khalifeh's feminist approach tries to emphasize; the necessity to treat women as individuals not as machines or emotionless subjects that come to act under the control of the patriarchal and colonial system all the time.

Nahleh is not satisfied with her current situation as an unemployed unmarried woman, "I am not used to staying at home. I spent my whole life working. Now, I find myself doing nothing but housework, sweeping and cleaning, washing and making pickles! I'm about to explode, this kind of life is killing me. Am I going to stay home after having spent a lifetime working?" (p.117) Nahleh does not want to end her life at home without a job since she is used to have her own room and her own income as Virginia Woolf insists on in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929). After losing these weapons, Nahleh starts to look for alternatives to fill this gap. She starts to beautify and use cosmetics, Nahleh's uncle insert, "Her father wonders, 'Where is Nahleh? Where did she disappear?'" and Nahleh continues to stay in her room in front of her mirror trying new outfits and playing sports to lose weight ... then she starts to write, writing her memoir ... she starts writing one page then she writes



other pages, after that she stops and does not know how to continue or what to say.”(95) Most of the time, “Nahleh sits in front of her mirror and starts to apply crèmes and oils, which she brought from Nablus, on her skin.” (p.96) By doing this, Nahleh tries to look for a partner with whom to continue her life believing that this would end her current boring passive status.

The situation Nahleh finds herself within, the pressure of her family and the traditions that view the unmarried woman as a spinster makes the situation worse. *The Inheritance* (1997) inserts, “Spinster? Spinster! A shallow sick word for the single unmarried woman and an unmarried woman is a fruitless land, it is not attractive. It does not arouse the thought and feeling. And this is the situation of a woman without the rain.” (p.66) In other words, the husband/male is like the rain that will make the woman become fruitful. In addition, within the Palestinian society, mothers themselves are concerned about their daughters being married since having unmarried daughters who are still even in their thirties means that the mother’s daughters are like “the sluggish goods”. (p.147)

Nahleh is in her fifties now and she insists that getting married could be the solution for her problems. This belief is rooted in the cultural practices within the Palestinian society and the oral traditions. This recalls the popular Palestinian proverb which shows that the movement of the Palestinian female and her exchange of place is too restricted within only two places ‘A woman leaves her house twice: when she gets married and moves to the house of her husband, and when she dies and is carried to her grave’. Although marriage is assumed to be an escape from being treated as unwanted demanding goods, Nahleh is still trapped within this trading process since marriage is performed by an exchange of money that is the dowry usually exchanged between men. Nahleh is forced to adhere to the societal norms that view marriage as the only destiny for women if they are to be considered worthy creatures. She loses her status as a free independent woman and finds herself in a situation where she has to adhere to the outdated Palestinian patriarchal traditions. *The Inheritance* (1997) describes the scene where Nahleh is sitting in front of her mirror and contemplating her reflection. In this sense, the mirror would reflect the patriarchal image of Nahleh. What Nahleh sees in the mirror will be a male-constructed image of her since she starts to adhere to the beauty standards that would qualify her to get a husband. The mirror serves as a patriarchal gaze that views Nahleh as an enclosed subject of the inherited patriarchal traditions after she used to be an independent woman. It is important to mention that the concept of the ‘male gaze’ has a long tradition within the feminist discourse. Laura Mulvey in her well-known article on “*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*” (1975) summarizes this ‘gaze’ concept where the woman appears as an ‘image’ while the man appears as a ‘bearer of

the look'. Mulvey states, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure while is styled accordingly" (1975, p.11). Through applying this cinematic interpretation to man/woman relationships within a given social context, the patriarchal representation of the woman as an inferior other is created. Mulvey concludes, "The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form-illusionistic narrative film" (1975, p.17). This active 'male gaze' places the Palestinian female in a passive position when it comes to beauty standards since she has to adhere to these standards that males prefer such as cosmetic application.

This function of the gaze derives Nahleh to insist on searching for a male partner that would uplift her from this passive situation within her Palestinian context. Nahleh believes that the male figure would empower her. Thus, she starts a relationship with an old man named Abu Salem who is already married and has children. Nahleh is caught having a love affair with him at a party that takes place in her town; thus, she has to marry him, "she did not find a place for love except in the toilet area!" (p.200) When her family discovers this affair, Nahleh has to suffer the consequences. She escapes to Zayna's place since her brother Said insists on killing her. When he finds her with Zayna, he shouts, "Open the door! You are a daughter of a bitch?" (p.163) He takes a knife from the kitchen and threatens Nahleh, "With this, with this! You see! Does she think there are no males in her family?" (ibid) *The Inheritance* (1997) shows that the shame caused by the female to her male relatives is only washable by her blood, which means ending her life. In addition, ending the life of the female by using a 'feminine tool' that is the knife, which is a 'domestic tool' usually used in the kitchen, could indicate that no one will blame the man since women are being killed by a domestic tool not a patriarchal one such as, the sword, the pen, the gun, etc. *The Inheritance* (1997) employs the phrase 'the biggest knife' many times, a kind of knives that is usually used in the butchers' shop; thus, this could be a sign to exaggerate the amount of oppression and the huge punishment imposed on women.

Nahleh tries to defend herself by threatening her brother of calling the police, "Get out! I will call the police" (ibid). *The Inheritance* (1997) criticizes the Palestinian society that does not provide the security for women inserting, "but she knows well and he knows too that there is no police and that the country is a mess since there is neither government nor supervision." (ibid) Finally, Nahleh holds a rifle to stop Said from attacking her and she

succeeds in stopping him. This recalls the same scene that happens with Zayna and her father while she is being chased by her father when she gets pregnant. Allowing a woman to hold a gun which is a 'masculine tool,' even it is a hunting rifle, could be a sign/call from *The Inheritance* (1997) for women to take the first step and start defending themselves. *The Inheritance* (1997) repeats the same chasing incident to communicate the message that these practices are the norms that the men resort to when it comes to their honor; that is their women's reputation within the Palestinian society. Khalifeh's novels, through Nahleh and Zayna's attempts to escape, recall what Gilbert and Gubar insert during their discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century women's writing, "Defining themselves as prisoners of their own gender, for instance, women frequently create characters who attempt to escape, ..." (2000, Pp.85-86). Such a connection makes it reasonable to view Khalifeh's work in light of the early feminist waves since Khalifeh's work clearly contains characters who attempt to escape.

*The Inheritance* (1997) views Nahleh as a woman who is totally indulged in the domestic traditional role of the wife towards her husband. After Nahleh's husband runs away when his first wife and his children discover his second marriage, Nahleh insists that she will not ask for divorce, "Oh! Isn't he my husband? Even if he runs away and escapes, he is still my husband. I am his wife and the wife should be patient and bear the hardships with her husband." (p.201) However, things get worse when Abu Salem's family kidnap Nahleh since they want her to sign a document giving up her right of inheriting his properties. Nahleh firmly refuses to sign the document stating, "Will I be divorced at the end of my life? What would people say about me? You want them to say that I am without honor? You want them to say that I get married with him because of the inheritance? Or you want them to say that I married him just to taste him?" (ibid) *The Inheritance* (1997) describes Nahleh's status, her father comments, "She is lost twice: once in her body and the other in her mind" (p.159). When his daughter disappears and is being kidnapped, the main concern of the father is only that what people would say about him, "He was shaken up and more afraid of a scandal than for Nahleh's safety!" (ibid) Nahleh ends up refusing to be divorced or giving up her share of the inheritance.

Nahleh is being treated as a criminal who deserves a big punishment. Her brother Kamal who works as an engineer in Germany contemplates while talking to his brothers about Nahleh's fate after the scandal, "If she were in Germany, if she were in Frankfurt," then her situation would be different since she could talk about her 'real self.'" (p.155) Kamal is aware that women there express and verbalize themselves in conferences, magazines, and newspapers, and some universities and institutions advise divorced women and spinsters

alike. Mazen believes that if Nahleh had the chance to go outside the West Bank, then her perspective on life and her behaviour would change a lot. Even at this point, while Nahleh's brothers are discussing the possibility of taking her to Frankfurt, they exclude her from the conversation. They continue to treat her as a child who cannot decide and reason what is suitable for her. This recalls Kabbani's statement about the broader scene in the Middle Eastern context, "The European was led into the East by sexuality, by the embodiment of it in a woman or a young boy." (1986, p.67) Western scholars give themselves the authority to make statements about the East by treating it as a subordinate object of investigation resulting in numerous inaccurate stereotypes.

*The Inheritance* (1997) tries to communicate the message that the problem is not about the place but about the mentality of the people who occupy that space/place. This shows the patriarchal practices that position men as guardians who are responsible to preserve the morality of women within the Palestinian society. This also reveals the nature of the relationships between Palestinian people; their relationships are subject to traditions and rules rather than emotions. Zayna, the narrator in *The Inheritance* (1997) summarizes the scene, "I realized that the feeling of the individuals towards each other is not as strong as I thought or the way they assume it should be. The members of my family were merely detached pieces in a rusty chain .... Their relationship was part of the traditions and was only symbolic." (p.160)

The way the society perceives the unmarried woman as a burden where her morality should be observed all the time could lead the female to commit mistakes. In other terms, this system of symbolization is again the main subject Khalifeh's work tries to subvert since it serves as a source of oppressing Palestinian women. Khalifeh's novels try to place the female characters in a continuous confrontation with the patriarchal cultural practices as a means to represent her female characters as active participants and round characters that aspire to liberate themselves from the patriarchal representations and constructed images imposed on them. The following sections will reflect on some cultural myths within the Palestinian context and the means the female characters adopt to dismantle this opposition between man and woman.

### **2.3. Unveiling Patriarchy: The Demystification of Palestinian Patriarchal Myths**

Khalifeh's work could be read as an answer to the French feminist critic Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) where the text encourages all women to write about themselves "The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. It is still unexplored only because

we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed." (Pp.884-885) Cixous' text insists on the positive representation of all females, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing." (p.885) In this regard, Kabbani argues that the image of the Middle Eastern woman has been shaky throughout history, "Europe's feelings about Oriental women were always ambivalent ones. They fluctuated between desire, pity, contempt and outrage. Oriental women were painted as erotic victims and as scheming witches." (1986, p.26) Khalifeh's novels represent a medium where the negative representations of the Palestinian female are being refuted. Khalifeh clearly states her position against the typical representation of the Palestinian female stating:

My primary task is to liberate women from the confines of an image imposed on them by male writers. In political poems and novels written by men, women are a symbol for the land; for procreation; for endless and unconditional loving and giving. The woman is a mother, she is the beacon lighting the darkness for ships in the night and a shoulder for the tired to rest on. Motherhood in our culture is a cult that has its origins in literature ... these symbols are gilded frames that help preserve the old female roles while making them seem more acceptable. (An interview, 1998)

Khalifeh's novels resort to refute some cultural myths associated with the female's place, virginity, ownership and reproduction. Khalifeh's novels try to demystify some patriarchal myths regarding the Palestinian society since those myths serve the patriarchal agenda of keeping the oppression against women. This recalls de Beauvoir ideas in her well known book *The Second Sex* (1961) where she tries to refute some patriarchal myths which show the cultural construction of gender that places women all the time in an inferior position compared with men. De Beauvoir believes that those myths are means in the man's hand to control women and sustain their patriarchal rule; thus, de Beauvoir (1961) observes that myths are employed as important means to persuade women of the naturalness of their destiny. The following sections will reflect on some myths that Khalifeh's novels try to subvert within the Palestinian context.

### **2.3.1. The Public Sphere is Masculine**

Khalifeh's novels reflect on the domestic place that is assigned to the female where this domestic place is characterized as being private, closed, and invisible from the active male gaze. In addition, this place is located within the threshold of the house, and ruled by a

patriarch. Khalifeh's novels reflect on the distinction made between the spheres assigned to both the masculine and the feminine subjects within the Palestinian society where the female place is connected to closures such as, prisons, walls, etc. while the masculine place is connected to openness such as, the sea, the land, etc. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) asserts, "The kitchen and the knife are women's matters, whereas, the man's job could be at the office, the harbour, riding the sea, ploughing the land, building houses, etc." (p.162)

*The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) inserts that this domestic sphere is the only destiny for the female. It is her one and only shelter from the hardships of life. When Um Azzam is beaten by her husband, she is still being advised to go back to her husband's house, "Is there a kingdom for the woman except her home, is there a crown for her other than her husband?" (p.161) The female is threatened to be divorced if she leaves her domestic place without the permission of the patriarch. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) inserts that Zakkia's husbands threatens to divorce her if she goes out without his permission, "One day, he swore if his wife goes out without his permission, then he will divorce her when he comes back. She opened the door and said challenging him: I am leaving!" (p.15)

This recalls again the stereotypical thinking within the Palestinian society where the female leaves her domestic sphere for two reasons mainly: to the house of her husband and to her grave. Otherwise, the Palestinian female is destined to spend the rest of her life within the threshold of the house. The traditional myth about the masculine space indicates that a woman would be an easy target and prey within the masculine sphere as long as she is alone, that is without a man to guard and protect her. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) shows the consequences that the female suffers from if she allows the male to step into her feminine place. When Nuzha's mother receives Israeli soldiers at her house as a means to earn a living to support her children, the society starts calling her space the 'ill-reputed house' since she breaches the expected norms by allowing the male to enter into her sphere.

The society changes this perception about the ill-reputed house only when Ahmad, Nuzha's brother, becomes a martyr. At this point, the house becomes a symbol for sacrifice and pride. The perception about the house changes only by the male interference as everything needs to be decided in relation to him. Furthermore, *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) shows that the Palestinian female is deprived of love and having a romantic relationship with her partner. She does not enjoy a romantic space with her spouse. This is clear when Widad goes to the cinema after she gets married and she wonders, "Is there love like the one we see at the cinema. Is there love?" (p.190) so if the Palestinian female wants to escape her reality then she goes to the cinema to enjoy the imaginary world of the relationship between the man

and the woman. The cinema becomes an escape for the female from her realities since the cinema can compensate her for the things that she is missing in real life even only by looking at and not practicing in.

Khalifeh's work presents an attempt to reject this domestic lifetime consuming place since her novels include characters who manage to cross the threshold of domesticity and challenge these cultural patriarchal divisions of place. In *Of Noble Origins* (2009) although Widad's marriage is described as a prison and the husband acts as a prisoner, Widad manages to escape from this prison in the end and runs back to her family's house. In *Sunflower* (1980), the widow Sa'diya manages to get a job after her husband passed away and does not care about what people would say about her. Thus, she continues to commute to the Israeli factory and spend time within the masculine sphere to gain a living. Moreover, in *Sunflower* (1980), Rafif insists on having a woman corner in the magazine and refuses to give up this right. These reactions of the Palestinian females, among others in Khalifeh's novels, prove that Khalifeh's novels rewrite the image of the Palestinian female as a round character, as someone who is aware of her duties to the same degree as she is aware of her tasks and responsibilities. By doing this, Khalifeh's work could be read as an answer to Cixous' call, a model for rewriting the Palestinian female image in a positive way, away from the domestic national connotations.

It is important to mention that Khalifeh's novels, in some scenes, represent the female's knowledge of the domestic sphere as an important means for the survival of the Palestinian male. This is clear in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) when Hussam gets shot and runs to Nuzha's house to treat his wound. Hussam whispers, "Open the door Nuzha, I am Hussam ... and then he entered to hide in Nuzha's house." (p.67) Hussam said, "Help me!" (ibid) Hussam finds a secure place within the domestic sphere of Nuzha to escape the Israeli soldiers chasing the young males. The domestic place is important for the male in this scene, which could be read as a momentary flash of hope where both men and women could harmonize their roles by allowing a symbiotic relationship between the private and the public spaces.

*Sunflower* (1980) includes another incident about the importance of the domestic space for the Palestinian male; in particular, when the guerrilla fighters ask Khadra to feed them and guide them to escape the Israeli soldiers chasing them. Khadra is aware of the neighbourhood surrounding her since she spends most of her life within this domestic sphere that is only devoted to women. Khadra is successful in guiding the men to the right directions saving their lives. This positive representation of the domestic sphere and its importance is

interesting to pay attention to when discussing Khalifeh's work since such representations aim at incorporating the Palestinian female as an active citizen who plays an important role in both daily life and the struggle against the occupation since she could help in saving the male's life.

Khalifeh's work challenges the notion that the private sphere is a subordinate position as often perceived from a stereotypical Western perspective. Instead, Khalifeh's work tries to subvert this broader image by portraying a reality that is more complex than the simplistic image of patriarchy in the East and the division of spaces into private and public from a Western framework. Within the Palestinian context, the private/domestic space is capable of playing a decisive role in preserving one's life. Such a difference within the socio-political context is what Mohanty is stressing to take into consideration while addressing the woman question in the Middle East. Khalifeh's novels show that both the private and the public sphere could be viewed as equals and complementary, crucial for constructing the occupied Palestinian society. Khalifeh's work gradually subverts the stereotypical images of the Palestinian man and woman, starting from the domestic sphere then shifting to the public one where women, in particular, challenge the restrictions imposed on them since Khalifeh's main characters are, "a woman head of a household, a journalist, a prostitute, and a housewife, are trapped between poverty, occupation, traditional norms, and unchanging male perceptions. Yet, they grow and become stronger through their adversity and are able to make a contribution to society in many ways." (Sabbagh, 1998, p.35) Khalifeh's characters "fight occupation they also fight against restrictive traditional values inculcated into their innermost self." (ibid) Thus, their suffrage is doubled.

### **2.3.2. The Female Honor is a Source of Shame**

Since women are always confined within the threshold of their domestic roles; thus, they perform the imposed roles on them as protectors of their home, family, chastity, virginity and honor. Accordingly, any violation of these domestic roles would lead to punishment by the male figure within the Palestinian society. Hamamra inserts, "Palestinian women who transgress the borders of the domestic sphere are subject to verbal and physical violence and sometimes, so-called, honour killing." (2019, p.4) This is represented clearly in the position that women occupy within the social fabric of the Palestinian family:

The structure of the family remained hierarchical, with variables such as age and gender shaping the pattern of relations among its members. The father represented the top of the hierarchy, with central decision-making authority, especially in cases of marriage, divorce, and inheritance ...



Females ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy, with little or no share in decision making. (Jad, 1998, Pp.114-115)

This shows the subordinate position that women occupy within the Palestinian social fabric. One important concept within the Palestinian context that Khalifeh's novels try to demonstrate is the female honor. It is important to reflect on some concepts related to the female honor before understanding how it works within the Palestinian society.

World Health Organization defines honor crimes as a "girl or woman being killed by a male or female family member for an actual or assumed sexual or behavioural transgression, including adultery, sexual intercourse or pregnancy outside marriage—or even for being raped." (2012, p.2) This definition entails two important aspects within the Palestinian society: On the one hand, it shows that death is the destiny that awaits the female who fails to preserve her honor. On the other hand, it shows that the concept of honor is linked only with the behaviour of women whereas men are not responsible to observe their morality and behaviour, "Since the male's immorality does not affect the honor of the family. Such gender imbalance brings victimization to women, who are transformed into a symbol of the family's honor to be protected and avenged by their male relatives." (Alhawamdeh, 2015, p.105)

When it comes to Palestinian traditions, the cleaning of the female honor, which in fact is the male honor, by sucking her blood to death, is a must since the social context within the Palestinian society places much emphasis on the reputation of the male figure and what people say about it. In this regard, Kanaana, the Palestinian anthropologist and folklorist, notes that the Palestinian cultural context is an oral and aural context that privileges and favours the spoken over the written (2005). In other words, if a woman violates the codes of morality regarding her honor, the man should react to this violation. Abu-Odeh asserts that, "to be a man is to engage in daily practices, an important part of which is to assure the virginity of the women in your family. In Arab culture, a man is that person whose sister's virginity is a social question for him." (1996, p.13) It is considered shameful for a man not to revenge over the loss of his honor, "If a man doesn't intervene by killing his sister/wife once she has shamed him, he suffers a loss of his gender: he is no longer a man." (ibid) However, it is important to mention that there is no correlation between honor killing and religion since some male figures resort to employ Islam as a veil for their violence against women.

There is no mention of honour killing in the Quran or Hadiths. Honour killing, in Islamic definitions, refers specifically to extra-legal punishment by the family against a woman, and is forbidden by the Sharia (Islamic law). Religious authorities disagree with extra punishments such as

honour killing and prohibit it, so the practice of it, is a cultural and not a religious issue. (Muhammad, 2010, Pp. 20-21)

Understanding the role of religion within the Middle Eastern social context is crucial for subverting some inaccurate images of the region. This recalls Mohanty's emphasis on the importance of understanding the social context in question. Within the Palestinian context, it is important to separate the patriarchal cultural practices from Islam, as Islam sometimes is used as a cover to achieve patriarchal agendas. Being aware of the role of religion in people's lives and how it can be manipulated helps to subvert the simplistic Western image of the Middle East and Islam, particularly as a misogynist religion. Therefore, Khalifeh's work aims at subverting such images while reconstructing non-stereotypical female roles since honor crimes as a practice are universal and not peculiar to Palestinian society per se. World Health Organization declares that "there are an estimated 5,000 murders in the name of 'honour' each year worldwide.... These killings occur mainly in parts of the Middle East and South Asia, but also among some migrant communities." (2012, p.2)

The concept of honor is linked to the inheritance process within the Palestinian family. In other words, the preference of a baby boy over a girl is the norm since the male heir would keep the family lineage whereas the female is viewed as a burden. This echoes Canaan who observes that, "The preference for male children who are taken to signify honour and the perception of female children as tokens of burden and shame are common features in Palestinian proverbs." (1931, p.175) This burden of supervising the female honor is clear in Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997) which tries to depict the life of the Palestinian females who are caught between patriarchal traditions and occupation. Several scenes in the novel are devoted to discuss the way women are being treated as symbols that stand for men's reputation and honor.

Thus, any breach of the morality codes that decide the way the female should behave, her blood will be the cost. This means according to the Palestinian male's codes of behaviour that ending the life of the woman proves that the male figure is a man and he is able to preserve his reputation by confiscating the life of the female figure and sucking her blood. By doing this, he preserves the qualities of his manhood. However, Khalifeh's work, for example, *The Inheritance* (1997) allows the female character Zayna to escape her father's attempt to end her life after he discovers her pregnancy outside marriage. When Zayna's father was chasing her, Zayna managed to escape and ran to hide at her grandmother house. This indicates that Zayna is not a passive woman since she manages to reject the destiny that is imposed on her by the male figure and she chooses to escape it.

In addition, *Sunflower* (1980) does not blame Khadra for becoming a prostitute. Khadra is a victim of the patriarchal system of both her father and her first husband who used to beat her every night. Khalifeh's novel does not accuse Khadra of being a prostitute since the novel is concerned with revealing the context and the cultural practices which derive Khadra to resort to prostitution as a final means of survival for an uneducated old woman like her. This is similar to Nuzha's mother in *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) who is forced to become a prostitute under the political situation and occupation at her age, solely for the purpose of feeding her kids. The novel does not accuse the mother of being a prostitute since it tries to reflect on the hard situation in her neighbourhood during the struggle against the occupation. Khalifeh's novels try to assert that the female honor should be approached according to the surrounding cultural and political context if one aims to reach clear conclusions regarding the female honor. In other words, it is important to understand whether the female body/honor is used to satisfy the female lust for sex solely or whether the female body is being sacrificed for the sake of reaching other aims such as, survival and gaining living.

Another cultural practice that is connected to the female honor is the concept of divorce. Khalifeh's novels show that being a divorced woman means that the female is weak, lacking and an easy target/pray for societal criticism. This is clear in *Of Noble Origins* (2009) where Widad's mother warns her daughter that becoming a divorced woman is a sin and a bad reputation for the female. Widad wants to end her engagement, but her mother shouts, "No divorce in our family. Getting divorce means a scandal!"(p.262) The cultural practices devote a great attention to the existence of the male figure in the female's life even if he is a shadowy masculine figure. *Heaven and Earth* (2013) inserts, "A shadow of a man is better than a shadow of a wall." (p.219) This shows that the patriarchal thinking insist that the woman should have a man in her life where this man acts like a wall that surrounds the house for protection from any external factors that may invade the place. Similarly, Khalifeh's novels try to show the great emphasis given to the male as the guardian of the female honor.

The attempts from the female side to breach the masculine assumptions related to her sexuality indicate that Khalifeh's work represents the Palestinian female as a revolutionary character who rejects these practices and refuses to stay passive and silent toward them. This is clear in Widad's case in *Of Noble Origins* (2009) who expresses her desire to get divorce and Sa'diya's in *Sunflower* (1980) who refuses to marry again after her husband passed away and insists that she can live with her children without the need for a man to protect her. Khalifeh's work represents the Palestinian female positively as someone

who knows how the system works, that is, she is not ignorant. Khalifeh's females dare to utter their wishes regardless whether these wishes are fulfilled or not, at least they take the first step towards rejecting the burdens imposed on them regarding their sexualities.

### **2.3.3. The Inheritance is a Male Privilege**

Khalifeh's work, in general, focuses on the injustice practices that prevent women from having their share of social rights just because they are females; thus, they are not entitled, for example, to inherit or have their property. Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997) is devoted to discussing this issue and the cultural assumptions that deny the female her share of the inheritance. Such cultural practices are derived from the myth that the female is supposed to stay at home and the man is responsible for satisfying all her needs, this means that she does not need the inheritance. In addition, the male is supposed to get married and have a family so he needs the money to build a house, and take care of his children, while it is not required of the female to fulfill these obligations. These myths surrounding inheritance justify why men are deemed more worthy of the inheritance than women. In this regard, Butler's theory of Performativity (1990) would help explain the process by which the Palestinian societal norms construct this notion of the superiority of the male in the inheritance. The Palestinian context dictates these norms and justifications, 'performative acts' in Butler's terms, for dealing with the inheritance unjustly and then imposing them on the Palestinian women. Butler<sup>11</sup> demonstrates that these performative acts generate and sustain ideology. Butler claims that to be a subject is to be born into a world in which norms are already acting on you from the very beginning (2004). This includes for example one's gender, name, race, etc. In this sense, gender becomes performative since one's identity is shaped and determined by societal scripts and constraints that the individual is obliged to adhere to. Gender is not something a person chooses to perform, but rather it is something performed on a person. In this sense, the performative act generates and sustains ideology since the myths surrounding inheritance are performed on women without giving them room to choose. The performative act of 'eating the inheritance', the expression people in my social context use, treating it as a hearty meal, not only reflects the existing ideological norms regarding the inheritance but also contributes to the reinforcement and reproduction of those 'eating the inheritance' patriarchal norms by continuing to normalize certain acts and practices related to the inheritance, which Butler

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<sup>11</sup> On Judith Butler's theory of Performativity (1990) check also:  
Butler, Judith. 1988. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." In *Theatre Journal*, 40 (4). Pp.519-531. [Online]. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893> [Accessed June 15, 2022].

terms 'normative acts'. Such normative acts within the Palestinian context function to sustain the patriarchal ideology and perpetuate the subordinate position of women within the society.

Khalifeh's work refutes such patriarchal assumptions about the inheritance since she includes characters that have to play the role of both the father and the mother. Life has its own agenda for each individual regardless of sex so the society cannot assume that the female's life could be easier than the males' then accordingly denies her the right of the inheritance. In addition, the inheritance could be employed as a means for threatening women. That is, the female is threatened, for example, if she does not give birth to a male heir, who would keep the lineage of the family, then she may be denied her right of the inheritance. This is exactly what happens with Futna in *The Inheritance* (1997). Futna becomes a victim for this stereotypical thinking about the inheritance; accordingly, she resorts to artificial means which leads to expose her body/honor to the male figure; in particular, the colonizer to have a male heir to guarantee that she will be worthy of the inheritance. The female figure is a victim of traditions and occupation, in both cases, her honor is being threatened for the sake of winning the inheritance.

*Of Noble Origins* (2009) shows that the older generation of Palestinian females is highly affected by this myth of inheritance. Widad's mother manages to arrange an exchange marriage for both her daughter Widad and her son Waheed. The mother accepts that Widad marries her rich cousin Rashad in return that Waheed marries Rashad's sister, by doing this, the mother believes that both the son and daughter will become rich, "She guaranteed that her daughter will have a lifetime nest with this exchange marriage and at the same time, she guaranteed that her son will get a hearty meal of the inheritance and a perfect marriage." (p.37) It is important to mention that the son Waheed will get married to his cousin who has some physical problems, a speech defect. However, the mother convinces Waheed that this is not a problem since the woman is worthy just because she will give Waheed access to a big share of the inheritance. The female's worth is measured by whether she can allow her husband to inherit a big share of money or not, regardless of her physical appearance or other mental traits. That is to say, the inheritance can affect the woman's chance of finding a lifetime partner within the Palestinian context since it increases the female's chance of getting a good marriage proposal. It is interesting to note that the theme of inheritance is a recurrent one in the Western feminist discourse as well, particularly, in the literary production of the well-known feminist writers Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). In these works, inheritance plays a decisive role in shaping the relationship between the male and female characters along with other factors such as social

status, love, and financial security. In Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Mr. Rochester's proposal to Jane, the female protagonist, is affected by both his affection for her and his desire to guarantee the prosperity of his estate through marriage. This concordance of the themes between the Western and Middle Eastern feminist discourse creates room for women to discover their common grounds as sisters of pain within this patriarchal system on the one hand, and connecting Khalifeh's work to the early feminist waves namely, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> waves where the inheritance laws were questioned, on the other hand.

Widad's mother's decision regarding marrying her daughter to one of her rich cousins is purposeful. According to this, the inheritance will be kept within the circle of the family and it will not reach out to 'strangers'. The inheritance will be kept as a private property within the same family circle. Khalifeh's novels try to demystify these myths about the inheritance by representing Widad as an unhappy wife whose husband does not take care of her and he spends most of his time outside the house. He does not maintain any intimate relationship with her, "She starts thinking about committing suicide ... she starts to realize that her marriage was a commercial deal." (Pp.107-108) In addition, Waheed is not satisfied with his wife's character; since she has problems in reproduction and giving birth. Thus, he decides to join the guerrilla fighters as an escape from his arranged marriage.

Khalifeh's work tries to prove that the inheritance cannot buy happiness when it plays a major role in choosing a lifetime partner. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) asserts that Widad, "remembers her nights with her husband. He slept with her few times and she hardly tasted the feeling of orgasm. One night, he was drunk and he gave her several emotional kisses." (p.305) However, the inheritance could not give Widad the road to a happy marriage. This shows the connected relations between the myths within the Palestinian society to the extent that they appear as a system that is deeply rooted within the mentality of the Palestinian man. The myth about the inheritance could influence the female honor and sexuality. Such a system shows the multi-layered oppression imposed on the Palestinian woman. The patriarchal myths regarding the inheritance prove to be harmful for both the male and the female. Thus, it is important to stop giving privileges to the inheritance at the expense of the individual's feelings and desires.

#### **2.3.4. The Unmarried/Childless Woman is the Fruitless Land**

One of the main themes Khalifeh's work tries to refute is the representations that frequently link the Palestinian female with the land. In other words, the Palestinian female is represented passively as the land that is waiting for the male to liberate, water and plough it. The male is

always the provider of the cure; he is the initiator and all things start from his side and end by his side as well. Khalifeh's work includes certain metaphors that express this stereotypical thinking about the male/female relationship. *Heaven and Earth* (2013) represents the future husband as the rain that makes everything green and alive after it comes. The female character in the novel *Yasmeen* complains about not getting married inserting that she has waited for a long time and no man proposed for her, "they dried up as the water from the river dried up!" (p.131) This represents the future husband as the water which when runs, it recreates life again. The female spends her life waiting for the rain to nourish it. This image recalls the Quranic verse, "Your wives are a tilth for you, so go to your tilth when or how you will, and send (good deeds, or ask Allâh to bestow upon you pious offspring) for your own selves beforehand. And fear Allâh, and know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give good tidings to the believers (O Muhammad SAW)."<sup>12</sup> (The Cow, p.223, Trans., Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhsen Khan). The "tilth" here means, according to Abridge Interpretation of the verse,<sup>13</sup> "Your wives are a place for you to sow your seed: they produce children for you just as the land produces crops." This image emphasizes the male's role as the seed provider, the rain. Interestingly, this image echoes also the Western tradition of considering nature as feminine, which the male owner must take care of. The oldest root of this image came from the Bible, where after creating the elements of nature, God entrusted Adam, the first man, to take care of it. The Bible says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15, New International Version). In this sense, God intended Adam to watch over the earth, allowing men to be the givers of the rain longed for by women. This shows that this image is not peculiar to the Middle Eastern female but to the Western context as well, which, in turn, reveals some universal aspects of the shared experience of women as sisters in this chain of representations, noting that both religions use this rain metaphor to stress the complementary relationship between man and woman, in lieu; of reinforcing the binary opposition between man as superior figure and woman as subordinate, the way the patriarchal system and cultural practices manipulated them. Such

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<sup>12</sup> The Arabic text reads:

﴿بِنِسَائِكُمْ خَزَتْ لَكُمْ فَأَنْتُمْ حَرَّتْكُمْ أَنْتُمْ شَيْئًا وَمَدَّيْمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَعَلِّمُوا أَنْتُمْ مَلَافُهُ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾  
 [البقرة: 223]

The English translation is retrieved from: [https://quranenc.com/en/browse/english\\_hilali\\_khan/2#223](https://quranenc.com/en/browse/english_hilali_khan/2#223)

<sup>13</sup> Abridge explanation of the Quran: A website that provides translations and interpretations of the Holy Quran in different languages: <https://quranenc.com/en/>

analogy aims at subverting the image that Islam is the source of these passive representations of the female, since this rain image as the analysis shows has its roots in the Bible as well.

Moreover, if a woman does not give birth to children then she is like the fruitless land. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) emphasizes this myth when Widad's mother tries to convince her son Waheed to get married after it becomes clear that his first wife is unable to provide him a son. The mother contemplates, "Nothing fills life except children. A woman without kids is a fruitless tree. And a man without kids is like a mosque empty of worshipers. Oh! If he agrees and gets married again" (p.289). The reproduction process plays an important role in the position of the female in the male's life. This fruitless tree, which is the woman in this case, is threatened to be cut down and replaced by another tree that is another woman (co-wife) if she cannot become fruitful, since she is useless and does not arouse the appetite of men. A woman without children is unworthy according to the male patriarchal perspective since the Palestinian context insists that the female should have children, preferably males. Affirming this point, I myself had come to live and experience this cultural norm since my family consists of five daughters and a long-awaited brother. My mom used to repeat that if she did not give birth to my brother, then my father would marry another wife who could bear him a male heir to continue the family lineage. It is interesting for me that my father does not indicate any intention to do so; he always laughs when my mom mentions this. This shows that the pressure of the surrounding context may lead the individual to assume things that may not necessarily happen and continue to live within this feeling. My mother was finally relieved with the birth of my brother in 2008.

More interestingly, when having a child, the woman's individuality is sacrificed since her identity starts to be constructed as a member of a family, as someone's mother, someone's daughter, and someone's wife. According to the traditional naming system within the Palestinian society, the literary critic Khalida Sa'id remarks, "We would reply that this is the wife, the daughter, or the sister of so and so ... .What is the woman? She is the female of the man, the mother, the wife. In short, she is defined in relation to the man, for she has no independent existence. She is being defined in terms of the other and not as an autonomous person." (1991, p.70) Within the Palestinian society, there are four layers of this naming: First, the daughter takes the last name (family name) of her father's side and not her mother's. Second, if a woman gets married, she gives up her family name and starts using her husband's family name. Third, when a woman gives birth to a child, people start calling her by her son's name like (Ahmad: Ahmad's mom), they don't use the daughter's name, they don't say



(Mariam: Mariam's mom). They only call the mother with her first son's name, not her daughter's name. Finally, if happens that the mother does not give birth to a baby son and gets only baby girls, society would insist on using an imaginary name for a baby son to call the mother.

Khalifeh tries to demystify this myth about the fruitless useless female since in her novels, there are characters who manage to survive, become successful and worthy subjects in their lives even without getting married and having children. Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (1997) represents Zayna as a successful figure who manages to establish her name as a successful anthropologist and Nahleh who has her own job abroad to support her family. She is the main financial source that her family depends on to survive. Such females are productive and fruitful in their ways even without having a male partner in their lives. One way that could be useful for the female to refute the myths related to her productivity is empowering herself with means of survival away from the male figure in her life. To enrich her side, the female has to be equipped with survival tools such as, education, profession, etc. which could empower her. The next section will try to reflect on some means of survival for the Palestinian female.

#### **2.4. Killing the Angel in the House as a Means for the Palestinian Female's Survival**

It is important to highlight the solutions Khalifeh's work tries to come up with in an attempt to plant subversive feminist ideas within both the Palestinian society and Palestinian literature. Khalifeh's novels propose some solutions to help women get their emancipation. Such solutions are of two faces: On the one side, they encourage women to have their own space within the Palestinian society and being visible. On the other side, they encourage women to be economically independent and get their own profession as part of the approach related to empowering women's purses highlighted by Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). It is important to mention that Khalifeh's solutions do not indicate the application of the Western feminist frameworks blindly on the Palestinian female; instead, Khalifeh's approach tries to come up with solutions in light of the Palestinian cultural context. In this regard, Khalifeh states:

... De Beauvoir said this is wrong, this is wrong and we have to find a solution in order to become like this. But to go from this position to that position, we have to pass through this passage. I did not know what to do with this *passage*. She did not describe it. And even if she described it for French society, she could not describe it for my own. So I had to find my way by myself. (An interview, 1980)

Khalifeh is aware that the solution to the Palestinian woman question is not the same as that of her Western sister. A solution for this doubly colonized Palestinian subject should take into consideration the unique experiences of Palestinian women in relation to their socio-political context, which is clearly different from the Western context. Again, this recalls Mohanty's (1984) view that the female experience in the North is different from that in the South. The solution would be different, indicating that women are not a coherent homogenous group, but rather a diverse, heterogeneous one. The following sub-sections will attempt to reflect on Khalifeh's work suggested solutions within the Palestinian context.

#### **2.4.1. Financial Independence**

Khalifeh's novels insist on the importance of the financial independence for women. Her novels contain female characters who could survive by having money in their pockets such as, Zayna in *The Inheritance* (1997) and Sa'diya's in *Sunflower* (1980). Khalifeh's novels assert that the female should not sacrifice all her financial efforts for the sake of her family. Every woman should realize her own worth/value and appreciate her own efforts to become an independent woman. Thus, the female should keep her own pocket full and have control over her financial status; otherwise, she has to suffer the patriarchal control. This is clear in *The Inheritance* (1997) where Nahleh is represented as a hard working woman who sacrifices her life for the sake of her family, yet her family never appreciates her efforts in supporting them. Nahleh spends most of her life working in Kuwait just to support her family; thus, she never thinks of establishing her own business, which would guarantee that she will remain financially independent for the rest of her life. Nahleh has to suffer the consequences of this poor planning for her life by becoming a victim, or as she called herself a 'cow', for the cultural practices where she finds herself struggling to find a husband to compensate her lack of financial independence. In this case, having a husband is a profession and carrying out his needs would compensate her for this lack of financial independence, since the husband is supposed to satisfy the financial needs for his wife. Khalifeh's novels insert Nahleh's character as a lesson to alert women that they should keep a room for themselves from the money they gain by their efforts as this money would help them liberate themselves from any controlling systems that may try to oppress them.

Khalifeh's novels insert examples about the effect of poverty on the female's status and how this lack of financial power in the female's life could cut her wings and confine her within her domestic sphere under the patriarchal control. This is clear in Widad's case in *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) where she realizes that she becomes a useless individual whose main

task in this life is to wait passively for her husband until he returns back home even if he is absent for several days. The narrator comments:

She stops feeling her dignity. Is there a dignity for a divorced abandoned woman? What is the value of a woman without education, without a degree? What is the function of a woman without a job, an income, or a profession? Without the ability to take decisions. In addition to these, a belly which makes her movement harder and makes her feel that time stops at the limits of giving birth, breastfeeding, motherhood and taking care of the child. (p.353)

Widad starts to think about ways to end her suffrage such as, committing suicide. This recalls what Woolf's wonders about in her book, "and what effect poverty has on the mind; and what effect wealth has on the mind." (1929, p.21) Lacking the financial independence would derive the female to think about ending her life. Widad realizes that only the financial independence would save her from this passive life. Thus, she starts thinking of launching a hair salon with one of her friends in her neighbourhood; however, her dream evaporates since her friend decides to get married and leaves the town. Widad has to continue her miserable/arranged marriage which Khalifeh's novel represents as a means through which Widad realizes the importance of money to save her from many obstacles. Such emphasize in Khalifeh's novels on the financial empowerment of the female shows that Khalifeh's feminist approach could be linked to the themes of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves where the main concerns for the feminist activists during these waves were the importance of making women financially independent and educating them about their rights. Thus, education will be discussed in the next sub-section.

#### **2.4.2. Education/Conscious Raising**

Khalifeh's work represents education as an important means for women's survival which could pave the road for their emancipation. This is clear in Khalifeh's novels that represent the educated female figure as a daring, strong and influential figure that is capable of expressing herself freely and reflecting on the female's status within the Palestinian society. The female characters in Khalifeh's novels are aware of their rights and they are using this knowledge to challenge the patriarchal system within their society. *Sunflower* (1980) represents Rafif as a hard working educated figure who challenges her male colleagues to have a corner in the newspaper that addresses issues related to women's rights; in lieu, of focusing only on the female body or her domestic duties. In this case, the educated figure Rafif is using her education for the benefit of all women and not only for herself. She is

looking for a collective solution for all women in her society. In addition, *The Inheritance* (1997) represents Zayna as a successful figure who comes to be an independent hard working anthropologist. Zayna in the novel is trying to discover the layers of the patriarchy that exist within the Palestinian society using the knowledge that her education has equipped her with. In this sense, Zayna is employing her education as a means to help in the female's struggle against her patriarchal society since the novel employs Zayna's education/profession as a tool to discuss the patriarchal practices related to the inheritance, the male honor, the occupation, etc.

Education could open the door for the female to think about new perspectives regarding her status and how to de-veil that status/mysterious subject. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) represents Samar as an anthropologist who is trying to reveal the cultural practices against women as part of her education. Samar wants to reflect on the way the female gets married within the Palestinian society through a survey she prepared for that purpose. Samar asks Nuzha to help her in filling out the survey. Samar mentions, "First, I will ask you some traditional questions about your age, your social and financial status, your childhood, and your problems, then I will ask you about the Intifada." (p.85) Samar aims to reveal the obstacles the Palestinian female suffers from. Samar asks, "Did you get married in a traditional way?" (p.88)

Through this conversation with Nuzha, Samar's education enables her to reach fruitful answers about Nuzha's personal life since Nuzha reveals that she was forced to get married with two men after her father passed away and there was an age gap between her who was 27 years old and one of them who was 45 years old. Khalifeh's novels repetition of this female anthropologist figure, in both Zayna and Samar figures, is purposeful since it emphasizes the importance of digging deep into the ordinary individual's life story and knowing its needs, fears, contradictions, wishes and hopes that the individual is aspiring to reach. Khalifeh's novels represent the type of education that makes Palestinian women close to each other, close to people and help in revealing their struggle. Such education is a community based/group education, not an individual focused education. Such a type of education is capable of leading to conscious-raising among women.

It is important to mention that Khalifeh's novels do not exclude the uneducated female figures from the struggle. Her work includes female figures that despite they could not have access to education, they prove that they can manoeuvre within the society based on the knowledge that they have gained from daily life incidents. This is clear in Sa'diya's character who is despite being represented as an uneducated figure, she could surpass the death of her

husband and manages to start working at an Israeli factory. She succeeds in employing her knowledge about life and her experience of living within the Palestinian society to save herself and her family from asking people for money. She employs vocational education as a means to survive with her children in a financially good atmosphere.

In addition, Khadra who falls in the category of the uneducated figure, with the knowledge she has about life and her neighbourhood, could survive under the occupation. Such kind of knowledge saves Khadra when she comes back from her work at an Israeli factory to her city while there is a lockdown. Khadra finds an alternative route and reaches home safely. Furthermore, Khadra helps in guiding the guerrilla fighters to escape the Israeli soldiers chasing them by her knowledge of her neighbourhood. Khalifeh's novels try to demonstrate that each woman has the potential to survive with the knowledge and education she has obtained. That is each woman is trying to survive using her own means, regardless whether this knowledge is academic or practical, much or little, education is capable of pushing the female's journey forward.

Khalifeh's novels show that education is a key factor in her feminist approach, but not the only one. It is not enough for the female to be educated to survive. Other circles should contribute to help enhance the status of the Palestinian female. Khalifeh's work shows that education and knowledge about women's rights should start from small circles that *Of Nobel Origins* (2009) indicates, "The familial system, the educational system, and the manner and political system." (p.364) The change has to be gradual if to liberate the occupied Palestine, it has to start from the family before shifting to the society. Khalifeh's approach stresses on the importance of the female education since this emphasis is derived from her real life experience. Khalifeh's characters are in one way or another herself. Nessa, the PhD scholar at the Department of Arabic at Gauhati University, India, states, "The characters represent what she experiences, what she feels, what she thinks and believes. Her characters, in a way are she. She is them." (2020, p.3262)

Khalifeh wants to reach many Palestinian females as much as she can through her education and her literary production. Her work employs a language that is easy to be understood for all the layers within the Palestinian society, which is the colloquial language not the standard one. Khalifeh's work employs everyday language during the conversations between the characters since the standard language is associated with masculinity which, in turn, represents superiority. Khalifeh reflects on her choice of the colloquial language explaining that she wants the elite and the poor to read her work and understand her feminist approach alike. In addition, the use of the colloquial language could reinforce the characters'

feelings of social belonging and rootedness. Khalifeh's literary production shows that the female's education could be used to refute the myths that are rooted in the cultural practices within the society. Education could be the means that help women refute images such as, the angel in the house and the anxiety of authorship. Thus, education could work when it comes to expressing one's desires and needs.

### **2.4.3. The Third Space**

The twenty first-century is best described as a melting pot in which people all over the world can influence and be influenced by each other simultaneously. However, globalisation and the world becoming a small village result in two opposing poles. On the one hand, there is multiculturalism, which means the coexistence of various cultural groups within the same society. This recalls *The Inheritance* (1997) scenes, particularly Hamdan's scene selling his goods in America where he uses English along with words that reflect the unique Arab culture such as, "This caftan is hand embroidered in Arabia, far away, do you know Arabia? The land of sand and camels, dates and incense, gum and the Quran. Do you know Mecca? (p.12) This scene shows the coexistence of two cultures, thereby reflecting the cultural plurality enjoyed by American society. On the other hand, there is interculturalism, which indicates the blending of one culture into another, which, in turn, could result in identity crisis, fragmentation, and instability. In many post-colonial novels, the reader encounters countless terms related to the 'metaphor of roots' such as roots, routes, rootedness, and rootlessness, during the characters' quest for concordance between their familial roots (history), their new culture, and their life journey (Vančura, 2015). Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), refers to this state of uncertainty where the individual is located, a state of 'in-between' or 'in the middle', further using the notion of 'the third space'. Consequently, the offspring of the migrant, according to Homi Bhabha, will find themselves inhabiting this in-between hybrid space. The uncertainty which usually comes with conflicting societal influences ends up paradoxically in experiencing two states, "a lack of belonging' as well as an excess of belonging. This so called excess ... is a consequence of belonging to and living in too many places at once." (Thompson, 2005, p.123) Said characterised this condition of being caught in-between by 'at least' two cultures as 'contrapuntal' since it 'gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions' (2000, p.186).

Employing this 'third space' in the Middle Eastern feminist scene would be helpful since the Women and Memory Forum, a group in Egypt, explains that the challenges are sharp due to this global context, "identify-ing exclusively with the west means rejecting the

Arab heritage, while rejecting the west and cleaving to 'tradition' means accepting patriarchal structures of subordination and inferiorization." (as cited in Altorki, 1998, p.16) The solution is to reject the Western modernity/tradition division, but how sophisticated the individual has to be to manage this situation. Khalifeh's novels include characters that come to live outside the Palestinian context; thus, it is important to reflect on this concept of 'the third space' from a feminist perspective. Although this theme occupies a marginalized position in Khalifeh's work, it is still worth mentioning here. Khalifeh's later novels, those written after 1996, try to reflect on this idea of 'in-between-ness' in relation to the female quest for emancipation. Khalifeh's novels demonstrate that the Palestinian man is a traditional subject who is obsessed with the cultural norms of his society. This is clear in *The Inheritance* (1997) where Zayna's father wants his daughters to adopt his cultural behaviour/norms. This sense of belonging could serve as an obstacle for the Palestinian woman. In other words, the Palestinian man, despite living outside the Palestinian context, still feels attached to his roots, which is his first place. This attachment, in turn, makes him conservative and traditional. The Palestinian woman is always placed in the first place; however, she should be given the chance to leave this traditional space and find another one, which could give her emancipation.

Khalifeh's work devotes most of the discussion to the first space as the only place where the female is present since this first place is an internal domestic one. By doing this, Khalifeh's novels demonstrate that the Palestinian female is denied access to the second space which represents a liberal space outside Palestine. In this sense, Khalifeh's work depicts the reality which limits the movement of the female within only one traditional space. That is why Zayna in *The Inheritance* (1997) decides to leave the Palestinian society at the end of the novel and go back to the United States where she will be more liberated. Khalifeh's novel indicates that this could be a sign of the female's rejection of the first space. Not all Palestinian women can move to the second space easily since they are controlled by the patriarchal traditions that confine them within one domestic sphere. However, I decided to get out of this traditional space by pursuing my PhD here in Hungary. I am the first female in my village who got the chance to pursue her studies abroad, a step that fed my journey a lot, in terms of getting to know different cultural and ideological perspectives, besides my Palestinian background; I agree that such a step is crucial if to survive in this era of globalization.

Khalifeh's work is trying to encourage the Palestinian female to try different contexts and make her open up to new perspectives. By doing so, she could reach the third

space which could serve as a solution/an escape for the female who does not want to continue to live within the traditional Palestinian society nor wants to abandon her society completely. Such a shift in the place would enable the Palestinian female to make connections with her sisters who share the same oppression and life experience worldwide. The next chapter will be devoted to the analysis of Khalifeh's autobiography and Marjane Satrapi's. Such works could be studied in light of this connection between women as sisters in different parts of the world who get the chance to experience the patriarchal system in different cultural contexts during their lives. Thus, the concept of 'the third space' will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.



## Chapter Three

### **Making Connections between Middle Eastern Writers: Sahar Khalifeh and Marjane Satrapi as ‘Sisters in pain’**

#### **3.1. Autobiography as a Female Genre**

The Middle Eastern female continues to de-veil the patriarchal oppression imposed on her through different means; one of which is writing her life story/life narrative. In other words, she resorts to the expression of the self through writing her life story as a means of talking back against the oppression imposed on her. This chapter aims to discuss two life narratives produced by Middle Eastern female writers; in particular, Palestinian and Iranian female writers in an attempt to make the feminist scene in the Middle East inclusive on the one hand, and draw on the feminist motto ‘sisters in pain’ on the other hand. However, before starting the analysis, it is important to reflect on some critical issues related to life narratives within the global scene and its perception in the East. It is important to mention that autobiography started to flourish in Europe; thus, it is being described as European before it started to be used in the Middle East, “Life-writing became an increasingly popular genre in the Indian sub-continent in the nineteenth century and by the end of the Second World War, a considerable number of auto/biographies had been written by colonised subjects across many other regions of the European empires.” (Gilbert, 2009, p. xi) With this widespread of autobiography, it becomes widely popular among females and it is being employed as a means for rejecting the masculine representation of them.

A number of texts discuss the relationship between autobiography and the female oppression. Smith’s “The Universal Subject, Female Embodiment, and the Consolidation of Autobiography” (1993) reflects on this patriarchal representation of the female. The text reflects on both the feminist theory and cultural studies in the past decade on the one hand, and discusses the way those issues could be related to the study of autobiography on the other hand. Smith highlights the common opposition between the universal male subject which is characterized as: rational, intellectual, public, progressive, unified, etc. and the ‘embodied subjectivity’ of women that is being referred to as: physical, emotional, private, messy and colourful. Smith's primary interest is in how the excluded and colourful subjects have used autobiography as a means of ‘talking back’. Smith views the history of women’s autobiography as one of opposition to, and disruption of, the norms of masculine autobiography. Smith tries to draw a politically progressive version of women’s autobiography wherein, by the late twentieth century, autobiographical acts become

instruments for sharp cultural critique. Smith and Watson go further in “Introduction: Situating Subjectivity in Women’s Autobiographical Practices” (1998) and discuss the themes included in women’s writing and compare them with those prevalent in men’s. The text asserts that women resort to authenticate themselves while males tend to idealize themselves to the heroic level in their narratives. The leading scholar in Francophone and comparative literary studies Françoise Lionnet argues that postcolonial women’s life-writing generally speaking promotes, “the creation of a plural self, one that thrives on ambiguity and multiplicity, on affirmation of differences, not on polarized and polarizing notions of identity.” (1989, p.16) The feminist critics Brodzki and Schenck state that, “Self-definition in relation to significant others, is the most pervasive characteristic of the female autobiography.” (1988, p.8) Women tend to emphasize the personal over the professional and heroic in their writings as Gilmore puts it, “men are autonomous individuals with inflexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that ... place the self at the centre of the drama. Women, by contrast, have flexible ego boundaries, develop a view of the world characterized by relationships ... and therefore represent the self in relation to ‘others.’” (1994, p. xiii)

Accordingly, autobiography gives women Woolf’s room that allows them to talk about their life experiences and share it with others after being captivated and silenced for centuries. This echoes professor Derbel words, “Women’s life narratives are symbolic endeavours to break the wall of silence imposed on them by their historical and cultural heritage.” (2017, p.1) An explanation for the function of the female narrative could be traced in Anderson’s “At the Threshold of the Self: Women and Autobiography” (1986), who believes that the production of actual narrative is not without ideological purposes. When a woman writes about herself, she is clearly engaged in a double process of writing and rewriting the stories already penned up about her as a female, as passive, veiled or hidden. By doing this, that is, by publicizing and de-veiling herself, she is challenging the very act of autobiography itself. A woman does not write about herself; instead, she strives to. In other words, writing for her serves as a double act of self-discovering and self-making. A woman struggles to find a room within which she can create an image of herself not completely outside the roles set for her by her social context. As Anderson puts it, “women’s autobiography is a reaching both toward the possibility of saying ‘I’ and toward a form in which to say it. Writing is a quest, a ‘process’.” (1986, p.65) This female quest aims for social change and opening the door of sharing the pain with other sisters.

### **3.1.1. The Perception of Autobiography in the Middle East**

Since autobiography as a female genre started in the West, this could make the discussion of Middle Eastern female writers and their life writings challenging. In other words, this could create a problem of how to approach the Middle Eastern female using some Western theories on life narratives. Spivak talks about this issue in her well-known text “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988). Spivak does not explicitly make a reference to any feminist theory or theorists in this particular text; however, she does raise concerns about Western frameworks that position the individual subject in Europe and North American as the norm. Spivak highlights the limitations of this highly individualistic subject, suggesting that it cannot be applied unthinkingly as a model in non-Western contexts. In addition, Spivak’s “The political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic” (1989) seems to be cautioning against the unquestioning application of Western feminist frameworks to subaltern women in former colonies. In the same vein, Mohanty in her text “Under Western Eyes” (1984) asserts that Western feminist theories become colonial when they study ‘Third World Woman’ as a monolithic subject regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location. Mohanty asserts, “An analysis of ‘sexual difference’ in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a ... reductive and homogeneous notion of ... ‘third-world difference’- that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries.” (p.335) Accordingly, Middle Eastern female life narratives should be viewed in light of their unique cultural and social contexts.

Such approach could help in identifying the unique characteristics that could be traced between Western and Eastern female’s autobiographies. Janet Gunn argued that ‘Third World autobiography’ “differs in two aspects from mainstream Western autobiography, both males and females. First it involves an unmasking or what I have called a denostalgizing of the past; second, it orients itself toward a liberated society in the future. In the first respect, it is a form of resistance literature; in the second, it is a form of utopian literature.” (1992, p.77) Therefore, this chapter aims at reflecting on the Middle Eastern feminist scene when discussing the genre of autobiography. The chapter aims at providing concrete examples on life narrative works produced by Middle Eastern female writers since some autobiographical theorists such as, George Gusdorf identified autobiography as essentially a “Western male narrative representative of great men, and there was little interest in women’s autobiographies until the end of the seventies.” (1980, p.32) Gusdorf believes that non-Western autobiographical work can only be imitative of what already exists in the West. However, with the rise of the feminist waves, the access of women to education, and the advancement in

the publishing industry, autobiography became very popular in women's writing during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The present chapter aims to discuss some Middle Eastern female autobiographies as a response to Gusdorf's belief that autobiography does not exist outside Western cultures on one hand and to investigate the conventions and traditions that female writers usually adhere to when writing their life stories on the other hand.

It is important to mention that Middle Eastern female writers' exposure to the genre of autobiography and the process of de-veiling themselves have not been an easy quest. According to the Algerian feminist novelist Djébar, even relatively class-privileged and well-educated females have to negotiate 'two absolute rules' of traditional culture: 'one, never talk about yourself: and two, if you must, always do it "anonymously".' As for speaking anonymously, she adds, 'one must never use the first person' since this would become serious for women- it is like appearing in certain contexts without a veil. (1992, p.172) Such autobiographical norms makes the journey of the Middle Eastern female to liberate herself, that is to de-veil herself, more challenging. Moreover, the majority of Middle Eastern female writers tend to avoid discussing issues related to the female body and sexuality since such themes are associated with taboos and should not be discussed in public according to the Middle Eastern cultural norms. This echoes Golley's words, Professor of Literary Theory and Gender and Women's Studies, "Until recently, this shyness about sex and anything to do with it have been a characteristic of Arab women's writings." (2003, p.107) However, Golley claims that a number of brave Middle Eastern women writers have been discussing the issue of sexuality beyond just criticism, that is towards a positive advocacy of women's right to sexual pleasure including, Huda Barakat and Hanan al-Shaikh (Lebanese), Ghada al-Samman (Syrian), and Sahar Khalifeh (Palestinian).

It is important to mention that the discussion of the Middle Eastern female's autobiography is a challenging task since, in some cases; the autobiography is being described as an under-developed area of investigation. Gilbert in her book *Postcolonial Life Writing. Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (2009) asserts, "Palestine and Palestinian life-writing, more specifically, are under-developed fields of inquiry within both Postcolonial and Auto/biography Studies." (p.113) In addition, Golley states, "Although there has been an increasing interest in women's narratives of self generally in Western literary and critical theory, there is an almost complete lack of any theorization of Arab women's autobiographical texts specifically." (p.2003, p. xv) However, there may have been some

positive changes regarding the theoretical aspect in the last twenty years<sup>14</sup>, but this is still a field to be explored. This chapter aims to incorporate some post-colonial and feminist aspects that can bridge this theoretical gap and help in examining the Middle Eastern woman's expressions of the self. The chapter will reflect on the concept of 'sisterhood' since it is important to keep in mind the developments that have occurred in the feminist waves' goals. Golley, apparently advocating the later feminist waves' views, states, "women's oppression cannot be simply measured and compared between cultures or countries, as if all women in a certain culture or country lived under the same conditions regardless of class, education, religious affiliation, or other social factors," (2003, p. xii) whereas Virginia Woolf's thoughts that belong to the first feminist wave do not hold any consideration for geographical borders between women. This is clear in Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1977) where the narrator's declares, "As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world." (p.125) Woolf is little convinced in race or ethnicity as grounds for solidarity, whether among women themselves or between the two genders. Keeping all these critical issues in mind, this chapter aims to investigate two Middle Eastern females' autobiographies in two different contexts namely, Iran and Palestine with an eye on their respective social and cultural contexts in an attempt to approach them as 'sisters in pain'. The discussion will elaborate on the socio-political context of each female and reveal how each female manages to de-veil her life story to the public. However, before starting the comparison, it is important to reflect on the situation within Iranian literature, since the scene in Palestinian literature is highlighted in the previous chapters; the following section will shed light on the Iranian feminist context which could give a hand in understanding the broader frame within which Iranian female writers express themselves.

### **3.1.2. The Feminist Scene within Iranian Literature**

The perception of the feminist movement in Iran is not different from its Middle Eastern sisters' where controversy and reluctance characterize the Iranian response to this phenomenon. Tohidi, an Iranian scholar on gender and women's studies, states that the feminist movement in Iran, "... supposedly Western exported phenomenon is accused of promoting sexual license to penetrate the darol-Islam and the traditional family and thereby

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<sup>14</sup> Some books written on the topic include:

Abdel Nasser, Tahia. 2017. *Literary Autobiography and Arab National Struggles*. Edinburgh University Press.  
Cheurfa, Hiyem. 2023. *Contemporary Arab Women's Life writing and the Politics of Resistance*. Edinburgh University Press.  
Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan. 2007. *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing*. Syracuse University Press.

destroying the internal moral fabric of the entire society.” (2016, p.77) Tohidi sums up all these doubts regarding the feminist movement in the East stating, “Since modernity in Iran and in many other Middle Eastern countries has been associated with Western intrusion, colonialism or imperialism, it has resulted in mixed feelings among many women and men. That is, a fascination with progressive aspects of modernity and strong desire to become modern, yet at the same time, a resentment and resistance against Western domination.” (ibid) The resistance side results in women being prevented from attempting the pen under the control of the patriarchal system which seeks to achieve its political agenda by oppressing women under the veil of nationalism and the motto that the Western feminist movement is a West-toxicating product, whereas the progressive stand gives the political figures in the Middle East the chance to control women by claiming that they aim to enhance the situation of their countries; that is to modernize the state through imposing on women certain laws to achieve their political agenda and appeal to the West as being modernists. For example, in Turkey, Kemal Atatürk advocates the idea of changing women’s traditional roles by encouraging a Western style of clothing for women as a sign of civilization which includes the de-veiling of women. In addition, in Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi follows the footsteps of Atatürk holding the belief that changing the role of women is necessary for transforming the East from an uncivilized place to a progressive one. Pahlavi opens the door for women in certain channels including, education, employment and the mandatory un-veiling in 1936 in an attempt to eliminate what Talattof calls, “a custom impeding women’s social role and to promote a Western lifestyle among women.” (1997, p.533) These leaders are interested in imposing the Western life style on the Middle Eastern woman regardless of what women would have chosen for themselves; thus, in one way or another, both the resistance and progressive advocates reveal that women are still tools in the hands of the patriarchal system.

As a result of such patriarchal control, the harem sphere remains vague and veiled for the West until the nineteenth-century when the Orientalist French painter Henrietta Brown takes on her own the responsibility of depicting the life of the Eastern woman through benefiting from her position as a woman during the Ottoman Empire era. Brown makes two paintings about the Western stereotypical perception of the Middle Eastern woman; that is a victim of the patriarchal society. In this regard, Yeğenoğlu comments, “It is with the assistance of the Western woman (for she is the only ‘foreigner’ allowed to enter into the ‘forbidden zone’) that the mysteries of this inaccessible ‘inner space’ and the ‘essence’ of the Orient secluded in it could be unconcealed; it is she who can remedy the long-lasting lack of the Western subject.” (1998, p.75) However, Brown’s paintings which were presented

through the medium of art to the public enforce the binary opposition between the civilized West and the uncivilized East. Thus, it is important to reflect on the Iranian female reaction to this representation.

The historical events that took place in Iran could be summarized using Povey's outline as follow: "the 1970s which was marked by Westernization and modernization under the secular Pahlavi state; the 1980s, the period of Islamization of the state and society under the Islamic republic; and the period 1990–2001, the period of institutional change, a growing gender consciousness and democracy movement." (2001, p.46) However, the revolution that took place in Iran in 1979 creates a shift in the literary discourse in different mediums. The literary scene in Iran pre and after the revolution does not remain the same. Milani asserts, before the revolution "Classical poems were created as love poems for and about women, who were at the centre of the poetry, an aesthetic object, there to be gazed at." (1992, p.52) However, after the revolution, Iranian women's poetry starts to discuss themes related to gender and sexuality after being captivated for several years within the limits of the traditional Islamic themes which stress the role of women as mothers, wives and martyrs who devote their lives for the sake of the nation. This echoes Hosseini's words, an Iranian scholar, who asserts, "Gender-related themes began to be highlighted in women's literary discourse in Iran during the post-revolutionary movement, after 1979." (2018, p.1) For example, Tahereh Saffarzadeh, one of the most well-known Iranian female poets, stands as a successful model in drawing on the socio-political changes that take place before and after the revolution in Iran and subverting the traditional themes linked with women's identity to more daring and revolutionary roles. Hosseini summarizes Saffarzadeh's new themes stating, "Solitude, alienation, the search for autonomy, anger and confrontation with patriarchal social structures can be considered the common themes." (2018, p.2) In addition, women's writings after the 1979 revolution employ the figurative language and the metaphorical forms heavily to avoid the political patriarchal punishment. This echoes Talattof's words, an Iranian scholar, who states:

Metaphorical forms of literary expression became necessary when the overall strategies of these writers developed to escape censorship and avoid punishment. In their literary language, similes, symbols, and metaphors conveyed the meanings that they were prohibited from expressing directly. Through a process of empathy and personification, these writers constantly spoke of freedom, political change, and revolution ... .These coded signs used metaphors such as night, cold, and darkness and silence to refer to the dictatorial condition, and spring, light, and sunshine to refer to revolution and freedom (1997, p.534).

Iranian women's quest for emancipation is best described as tides that are sometimes calm yet aggressive at other times. In other words, despite the widespread of television, social media, and the internet, their journey is not easy. For example, Shahla Lahiji, the first woman publisher in Iran, published some books about the life of working-class women who lost everything in the war for the sake of their country. In 1985, Lahiji reflects on her journey stating, "During the war years, as a publisher I needed a supply of paper and there was shortage of paper. Paper like all other commodities was rationed. But I worked consistently to create an opportunity for women's voices to be heard. My publishing house became a women's studies institution and many women became active around it." (cited in Povey, 2001, p.48) In addition, Faezeh Hashemi established a newspaper entitled 'Rouznameh Zan' between August 1998-March 1999 for the sake of concentrating not only on women's issues but other various themes to attract male readers. However, Hashemi's newspaper was closed down in 1999 for publishing a cartoon which shows, "a gunman attempting to kill a man and a woman and the male victim appealing to him by saying that 'don't kill me, kill her as she is cheaper.'" (cited in Povey, 2001, p.58) This incident shows that the publishing industry is controlled by the patriarchal system. Shahla Lahiji, a member of Women Journalists Trade Association which was established in 1998 explained, "But in Iran women's writings have been more under scrutiny and censorship than men's writings, because of a moral double standard which applies to women and not necessarily to men. For example within literature, the role of love and lover is acceptable for men and not for women, and therefore, women's literature is constantly under scrutiny and censorship." (cited in Povey, 2001, p.60)

This affects the Iranian female journey of expressing herself in her writing. Farideh Goldin, an Iranian Jewish writer, describes the scene, "There has been an explosion of memoirs by Iranian women writers since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The books are written and published not inside Iran, whose bibliophobic government has killed many writers and their words, but abroad--not in Persian, but in English and French." (2004) accordingly, scholars of Iranian women writers and Iranian autobiographies criticize the "continuous political oppression against freedom of speech and literary expression; they blamed the indirect style of writing in Persian, where speaking of oneself is at best impolite, at worst, vulgar; they blamed the spiritual veiling of women that keeps their voices silenced." (ibid) Thus, this chapter aims to discuss the reaction of two Middle Eastern female writers in relation to their expression of the self against the patriarchal oppression that aims at silencing



them. More specifically, this chapter aims to compare the autobiographies of Sahar Khalifeh's *My Story to My Story* (2018) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000)<sup>15</sup>.

The reasons for this comparison lay, first of all, in the fact that autobiography as a feminine space for de-veiling the self is being marginalized in both respective societies, namely, Palestine and Iran. Goldin asserts, "A decade after the Revolution, scholars of Iranian women writers and Iranian autobiographies called attention to the rarity of autobiographies and even biographies by Iranians and fewer still by Iranian women." (2004) In addition, Gilbert in her book *Postcolonial Life Writing. Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (2009) describes Palestinian life-writings as 'under-developed' areas of study. Such marginalized scene, stresses the need to study, reflect on and publicize the autobiographical work of the Middle Eastern female to up-lift it as a field of study from its current subordinate status. Secondly, this chapter aims at comparing Khalifeh's novel with Satrapi's graphic novel. Apparently, they are different literary forms; however, Derbel in his book *Iranian Women in the Memoir: Comparing Reading Lolita in Tehran and Persepolis (1) and (2)* (2017) states, "as revealed by the literature review, no study has made a comparative investigation between two generically distinct memoirs, that deal thematically with the reality facing Iranian women in post-revolutionary Iran." (p.9)

Drawing on this, the present chapter could make another contribution when addressing the female question in the Middle East since such a pragmatic/strategic connection would help in revealing the oppression imposed on Middle Eastern women as 'sisters in pain'. In this regard, Spivak devised the notion of "Strategic essentialism" (1996) since essentialism is defined as, "the assumption that groups, categories, or classes of objects have one or several defining features exclusive to all members of that category" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998). Such a common experience between Middle Eastern women could unify them, make their voices heard, and refute some inaccurate Western/colonial stereotypes about them. In this sense, Spivak reads the works on the experiences of the subaltern groups in India, whose goal is to rewrite the history of India from a subaltern perspective as "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 1996, p.214), indicating that 'strategic essentialism' could be employed as "a temporary political strategy and not as a universalizing theory or as a universal way of conducting political struggle." (Eide, 2016) Accordingly, this comparative investigation will reveal how two Middle Eastern

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<sup>15</sup> From now on, the researcher will use the term '*The Complete Persepolis*' (2003-2004) which is the English translation of the two parts of *Persepolis* (2000). *The Complete Persepolis* (2003-2004) includes: *The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and *The Story of a Return* (2004).

autobiographical works, different in form, could create a common platform to refute the patriarchal oppression, make women's voices heard, free their bodies from social sanctions and taboos, and shape their identities in a process of renewal and becoming. Finally, as noticed by the literature review, studies that try to connect between the Palestinian and Iranian literary production are rare. Arjestani, Chegini & Gojezadeh in their article "Role of Contemporary Iran and Palestine Poetesses In the Persistence and Resistance Literature" (2021) investigate the role of contemporary Iranian and Palestinian poetesses and they conclude that, "the poetesses, by being influenced by the society circumstances and the consequences of political, social, cultural, etc. themes in their poems, had been able to obtain new experiences and achievements." (p.79) Arjestani, Chegini & Gojezadeh focus their analysis only on poetic texts. Thus, such a literary gap triggers the researcher to take a step forward towards making connections between the females' literary production in the Middle East; in particular, their autobiographical work and their de-veiling of the self. The next sections introduce the autobiographical works of both Khalifeh and Satrapi before start comparing them in an attempt to expand the channel of communication between Palestinian and Iranian women writers as voices from the third world.

### **3.1.3. Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis* (2003-2004)**

Marjane Satrapi who was born in 1969 is an Iranian-born French graphic novelist, cartoonist, illustrator, film director, and children's book author. Her graphic memoir which consists of two parts: *The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and *The Story of a Return* (2004) was originally published in French *Persepolis* (2000), and translated into many languages including: Farisi (2011), Turkish (2009), Hebrew (2005), and Arabic (2001). These are the four main languages of the Middle East. In addition, the graphic memoir was also translated into different Western languages including: Spanish, Romanian, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, and Dutch. The reasons behind choosing Satrapi's graphic memoir for the comparative part lay in the following reasons: First of all, many researches such as, Chikuma & Ben Lazreg comment, "*Persepolis* could be considered the first complete and popular graphic novel about the Middle East, no one artist after could avoid its presence, reject it, or ignore it. Moreover, it clearly helped put the Middle Eastern graphic narrative on the map in the Middle East and in the West." (2017, p.760) Chris and Houssein add, "due to a strict continuous censorship policy, Iran has not produced much in modern forms of comics and graphic narratives since 1979." (2017, p.764) In addition, Begum mentions that Satrapi's work is "claimed by the critics to better serving the purpose than any other wordy novel would have." (2017, p.69)

Thus, *The Complete Persepolis* could help in understanding the scene when it comes to graphic narratives in Iran. Secondly, this graphic memoir is written after the 1979 revolution and it gives insights about the personal life of the protagonist 'Marji'. In this regard, Talattof states, "In these works [produced after the 1979 revolution], women's personal and private experiences become public. Their narratives articulate their protests against sexual oppression and reflect their struggle for identity." (1997, p.531) Thus, Satrapi's work could feed the research with useful insights about the different means Middle Eastern women employ the autobiographical form in finding a room to express themselves and their wishes.

#### **3.1.4. Sahar Khalifeh's *My Story to My Story* (2018)**

Khalifeh narrates her life story in around 400 pages in which she shares some incidents from her personal life which have shaped her personality and made her become the person who she is now. Khalifeh adds a subtitle for her autobiography to become a 'literary autobiography'. Khalifeh narrates some incidents from her private life such as, her family, her marriage, her education, her divorce, etc. along with some scenes where she gives the readers some explanations on her novels beside some incidents that happen with her while writing and publishing them. Khalifeh indicates that her autobiography will have another part. Unfortunately, the second part still does not witness the light, at least, until the time this dissertation is being written. Based on this introduction of both Khalifeh's *My Story to My Story* and Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*, the following sections will highlight some of the similarities/differences between both works and provide examples on the topic/s in question for the validation of the claims made in relation to both works.

### **3.2. A Comparative Analysis: Khalifeh vs. Satrapi**

#### **3.2.1. Representations of the Self through the Narrator**

Khalifeh chooses to narrate her autobiography through dividing it into 47 sections; thus, she chooses titles that reflect the obstacles which affect her life journey as a female such as: 'A Divorcee', 'The Daughters' Mother', 'My Father, the Groom', 'My Father's Bride', 'The Occupation', 'The Escape Decision', 'The Certificate then Employment', 'The Personal is Political', 'Farewell America', etc. In her life chapters, Khalifeh through her narrator 'Sahar' tries to reveal the challenges that face her as a Palestinian woman who comes to live within an occupied tradition-oriented society. In some scenes, Khalifeh makes her narrator Sahar use the first person pronoun 'I' along with the past tense. This could indicate that Khalifeh wants her work to speak for all Palestinian women; instead of focusing only on her individual self.

In this sense, 'I' could serve as 'We' within the feminist context; that is the narrator Sahar is revealing the obstacles that every Palestinian female could suffer from. In addition, Khalifeh starts her autobiography declaring that Sahar becomes a free woman. It is important to mention that Khalifeh manages to get her divorce at the age of 32 after a miserable marriage which results in two daughters. Khalifeh represents her protagonist Sahar as a butterfly who manages to escape one patriarchal closure, which is her marriage. Sahar states, "I came back from the religious court and I was jumping the stairs like a butterfly. I threw myself on the green grass growing under an olive tree in our family's house then I raised my legs up in the air while I was screaming: free, liberated. Finally, I got my freedom." (2018, p.9) Khalifeh represents her narrator Sahar as a bird that is finally released from his cage to hug the blue skies. This scene recalls the images 19<sup>th</sup> century women writers tend to employ in their writings which Gilbert and Gubar discuss in the *Madwoman in the Attic* (2000). In other words, Gilbert and Gubar notice that women's writings were characterized by the extensive use of images of enclosure and escape such as, caves, mirrors, locked cabinets, cages, etc. Khalifeh represents Sahar as a survivor who manages to escape all the patriarchal oppression imposed on her as a Middle Eastern Palestinian female since she is telling her story to the world now as an independent woman. In other words, Sahar narrates her life story as a mature female in her 70s and from an experienced feminist perspective that enables her to view the world with a better understanding than the one she has 30 years ago. At this point, it is important to mention that Khalifeh, in the Preface to her autobiography, encourages women to attempt the pen and pen up their life experiences on the paper. Khalifeh inserts, "literature is neither an invention or a creation, as they claim, nor is it a super-human work that only the elite or those who are gifted with highly linguistic talents, which seem to breathe the very atmosphere of heaven, can practice it, for the novelist is like any other human ... " (p.4). Such a declaration from Khalifeh's side could be linked to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves since Woolf, for example, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) rejects the authority of male figures in the universe such as, Shakespeare and Beethoven and encourages women to write.

On the other hand, Marjane Satrapi chooses to narrate her life story using graphics along with words. Satrapi divides her life story into 38 sections. She chooses titles that refer to her experience as a child living under a religious patriarchal system in Iran on the one hand, and as a teenager living in Vienna on the other hand. Satrapi comes up with titles such as: 'The Veil', 'The Bicycle', 'The Letter', 'The Wine', 'The Cigarette', 'The Passport', 'The Croissant', 'The Return', 'The Wedding', etc. Satrapi chooses to incorporate different voices while narrating her life story such as, her parents, her teachers, her friends etc. Thus, Satrapi

engages her narrator with conversations with each group to reveal the obstacles that she has to undergo in her life as a female. In addition, Satrapi uses the nickname 'Marji' for her narrator along with the present tense; thus, she does not narrate her life story as a reflection on the past the way Khalifeh does; instead, she allows her narrator Marji through the interaction with other characters in the graphic novel, to reveal what she wants to share with the public. Thus, Satrapi, unlike Khalifeh, introduces herself as a child who gives the readers the chance to grow up with her and witness the way her personality/ identity comes to be shaped in relation to her surrounding context. At this point, Satrapi's work could be associated with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> feminist waves that tackle issues related to the female identity and the way the female comes to perform and negotiate the social norms imposed on her. Thus, Judith Butler's ideas about performativity and the individual's behavioural role could be relevant in the discussion related to Marji's quest of shaping her identity.

In addition, Satrapi differs from Khalifeh in the way she de-veils her life to the public. Satrapi employs graphics since she states, "So drawing gives to me the possibility of this sense of saying what I want to say. Also, there are so many things that you can say through images that you cannot say with the writing." (An interview, 2007) Consequently, her drawings enable her to express her life route more comfortably. For example, the first chapter in Satrapi's story, where the protagonist Marji introduces herself to the audience, gives fruitful insights about the purpose behind writing a memoir using graphics. The title of the first part is 'The Veil' (p.7), a costume that is supposed to hide not reveal things yet Satrapi is doing the opposite by introducing her life to the public. Satrapi attempts to transform her life from being veiled under the Iranian Islamic regime to being de-veiled; she is de-veiling herself by her drawings. Moreover, the image of the eye next to the title shows that there is an eye watching her, it is only one eye not two which could symbolize the Iranian Islamic government who imposed the veil on women after the 1979 revolution and who also had the final say in Iran at that time. Thus, women have no choice but to accept this law. This is clear when the main character Marji introduces herself to the readers stating, "And this is a class photo. I am sitting on the far left so you don't see me" (ibid). In her drawings of her classmates, Marji's friends look like copies since they have the same appearance. However, showing only her arm, Satrapi gives the floor to the readers to draw Marji's image since all her classmates look the same; thus, it is not hard for the readers to fill this gap and imagine her shape. This could be the first critic that Satrapi tries to communicate with the audience through her art, a critic about the oppression imposed on women by the Islamic regime which aims to erase any attempt of women to have their own individual freedom and unique

personality. By excluding herself from the class photo as shown in **Figure (1)**, Marji declares that she is not satisfied with the current situation of women in her country Iran; thus, she does not want to belong to this group, she wants to have her own identity.



**Figure 1: The Complete Persepolis (p.7)**

In Judith Butler's terms, Marji is performing subversive roles since she refuses to adhere to the repetitive norms related to the veil within her society. Butler's theory of Performativity (1990) which tackles the behavioural aspects of the characters in real-life situations explains two states: first, if the individual follows the norms which are agreed upon by society, then that individual is performing a repetitive act. In this sense, society stands for the stage where the normative behavioural act takes place. However, when the individual refuses to act out or put on the expected gender roles as they are dictated by the cultural scripts or even challenges them, the performative behaviour shifts from being simply a repetitive act to being a subversive one. This subversive act functions as a means of refusal to adhere to what is called repetitive acts. At this point, the individual moves from the state of being passive to the state of being active. Accordingly, Satrapi mocks the Islamic government's decision of imposing the veil on women in Iran in 1980. Satrapi employs an ironic tone when narrating the way women perceive this law. The protagonist Marji uses a lot of ironic phrases to describe the way the veil becomes a tool in the hands of the girls at school such as, "Ooh! I am the monster of darkness," "It's too hot out," "Give me my veil back" and "You'll have to lick my feet" (ibid). The veil is employed as a tool to have fun at school among the girls. However, Satrapi in her work does not attack the veil as a costume, yet she attacks the way the veil is employed by the Iranian patriarchal government as a tool to control and oppress women. Marji does not stand against the veil but she wants it to be approached

and put on by women as a matter of their free choice not as a matter of imposition for achieving political agendas. This is evident in the different styles of the veil Marji employs in her graphics. Marji distinguishes between the veils worn by those representing the Iranian regime, the powerful figures, and those who oppose this regime. In Marji's graphics, the veil of powerful figures appears as a single, continuous black shroud covering the entire body. In contrast, those who oppose the regime wear the typical two-piece veil, meeting at the shoulders, as illustrated in **Figure (2)**. In another scene, Marji states, “You showed your opposition to the regime by letting a few strands of hair show.” (p.79)



**Figure 2: The Complete Persepolis (p.101)**

These clues from Marji signify her rejection of the way the Iranian government exploits the veil for its political agenda. Therefore, the extended veil can be seen as Marji's way of emphasizing that those in power are symbolically more shielded from the unjust practices of the Iranian regime, while the typical veil symbolizes rebellion to its imposition. Marji communicates this awareness and understanding of the nature of the patriarchal Iranian regime through positioning herself as the full moon indicating her full enlightenment about the false promises made by the Iranian regime. For instance, the Shah claims, “I will make this country the most modern of all time,” (p.31) and Marji comments, “Even worse!” (ibid.) as illustrated in **Figure (3)**.



**Figure (3): The Complete Persepolis (p.31)**

### 3.2.2. Seeds of Feminist Awareness: Sahar and Marji as Victims

Comparing both Sahar and Marji's characters, it is clear that Sahar experiences the patriarchal oppression as an insider within her family while Marji comes to realize it from her surrounding social context as a witness. In other words, Sahar's familial context is unstable compared with Marji's since Khalifeh represents her mother as a victim who spends her life facing the societal criticism for giving birth to eight daughters. Thus, she comes to be known as 'the daughters' mother' which is a bad reputation/name for the female within the Palestinian context. Sahar reflects on this situation stating, "Until these days, the girl still represents disappointment, shame, and a heavy burden that leads only to worries." (p.17) Sahar adds, "The peak of disappointment reaches our mother and us when one of us confirm her femininity by start getting the period, out of her will." (p.19) However, after the long-awaited son arrives, Sahar's family divert all the attention to him and indulge him with all sorts of enjoyment. This spoiled treatment ends her brother's life in a wheelchair after having a car accident while driving too fast. The mother has to spend the rest of her life taking care of him. Sahar's father could not bear this shock; accordingly, he decides to get married again in an attempt to forget this disaster on the one hand, and find a female who would give him a male hire again, on the other hand. At this point, Sahar's mother goes crazy and starts projecting all her sufferings onto her daughters by trying to get rid of them. The mother starts arranging marriages for her six daughters in an attempt to reduce the burden put on her shoulders. These reactions result in Khalifeh's miserable marriage at the age of 18, Khalifeh's marriage lasts for 13 years. Sahar reflects on her relationship with her mother, "My relationship with my



mother hasn't been easy at all. It was full of obstacles, and I still blame her for some relapses that happened to us." (p.17) This image of the defeated oppressed Palestinian female derives Sahar to start thinking about her value as a female within her society. Sahar inserts, "Within this atmosphere, I learned the meaning of my existence and my value in this world. I learned that I belong to a low-value sex that even does not worth lamenting. I also learned that I could be a source of threat since I am perceived as a source of shame and fear." (p.19) Sahar resorts to writing and painting as a room for her to escape this patriarchal atmosphere surrounding her and expand her feminist awareness as an insider who has come to suffer from this patriarchal oppression.

On the other hand, Marji seems to be more comfortable with her familial context. In other words, Marji maintains a stable relationship with her family unlike Sahar. Marji gets all the attention of her parents since she is their only child. Thus, they expose her to reading at an early age. Marji comments, "To enlighten me they bought books" (p.16). This reveals how caring and progressive her parents are. Moreover, it is interesting to mention that Marji tries to enlighten her knowledge about some subaltern groups. Marji despite having a healthy relationship with her parents and not experiencing oppression at the familial level, she is still aware of what is happening with other oppressed groups. Marji inserts "I knew everything about the children of Palestine" and "About the young Vietnamese killed by Americans." (ibid) Such atmosphere gives Marji the floor to expand her knowledge since her childhood witnesses the historical period of the demonstrations against the Iranian regime. However, Marji's parents prevent her from taking part in the demonstrations since they want to keep her safe. This would recall Gilbert and Gubar's ideas (2000) where they note, "It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters." (p.53). Marji could be described as 'the angel in the house'; however, Marji joins the demonstration secretly behind her parents one time with her babysitter. On that day, the government attacks the protesters harshly; thus, they get injured. However, by this shift, Marji becomes the 'monster woman' who performs subversive acts. Such incidents trigger Marji to expand her awareness about the situation in her country. This shows that Marji's feminist awareness in relation to her surrounding atmosphere comes from her experience as an active participant while Sahar's awareness is established from her experience as an oppressed victim; thus, Sahar could be described as the object of the gaze that Satrapi comes to draw in her graphics.

### **3.2.3. Sahar and Marji as Models for the Middle Eastern Female**

Sahar and Marji represent two attempts of surpassing the stereotypical images associated with the Middle Eastern female. In other words, “It is true that for most westerners, even today, the phrase ‘Arab woman’ conjures up heavily veiled, secluded women, whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children, and the other females in the ‘harem’ or immediate kinship circle.” (Hussain, 1984, p.71) Accordingly, Sahar and Marji as female characters try to refute such a stereotypical thinking about the Eastern woman. Starting with Sahar’s character, it is clear that Sahar reflects on some obstacles that she has to undergo as a female before she declares herself a free woman. First of all, Sahar decides to end her miserable marriage that has confiscated 13 years from her life. It is important to mention that Sahar is the one who asks her husband for divorce. In this sense, she is the one who initiates the divorce decision, she starts to become active and refute her image as a Middle Eastern silent woman. Secondly, Sahar has to challenge the cultural norms that place the divorced female in a subordinate position; consequently, she insists on gaining a proper education. Sahar becomes enrolled as a university student at Birzeit University at the age of 32, as a mother for two daughters. Sahar turns a deaf ear to those who try to discourage her even her female friends. Sahar inserts:

The discussion on my higher education continues, the possibility of studying at that age, and whether I will succeed or not goes on: would I be shameful to sit next to students who are in the same age of my daughters? Then, I said that their way of thinking is traditional since in more developed societies, there are hundreds even thousands of those who return back to school at an old age. One of them said: That would happen in Europe and America, but here within this society, what would people say? And you, How would you see yourself in the eyes of your surrounding community? (Pp.155-156)

Despite this discouraging atmosphere, Sahar continues her quest and becomes a university student. She becomes the first middle-aged university student in Palestine with other two of her friends. It is important to mention that the university welcomes her and she does not have any problem with the administration procedures. Sahar tries to break the cultural norms that sometimes associate female acts and behaviour with an age limit.

Moreover, when Khalifeh decides to turn to writing and publishing, she encounters obstacles. Sahar mentions that her friends view her as a dreamer when she informs them about her intentions to start writing novels, “The three young females looked at each other when I mentioned writing novels, since they already know my interests in drawing, singing, learning about music and reading books and novels but writing novels for them is one of Sahar’s

stretches of imagination.” (p.115) In addition, Khalifeh’s early work has to be acknowledged by the masculine pen before its publication. Sahar shares one feedback that she gets on one of her early novels, which is written in Arabic, the head of the Arabic department at her university in his report mentions, “This novel lacks the artistic images and depictions ... it is loaded with curse and bad words beside vulgar language, and her characters are either nationally deviant or from a backward social background.” (p.210) Thus, Khalifeh’s work used to take time to witness the light. Another dilemma is the occupation. For example, when Sahar wants to go back from Amman to Palestine, the occupation confiscates one of her earliest novels. Sahar recalls her interaction with the Israeli soldier at the borders, “He opened one of the notebooks and started to read the paragraphs in which I describe the tanks and the apple’s valley battle.”(p.110) Sahar is afraid that she will end in prison since writing about the political situation in the 90s was considered a criminal act that threatens the security of ‘Israeli’. Sahar tries to distract the soldier’s attention:

I told him that I try to add a realistic touch to the romantic atmosphere as they do in Russian literature. He asked me about the writer who I am trying to imitate and I said ‘War and Peace’ by Tolstoy. He laughed loudly and said Tolstoy! I laughed back challenging him and asked why do you laugh sarcastically? Is it because that I am an Arab female and a housewife so you find Tolstoy is too much for me to read? (ibid)

In this scene, Sahar employs laughter as a feminine means to try to defend herself as a Middle Eastern woman who has the right to use her pen. However, all the obstacles that Sahar faced could not stop her from pursuing her higher education and becoming one of the most important feminist writers within the Palestinian context and the Middle East. Such a journey subverts the images that place the Eastern woman in an inferior position compared with her Western sister.

In the same vein, Satrapi draws herself as a well-educated girl who knows about modes of dressing and famous icons in the West. Marji states, “I put my 1983 Nikes on”, “...And my denim jacket with the Michael Jackson Button, and of course my head scarf” (p.135). Marji also knows famous figures such as, Marie Curie and Fidel Castro. Thus, mixing both the knowledge of different regions and putting the scarf at the same time is purposeful since Satrapi aims to dismantle the binary opposition established between the educated West and the uninformed East. Satrapi portrays herself as a courageous and rebellious woman who can speak and defend her thoughts since her childhood. This is clear in the scene when Marji hits the principal at school since the latter discovers that Marji is wearing a bracelet. Her classmates comment, “Marji hit the principal”, “She is finished!”

(p.147) It is clear that the protagonist is tasting different classes and cultures which is against the Western stereotypical perception of the East. In other words, Marji's knowledge of famous figures and different modes of dressing proves that, "Through her attempt to explore different class systems, Satrapi challenges Western stereotypes of the East." (Basu, 2007, p.3) Satrapi's choice of the veil as a title for her chapter is of double purpose: on the one hand, she de-veils the sufferings of the Iranian women since they are voiceless under the Islamic regime by writing and drawing them. On the other hand, she refutes the stereotypical images, which usually link Middle Eastern women who put on the veil with passivity, backwardness and terrorism, by presenting an opposite model to these images through her brave mother and herself. **Figure (4)** shows Marji (the woman on the left side) in a rebellious position. It becomes clear now that Marji has not experienced the same obstacles that Sahar has done in her quest. This could be an answer for Mohanty who calls upon taking the cultural, political and social differences between groups of women into consideration; in lieu, of approaching them as a homogeneous coherent group. Marji and Sahar show this diverse status among Middle Eastern women.



**Figure 4: The Complete Persepolis (147)**

It is important to mention that in regard to this treatment of the West and East representations, Satrapi draws her parents in a Western style of clothing, her father's beard is shaved and her mother is not wearing the traditional Iranian Islamic dress, or what is known as the chador; instead, she is wearing pants. In addition, Satrapi wants to make her readers optimistic toward enhancing the situation of women in the East. The protagonist Marji talks about her mother and describes her positively since she is brave enough to join the demonstrations that aim at ending the patriarchal Islamic regime. Marji states "At one of the demonstrations, a German journalist took a photo of my mother" Marji adds, "I was really proud of her. Her photo was published in all the European newspapers." (p.9) Satrapi draws

her mother shouting for a better future for women in Iran as shown in **Figure (p.5)**. By this positive representation of her mother as a brave and active Iranian woman, the protagonist subverts the stereotypical images associated with the Middle Eastern woman as being passive and submissive. Marji states, “I had learned that you should always shout louder than your aggressor.” (p.147) It is clear that Satrapi advocates the ideas of the leading post-revolutionary Iranian female writer Muniru Ravanipur who states in an interview, “Life, of course, is not just shouting.” Her life, she adds, “also involves struggle and resistance for the sake of the women of my country. From now on, my heroines will face suffering and struggle as well as good fortune and happiness. Because life is not just suffering.” (1990, p.47) Moreover, Talattof asserts, “Ravanipur adheres to a feminist notion of literature which pleads that women should be portrayed not as helpless victims but, rather, as rebels” (1997, p.547). Thus, Satrapi follows their steps in her treatment of the image of the East stating, “I wrote this book to give the image of Iran that I knew.” She adds, “Anytime I was outside my country and saw pictures of Iran, it was pictures of women in chadors and guys with guns.” (An interview, 2003) Through her graphics, Satrapi tries to subvert such stereotypical images.



**Figure 5: The Complete Persepolis (p.9)**

### **3.3. Feminist Post-colonial Insights in Khalifeh and Satrapi's Work**

#### **3.3.1. The Third Space**

Both Khalifeh and Satrapi experience the third space during their life journey; however, their experience and their reaction to this state of in-betweenness that Homi Bhabha reflects on in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) are different. Khalifeh employs the third space as a means to liberate Sahar from patriarchal oppression on the one hand and as a means to reveal

the rootedness of some Western attitudes towards the East on the other hand. By contrast, Satrapi uses the third space as a means to shape and negotiate Marji's identity on the one hand, and as a tool to correct some misconceptions about both the East and the West on the other hand.

The first time Sahar experiences the third space is when she has to move to Libya to accompany her husband who manages to get a job there. Sahar finds herself in a new cultural context, alone without either her family or a husband to support her. Sahar starts to spend time alone which derives her to look for a job to fill her time while her husband is absent. However, Sahar has to face some challenges since she does not have a Bachelor degree. Sahar reflects on her situation when she asks her husband to help her in getting a job, "I asked him when I got the certificate in printing to help me in finding a job and he mocks me. He said that I am without qualifications and there are no jobs for those who are like me, a woman without a degree, experience or even mind. He turned his back to me laughing." (p.90) At this point, Sahar decides to kill the 'angel in the house'; thus, she decides to join "the centre for training girls in printing, hairdressing and sewing which belongs to the Libyan women's association. It was the first professional decision I ever took in my life." (p.89) It is important to mention that Sahar is not interested in choosing the other domestic traditional roles since she realizes that such roles will not make her survive within this space. Sahar admits that she manages to get the certificate in printing secretly without her husband's knowledge. Sahar informs her husband only when she gets the certificate, a journey that lasts for two months. Finally, Sahar manages to get a job and she is even promoted; thus, she starts to have her own money. This experience in Libya paves the road for her to manage to end her miserable marriage. She becomes an independent woman who can afford to buy the flight tickets for herself and her two daughters and fly away from her prisoner. Thus, the third space in this sense empowers Sahar since she realizes that she does not want to stay in the shadow of her husband as an obedient wife nor she wants to return back to Palestine as a defeated traditional woman. Her job gives her the chance to view life from a different perspective where she becomes aware of her value. Thus, after she returns back to Palestine, Sahar decides to continue her higher education at Birzeit University. Sahar becomes one of the early middle aged women to be admitted to university.

The second shift in Sahar's life takes place when she moves to the United States to pursue her PhD degree. This is the second place where Sahar comes to negotiate her image as a Middle Eastern woman. More specifically, Sahar tries to refute the images that represent Palestinians as terrorists. Sahar used to give some lectures to the university students as part of

her PhD program in the United States. However, during one of her classes, one of the students asks, “Is it true that all Palestinians are terrorists?” (p.386) Sahar replies, “You mean since I am Palestinian, then by default I am a terrorist? And in your opinion, if you please, what is the exact definition of a terrorist, and does it apply to me?” (ibid) Sahar mentions that the student did not answer and moved his eyes away. Thus, Sahar decides to draw a map for the Arab World and demonstrate to the students how this area was considered one unit before the colonial powers divide it into small parts to make it easy for them to control. Despite the fact that Sahar engages the students in a conversation about the topic, they remain passive and do not take her seriously. Sahar reflects on the American life style, “I remembered what one of the American thinkers say about the American people that they are the only nation on this planet that believe everything their government say without any objection. They are controlled by media, large companies, banks and the rhythm of the American life style that makes the individual only care about himself beside money.” (Pp.388-389) Sahar believes that this typical way of thinking could not be changed; thus, she decides to go back to Palestine after she finishes her PhD studies, she prefers Palestine over America, “I left the United States swearing that I will not be back again.” (p.389)

However, it is important to mention that while Khalifeh is trying to refute the stereotypical images associated with the Middle East, she creates a stereotypical image of the West, an image that views it only as a capitalist community devoid of emotions, a too simplistic image that cannot be generalized since social relations and ties exist in the American culture as well. In this sense, Khalifeh appears to misuse the third space as a means that could help her negotiate her identity as a post-colonial subject since she seems to be not open to engaging with various cultural patterns. Sahar did not accept staying between two cultures, American and Palestinian. She did not show any motivation to indulge in American society and establish her identity based on this in-between state. Sahar inserts, “I preferred to return to a gloomy Arab life, under the occupation and practice my role as a national writer, a feminist activist where my roots, memories, and my cause exists.” (p.379) The protagonist Sahar did not take advantage of this third space opportunity to develop and shape her identity based on the mixture of both cultures, a process that could result in a hybrid personality, which is a norm in this era of globalization. Sahar chooses to remain a national subject, which could be a reason to connect Khalifeh’s work with the early 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves, which focused their attention on their restricted Western surroundings compared with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> feminist waves that started to call for making connections between women all over the world

regardless of their geographical location and encourage them to become multinational subjects by influencing and being influenced by one another.

On the other hand, Satrapi's treatment of the third space is more progressive than Khalifeh. For example, after finishing school in Iran, Marji goes to Vienna to pursue her Bachelor degree in Arts. Thus, she finds herself in a new place that is not like her original place at all. At this moment, Marji faces an identity crisis. The protagonist is confused whether to indulge in the new culture, that is a Western one or to keep her Middle Eastern Iranian roots. During this crisis, the protagonist seizes the chance to correct some misconceptions about both the West and the East. First of all, from an Eastern perspective, the West is viewed as the optimal place for living since Marji's father tells his daughter while trying to comfort her at the airport before she leaves to Vienna, "Europe awaits you" (p.156) as Europe is considered the land of opportunities. However, Marji's journey in Vienna is not easy at all since the protagonist suffers from cold, hunger and lack of shelter. Marji contemplates, "I just wanted them to know that I too had suffered" Marji adds, "My life in Vienna was far from easy ... I lived in the street, I spit up blood. I was alone. No one loved me." (p.270) This refutes the assumption that life in the West is easier compared with the East; thus, Satrapi confirms Said's claim that, "There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights..." (1977, p. xiv) Moreover, Satrapi here recalls Spivak's argument (1988) whether it is true that the West is the right place for the Middle Eastern woman to gain her freedom or not by replacing Spivak's white man with the West who is trying to save the Eastern woman (the brown woman) from the Iranian regime, that is the brown man. This reference is clear in Marji's conversation with her neighbour Neda who states, "One day a blond prince with blue eyes will come and take me to his castle," Marji replies, "Oh yeah! Me too!" (p.141)

Satrapi de-veils the Western agenda whose main aim is to take over the profits of the East. Satrapi knows that the Western intervention in the East is covered under the veil that the West is trying to help the East, a third world area, yet deep down it aims at colonizing it. The protagonist contemplates, "You [Reza Shah] just give us the oil and we [the British] will take care of the rest." (p.25) This echoes Edward Said's thoughts regarding the concept of Orientalism who defines it as, "Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the



Orient.” (1977, p.3) Satrapi goes further to correct some misconceptions about Islam. Her protagonist Marji does not stand against Islam, yet she is against the way it is being manipulated and employed to guarantee the patriarchal supremacy within the Iranian community. Regarding her views about the veil, Marji justifies her perspective about choosing to put on the veil or not saying, “I have always thought that if women’s hair posed so many problems, God would certainly have made us bald.” (p.287) Marji adds, “Like all Iranians, I don’t understand Arabic. If praying is talking to God, I prefer to do it in a language that I know. I believe in God, but I speak to him in Persian.” (ibid) Marji believes that one’s relationship with God is a matter of personal choice; it is neither an imposition as the Iranian government employs nor submissiveness as the West understands it.

Marji’s journey of becoming a transnational person is not easy at all. This confusion about which place she finds herself belongs to is best described by her stating, “I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn’t even know anymore why I was living.” (p.275) This identity crisis that Marji suffers from when she moves from Iran to Vienna then back home to Iran again after spending four years in the West allows her to rethink of her identity as an Eastern woman. Marji is confused about the appropriate place for her: Is it the East or the West? Marji’s situation is justified because: On the one hand, her family insists that she should never forget her Iranian roots. Her father addresses her saying, “Don’t ever forget who you are!” Marji replies, “No. I won’t ever forget.” (p.152) In addition, Satrapi’s graphics portrays Marji’s physical appearance in a state of sadness the moment her parents decide that she should leave Iran to Vienna. Marji does not want to be detached from her family, friend and her home land; thus, Marji decides, “The next day I filled a jar with soil from our garden. Iranian soil.” (p.153) This proves her attachment and love for her country despite all the obstacles that are imposed on her as an Iranian female citizen.

However, Marji’s life in Vienna despite being filled with hardships, it opens the door for her to try new things that are different from her own culture. Her exile feeds and shapes her personality by making her more open and daring through experiencing different issues such as, smoking, sexual relations and different modes of dressing. This experience makes her perceive the world from different perspectives and it gives her the opportunity to become the person she wishes to be. However, when she has to return back to her country, Marji stands in front of two routes, either she can be more or less free and give up her Iranian roots, or she can return home at the expense of her freedom and individuality. Marji returns back to Iran, yet she finds it hard to manoeuvre again in Iran after her personality has being established. It is hard for her to adapt to the rules of the patriarchal Islamic regime; thus, she decides to leave

to France this time. Her mother states, “Well, we’re very happy with your decision. You were not made to live here. We Iranians, we’re crushed not only by the government but by the weight of our traditions!” (p.342) Marji decides to leave to France to continue her education in Decorative Arts yet, “The goodbyes were much less painful than ten years before when I embarked for Austria: There was no longer a war, I was no longer a child, my mother didn’t faint ...” (p.344) Marji knows that her grandma is sad for her departure; thus, Satrapi draws her grandma crying in the graphics yet the protagonist Marji states, “... and my grandma was there happily.” (ibid) This all comes to Marji’s wish to be a free woman who resists staying in the shadow as **Figure (6)** shows. Satrapi’s work could be associated with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> feminist waves since Satrapi tackles the issue of shaping the female’s identity as a multinational post-colonial subject unlike Khalifeh who chooses to locate her protagonist within a traditional mono-national context most of the time. This could be attributed to the age at which both Khalifeh and Satrapi are exposed to the West which, in turn, could affect their feminist perceptions, that is whether to remain traditional or indulge themselves in various cultural contexts. In other words, it may be easier for Satrapi to get involved in this diverse post-colonial context since she is exposed to the Western context at an earlier age as a teenager compared with Khalifeh who only gets the chance to experience the Western context at a later age, that is when she starts to be familiarized with the feminist concepts as part of her PhD journey which she starts around her 30s.



**Figure 6: The Complete Persepolis (p.80)**

### **3.3.2. The Female Body and Sexuality**

Comparing Khalifeh and Satrapi’s discussion of female sexuality, it becomes clear that the graphics allow Satrapi to discuss female sexuality more freely compared with Khalifeh. In

other terms, Satrapi's narrator discusses the female sexuality as a participant while Khalifeh's narrator de-veils the female sexuality as a witness only. Khalifeh's autobiography could be described as a text that is still shy to talk about sex. In other words, Satrapi manages to put the female body on the page while Khalifeh does not. This recalls Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) in which Cixous argues, "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display ... Inscribe the breath of the whole woman." (p.880) Thus, the following lines will elaborate on both Khalifeh and Satrapi's representations of the female body.

Starting with Khalifeh's autobiography, it is clear that Sahar barely shares with the readers details about her experience of her body as a female, and even if it happens that she shares some information, this information is not explained in details. For example, Sahar inserts that her mother used to cry whenever one of her six daughters starts getting the menstrual cycle; however, Sahar neither reveals her own experience with this change, when she herself has to shift to this stage nor she de-veils the moment she informs her mother about this change in her life. Moreover, Sahar gets married at an early age, before she turns 18; however, she does not share any detail about her sexual relationship with her husband; despite the fact that her marriage results in two daughters. Sahar mentions that her husband beats her while he is drunk, yet she does not reflect on their relationship as a husband and a wife even though she describes her marriage as being miserable. In addition, Sahar reflects on the female's virginity only as it is a part of the Middle Eastern man's reputation. In other words, during her study at the United States, Sahar used to spend time with an Arab family where the father is an Arab and the mother is American; however, both of their daughters get pregnant at an early age. Sahar witnesses the incident where the father gets mad and wants to end their lives. However, the two daughters survived. Khalifeh through presenting Sahar as a witness to this incident aims to reveal the double standards the Arab man adapts when he finds himself outside his country. That is he wants both to gain money and preserve his daughters' virginity at the same time. Khalifeh's work wants to show that the female experience with her body could be different from one to another, from one geographical region to another, and even from one cultural context to another. Khalifeh admits in her autobiography that she derives the themes in her novel *The Inheritance* (1997) from this incident within that Arab family. By doing this, Khalifeh is still acting as a witness, not a participant who should bring her own body to paper since there is no unified experience of the female body and according to this, each female should de-veil and talk about her body for she is the one who controls this body

and knows more about its hidden details. Thus, each woman should dare to write about her body and not only act as a witness to other female's experiences.

In addition, Sahar reveals that she draws two paintings which she named, 'Behind the walls' and 'A Rebellious'. Sahar mentions that she managed to present them at an exhibition; however, she does not give any details either about the place or the time she revealed them. It is clear from the titles that the paintings communicate messages about Sahar's status as a female living within the Palestinian patriarchal context. Such autobiographical piece of information raises questions like: would Khalifeh still be shy to reveal information about her body if she got the chance to use graphics to narrate her life story? Is painting capable of giving her the space to speak more freely about her life? Does Khalifeh want the readers to draw an image for her based on the information she provides in the text? However, in some cases, the image could limit the individual's thinking to what is seen on the page only and prevents him/her from using his/her imagination to draw the scene as s/he understands and perceives it. Thus, it is important to reflect on Satrapi's work and the way she represents her protagonist Marji in relation to the female sexuality in an attempt to find answers for such questions.

Satrapi tries to encourage other women to speak about their personal life by tackling more daring topics such as, sexual issues; in lieu of discussing traditional themes such as, the family, the role of women, the mother land, etc. Such a shift in Satrapi's graphic memoir recalls again the work of "The Laugh of the Medusa" by Hélène Cixous (1976) who encourages women to write about themselves stating that "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies." (p.875) Apparently, Satrapi is daring enough to discuss issues related to women's sexuality in her conservative country Iran. Thus, the medium of visual graphics here is functional since Satrapi's graphics may help in expressing her ideas about the female body without being punished for writing about an issue that may be considered a taboo under the Islamic regime in Iran. Satrapi uses her graphics to highlight the differences between the Western and the Middle-Eastern woman when it comes to the female body. In this regard, Marji's friend states, "Oh, You're the pure, timid, innocent virgin who does her homework. I am not like that. I've been having sex for five years" (p.185) while Marji contemplates, "I was shocked. In my country, even when you had sex before marriage, you hid it." (ibid) As a result, Marji tries to change her physical appearance after she has grown to a teenager. Marji states, "In short, I was in an ugly stage seemingly without end," (p.192) "As if my natural deformity wasn't enough, I tried a few new haircuts. A little snip of the scissors

on the left.” (p.193) Marji refers to the way the Middle Eastern woman treats her body stating, “Body hair being an obsession of the Oriental woman. I began with hair removal.” (p.277) Marji wants to become a sophisticated woman; thus, she is beautifying according to the criteria of her conservative society. She is trying to adhere to the repetitive cultural norms within her context. However, Marji learns a lesson after grown as a mature woman stating, “I finally understood what my grandmother meant. If I wasn’t comfortable with myself, I would never be comfortable.” (p.200) This is a call from Marji for women to treat their bodies the way they wish, neither according to the government laws nor according to their society’s criteria. This explains why Satrapi wants the veil to be approached as a matter of choice not as a matter of imposition. By choosing what to put on their bodies, women will be satisfied and happy. This echoes Cixous’ views, “To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (1976, p.880). Such insights from Marji’s life and the way she comes to experience her female body within different cultural contexts show that Satrapi’s work touches upon the female body and sexuality in a more detailed way by placing Marji as an active participant in her journey of discovering her body, unlike Khalifeh’s narrator who comes to discuss the female sexuality only as a witness.

### **3.3.3. Feminist Motifs**

Examining Khalifeh and Satrapi’s work, it becomes clear that they share some feminist motifs that employ in their autobiographies as part of their quests to liberate themselves from the patriarchal system oppressing them. This section will highlight some recurrent feminist images in Khalifeh and Satrapi’s life experiences including the prison of marriage, the airport as an escape, etc. Both Sahar and Marji experience life as married women and they represent the institution of marriage as a prison that confiscates their lives. However, the way Sahar and Marji decide to release their selves from this prison is different. The following paragraphs aim to reflect on their struggle within such a patriarchal institution.

Starting with Khalifeh’s work, it is clear that marriage is represented as a prison, an enclosure that has wasted 13 years from the protagonist’s life. In other words, Sahar gets married with her husband in a traditional way where her father comes to know him during his business, who then gets married with her. However, Sahar describes her situation during her marriage as a worm that can only crawls, a subject that is weak and subordinate. In addition, Sahar admits that she experiences the physical violence from her drunken husband twice

during her marriage. During her stay in Libya, her husband goes on gambling every night and when he loses, he returns back home and beats her. Sahar inserts that sometimes she could not defend herself unless the neighbours interfere to save her life. In Spivak's terms, Sahar, in such a situation, becomes the subaltern woman who needs to be saved. Sahar decides to move to her daughters' room to avoid any encounter with her husband. She finds an escape in that room since her husband does not occupy that space. This recalls Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) ideas that emphasize the importance of women having their own rooms and spaces. Sahar continues to reflect on her journey as a married woman who tries to attempt the pen. Sahar mentions that she chooses to stay in her daughters' room to attempt writing novels, Sahar inserts that she starts to write when her husband goes to work and she asks one of her daughter to look from the window and inform her when her father is coming back home; thus, she could have enough time to hide her papers. This practice recalls the attempts of early feminist writers such as, Jane Austen, who used to hide their pieces of writing from the male figures under, for example, the table mat. Sahar becomes afraid that her husband finds her papers and tears them up since he used to destroy her paintings before. All these obstacles Sahar finds herself to undergo while she is still a young female in her 20s makes her marriage a prison for her. Sahar decides to rebel against her prisoner when he threatens to end her life "Either you give me, at least, your half salary or I throw you from this balcony. I said, while I was standing in a distance from him hiding behind the glass door, 'do that so I get rid of my life with you and your face.' Then, I ran to my daughters' room and locked the door so he would not attack me nor beat me again." (p.92) At this point, Sahar decides to fulfil her mother's advice since she used to advise her to end her life with her husband saying, "take him off as you take off your shoes. Don't care, you will get one better than him." (p.11) The mother likens the husband to a pair of shoes that one should replace if she does not feel comfortable with. Finally, Sahar manages to buy the flight tickets for her daughter and she goes back to Palestine after she settled down the divorce decision with her husband. Sahar describes her feeling at the airport, the place that gives her the freedom she has waited for 13 years, "The flight took off, with me and my two daughters, and I saw him waving for us. I felt that I was saying farewell to my prisoner, the one who has silenced me and confiscated my soul. From this moment, I will live with two wings, as a free woman without constraints, tears, or complaints." (p.94) In this scene, the airport functions as an escape for Sahar from her prisoner. Khalifeh through Sahar seems to encourage women to change their place if they do not feel comfortable in their current space.

On the other hand, when examining Satrapi's work, it is clear that Satrapi represents marriage as a prison, similar to Khalifeh's perspective, although it is not as physically perilous as Sahar's situation. Satrapi employs this representation to convey the lesson her protagonist learns throughout her experience as a married woman. In other words, Marji comes to negotiate her identity and refuse to adhere to the societal norms usually placed on the female side or, in Butler's terms the repetitive norms. Marji comes to act as an active participant who reflects on the way marriage could affect and shape her life at the age of 21 and the lessons she has gained from this experience unlike Sahar who narrates her life as a victim that comes to realize that she should end her marriage only after it steals 13 years from her life. It is interesting to mention that Satrapi also draws Marji behind the bars when she contemplates the concept of marriage as **Figure (7)** shows.



**Figure 7: The Complete Persepolis (p.320)**

Marji regrets her decision of getting married with her friend Reza stating, "It required too many compromises." (p.320) During her marriage, Marji realizes that she cannot go further with her husband anymore after two years of marriage since she realizes that their characters are opposite each other. Moreover, Satrapi calls the females to have confidence in their bodies. In other words, Marji admits that she lies to her husband. Reza says, "I love girls in suits", "I don't like rude girls", Marji replies respectively, "That's just my style", and "Oh! I hate them." (p.321) Such behaviour from Marji's side creates a gap for Reza, a gap between the reality and imagination as **Figure (8)** reveals. Marji's behaviour to adhere to the beauty standards that her husband wishes to find in his life partner and ignoring what she has in fact makes their relationship unstable. Interestingly, when Marji discusses her unhappiness marriage with her grandmother, her grandmother uses an image for the husband similar to the one that Sahar's mother employs when she encourages her daughter to get divorced. Marji's grandmother states, "Take your time, think about it and the day you don't want it anymore, you leave him! When a tooth is rotten, you have to pull it out!" (p.336) In this case, the tooth,

metaphorically stands for the husband, in the sense, when he is not good, he should be removed. Finally, Marji decides to end her marriage and start a new chapter in her life; thus, she decides to fly to France to pursue her studies in Decorative Arts. Satrapi draws Marji at the airport as a happy woman who is greeting her parents before she flies to achieve her dreams. Again, the airport here serves as an escape that liberates Marji from the Iranian Islamic patriarchal regime and gives her the space to keep her quest of shaping her identity as a multinational postcolonial subject in progress. Marji continues to enrich her individual experience from both Eastern and Western cultures, her identity is still in progress, a concept which Hall defines as “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” (1990, p.222) Khalifeh and Satrapi’s work come to share some feminist motifs that may impede their quest for emancipation as Middle Eastern women which, in turn, supports the feminist motto ‘sisters in pain’, that is females in different parts of the world may come to experience the same oppression despite being manifested in different shapes and means.

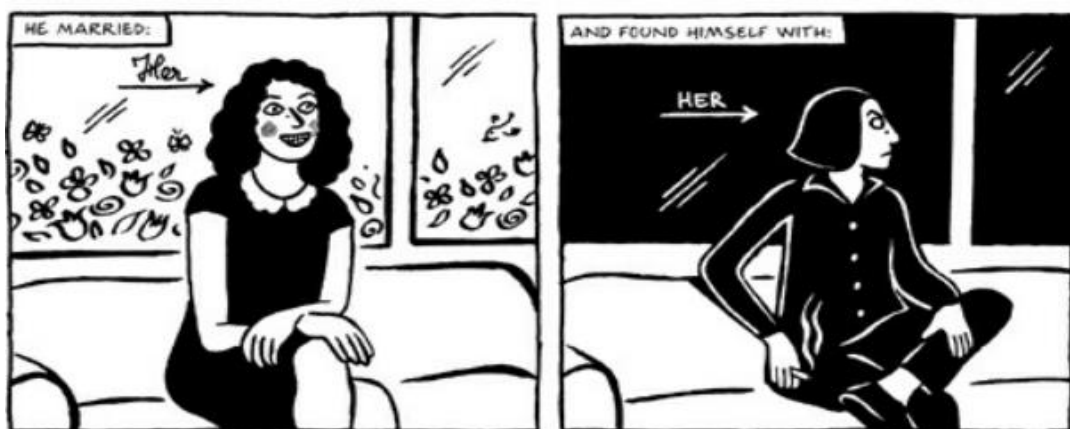


Figure 8: The Complete Persepolis (p.321)

### 3.3.4. Reflections on the Feminist Waves

Khalifeh and Satrapi attempt to de-veil the challenges that Middle Eastern females suffer from under the patriarchal system through narrating their life stories in an autobiographical form. Through their reflections on their life stories, it becomes clear that their works could be read in connection with the four feminist waves and their themes. Khalifeh’s narrative inserts some pieces of information through the protagonist Sahar that could enable this section to argue that her work belongs to some themes discussed in the early feminist waves, namely, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> waves as follows: First of all, Sahar mentions that she does not dare to put her photo as a cover on her early novels since she is afraid that this would affect her literary and



intellectual status as a writer. Sahar inserts that she continues to refuse to use her photo until she has achieved some fame and success within the Palestinian and Middle Eastern literary context. In this sense, Sahar seems to be afraid of attempting the pen and de-veiling her image to the public exactly like early Middle Eastern writers who suffer from what Gilbert and Gubar (2000) refer to as 'the anxiety of authorship', a state in which female writers are afraid to own their literary works. Secondly, during her early attempts of discussing the female status within the Palestinian context, Sahar was accused of diverting the attention from the national struggle against the occupation towards less important topics such as, the female's status. Sahar inserts, "...discussing this subject or this topic is something dangerous since it aims at breaking the national ranks." (p.269) Thus, Sahar is described as 'males' hater, females' spoiler, destroyer of femininity, publisher of atheism' (Pp.405-406). This challenge is connected with the early feminist waves where male writers resort to limit the topics that the female could discuss in her writing, namely domestic issues beside creating a monstrous image for the woman who breaches the male standards.

Khalifeh's work employs some images of enclosures that used to be frequent in the writings of early feminist writers as an attempt to refute and liberate the female from the masculine representation including: marriage, prison, cage, etc. Sahar narrates her life in the narrative form since her surrounding context prevents her from employing painting as a means to share her feminist ideas. This makes her journey harder since she has to challenge her status as a colonized subject as well, who is not allowed to speak for herself. In other words, if Sahar had the chance to use art and employ her paintings as a means to de-veil her ideas, then would she avoid losing her first novel that is confiscated from her at the Israeli borders with Amman? Would art rescue her in such a case from being arrested and ending her life in prison? Such a scene could emphasise the importance of discussing Khalifeh's work in relation to the 1<sup>st</sup> feminist frameworks since females at this early stage struggle hard to gain equal rights with men and have access to the same tools such as, the pen, and the second feminist wave where women aim to produce their literary production and make it public without any masculine constrains for the second feminist wave aims at emphasizing the difference between men and women by creating a unifying image of the feminine.

On the other hand, Satrapi's work could be connected to the later feminist waves, namely the 3<sup>rd</sup> feminist wave which focuses on the differences between women and the 4<sup>th</sup> feminist frameworks which focuses on the performative role and female identity. These ideas become clear from the medium Satrapi chooses to de-veil her life story to the public. Satrapi, through using graphics to reveal the life story of her protagonist Marji, shifts her status from

being the subject to be gazed at to the one who creates that gaze. Satrapi challenges the stereotypical patriarchal representations of the Middle Eastern woman by drawing her protagonist according to her understanding of the role the woman should play. In other words, Satrapi liberates Marji from being a victim that is locked within the patriarchal system to a female that becomes an active individual who starts negotiating issues such as, the female sexuality, the female behaviour and the female identity; instead of, focusing only on images of enclosure. This is clear when Marji reflects on the Iranian scene while her father is driving the car back home after her friends leave Iran to the United States. Marji comments, “Maybe we should leave too” and “So that I can become a taxi driver and you a cleaning lady.” (p.68) Such early reflections from Marji’s side on the behavioural norm of the individual links Satrapi’s work to the 3<sup>rd</sup> feminist wave themes; in particular, Butler’s theory of Performativity (1990) since Butler claims that the societal norms are dictated on the individual from the very beginning and thus, s/he is denied the right to choose which role to play within his/her social context including example, one’s gender, name, race, etc. However, Marji decides to challenge the cultural norms imposed on her. Thus, she decides to put on different roles by trying different outfits and changing her physical appearance which sometimes end in ironic outcomes in an attempt to understand the way gender roles work within the society. In Butler’s views, irony could be employed as a means to criticize the system that oppresses the female.

This awareness and connection of Satrapi’s work to later feminist waves could be linked to the fact that Marji, who comes to be surrounded with a lovely and caring parents since her early childhood, gets the chance to be exposed to the global feminist scene through reading books including *The Second Sex* (1961) by Simone de Beauvoir. Marji reads this book as a teenager unlike Sahar who mentions that she reads the same book and starts to be familiarized more with the global feminist scene only at her 30s, when she becomes a university student at the United States. In addition, Satrapi employs an ironic tone throughout her work to criticize the practices of the Iranian Islamic regime on the one hand, and to subvert the binary opposition between the Western and Middle Eastern woman on the other hand. In this sense, Satrapi’s text becomes performative since the reader besides reading the text; s/he becomes a witness on her life journey. In other words, the graphics gives Satrapi the room to express her ideas as a colonized subject more freely compared to Khalifeh. For example, when talking about the Iranian Shah, Satrapi is successful in drawing him like a snake that stands for the devil which surrounds the whole frame in the graphic similarly like

the Shah who is controlling all of Iran by imposing his laws on the citizens. Marji's mother describes him as "Now that the devil has left" (p.47) as **Figure (9)** shows.



**Figure 9: The Complete Persepolis (p.47)**

The choice of black and white colours when talking about the aggression of the Iranian regime is purposeful since Satrapi's graphics do not aim to terrify the audience nor do they aim to distract their attention by using a lot of vivid colours. For example in **Figure (10)**, when Marji mentions the way the government tortures its opponents, no colours of bloodshed are visible, "They burned him with an iron" (p.55) and "In the end he was cut to pieces." (p.56) Satrapi is concerned with communicating her ideas more than her talents in choosing vivid colours since Hajdu asserts, "Black and white makes [violence] more abstract and more interesting." (2004, p.35) Through this graphic form, Satrapi's work manages to draw the indescribable trauma that she came to witness as a child in Iran, along with an ironic tone. Selecting this form of comics could be functional since it helps achieve the humour effects more effectively, compared to a written work that may make humour sound more serious and formal. In this sense, Satrapi's art could be read as an act of speech, without uttering a word, what Chute refers to as "The visualization of what is invisible" (2008, Pp.93-94). The reader comes to read and see the whole story since this graphic form allows Satrapi to draw everyday life scenes from Iran such as school practices, family gatherings, demonstrations, boyfriend problems, etc. Satrapi reflects on her selection of this form stating, "Graphic novels are not traditional literature, but that does not mean they are second-rate. Images are a way of writing. When you have the talent to be able to write and to draw it seems a shame to choose one. I think it's better to do both." (cited in Davis, 2005, 269) In addition, using comics may open the door for more interpretations since some signs could have different connotative meanings, and thus; be interpreted differently across cultures such as the snake which in the Western culture indicates female temptation, while in the Middle East, it stands for evil and danger, it

is not necessarily connected to women. The graphic form can make the work more accessible and reachable to a wide range of audiences of different backgrounds such as the West. In this regard, Satrapi inserts that her technical choice of this form of graphics assimilates with the Western needs. In other words, Satrapi aims to address the global audience, namely, the West. In her introduction to *The Complete Persepolis*, Satrapi declares this goal clearly, “this old and great civilization has been discussed mostly in connection with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me. I believe that an entire nation should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists.” (p.5) Thus, Satrapi reflects on her choice stating, “I cannot take the idea of a man cut into pieces and just write it,” Satrapi explained. “It would not be anything but cynical. That’s why I drew it. People are not ready to read a book about all the misery of the third world, and I don’t blame them.” (An interview, 2003) Such a technical choice makes the work more accessible across different age groups including, children and adults alike.

On the other hand, Khalifeh’s technical choice of using the narrative-written form to de-veil her life story does not provide a detailed analysis of the scenes of life within her local everyday life context. The reader does not get access to a detailed description of the house where Sahar spends her life, the streets of her neighbourhood, the shops, the universities, etc. Her work could be described as ‘read and image’ compared with Satrapi’s ‘read and see’. However, this could allow the readers to imagine the scene without limiting themselves to a certain set of comics placed within a limited frame on the page, unlike Satrapi whose work is narrated through frames and episodes, limiting the imagination of the reader within certain items on the page. In addition, such items could be associated with symbolic connotations that may make Khalifeh move away from this form since her feminist approach is based on subverting this symbolic system of signs and images that Satrapi’s work includes such as the snake and its connection with the female temptation. In an interview, Khalifeh discusses this issue related to the selection of either the form or content in her works commenting, “They are both important but one should not lose too much time on form” (1980, p.86), while Satrapi considers it a shame to choose between writing and drawing, thus; she chooses both. Khalifeh adds, “There will be always new techniques and new styles. So to think that you will achieve the best technique ever is really funny and misguided. It is dangerous. I think, along the way, if you find a technique and a style that would give your work real balance and importance and influence, you use it. But don’t lose too much time on it.” (1980, p.86) Technically speaking, Khalifeh’s choice to narrate her life story in Arabic, which is functional

in her feminist approach, limits the accessibility of her work worldwide since written texts usually require translations into other languages to reach a wider audience, compared to Satrapi's graphics which may be understood even without translations. This form could indicate that Khalifeh is still writing to be heard within the Middle East, she has not written any novel in English yet. This, in turn, becomes a motivation for the present dissertation; to make her work more popular despite the challenging tasks that I encountered while providing translations for some parts of her novels that still do not have a translation in English yet. In this sense, Khalifeh's selection of the form appears as if she is addressing an Arabic-speaking context only, recalling the focus of the early feminist waves that were accused of being racist by focusing on the white female status only, what is being referred to as 'White feminism'. However, Khalifeh inserts, "So, the themes which the writer of the Third World presents have this sense of internationality, of anti-expolitation, of anti-racism-themes that aim to awaken the human conscience and consciousness." (1980, p.85) Such a difference between the technical choice of the form between Khalifeh and Satrapi allows for a comparative part to take place in this work. However, without using graphics, would Satrapi still dare to reflect on themes related to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> feminist waves? Would she continue discussing issues related to female sexuality, gender roles, and the Iranian regime or she would stop at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist themes as Khalifeh does? Such a conclusion opens the door for further research on this issue and encourages other studies to be conducted on this topic.



**Figure 10: The Complete Persepolis (p.55)**

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The present dissertation aimed at a detailed analysis of Middle Eastern women's writings against the double oppression imposed on them particularly the work of the Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh and Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi. The dissertation is divided into two main parts; the first part tackled the female representation within Palestinian literature, while the second aimed at making connections between Middle Eastern female writings, namely Khalifeh and Satrapi's autobiographies in an attempt to provide insights into women's voices locating within the Middle East. The dissertation attempted to discuss the feminist aspect in their writings from a new perspective, diverging from the commonly employed post-colonial frameworks when approaching Middle Eastern women's writings. The dissertation tried to integrate both post-colonial approaches and feminist frameworks in analysing the selected works, ultimately reaching the following conclusions:

The first chapter which is devoted to the discussion of Palestinian literature and Sahar Khalifeh's work, in particular, demonstrates that women's representation in Arab literature is always penned up with images of patriarchal control that represent women as objects, mothers, or symbols that fit the national and masculine frames of male narratives including concepts such as motherland, fertility, and generosity. Such a situation ends up with Middle Eastern women being doubly colonized, being both third-world subjects and females. Khalifeh's work represents an attempt to subvert this double oppression imposed on Arab women and Palestinians in particular. Khalifeh's work allows the female characters to resort to subversive acts in their behaviour within their social context as a means to refute the stereotypical representations of them as being tradition-based, vulnerable, and passive Middle Eastern, third-world subjects. These subversive acts express women's refusal to adhere to their normative/repetitive roles mainly as obedient wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, etc. Thus, Khalifeh's work instead of representing women as objects and symbols portrays the female characters as subjects, round characters, which develop through the course of the actions in the selected novels while fighting their confinement within their surrounding socially occupied context drawing on means such as having a profession, acquiring knowledge of different spaces and getting a proper education. The female characters do not aspire to become heroines, yet they act as ordinary individuals who do very basic things such as, eating, sleeping, dancing, dreaming, committing mistakes, etc. In light of this, Khalifeh's feminist approach becomes clear, an approach that places women in everyday life situations

as individuals, who are devoid of any patriarchal or national traces, such a realistic representation aims at liberating women from the patriarchal pen/penis.

Furthermore, the dissertation draws on themes from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves to discuss Khalifeh's work as a reaction to this treatment of the female image. The analysis reveals some common images and themes between Western women's writings and Khalifeh's literary production such as the inheritance laws, marriage problems, and the reproduction process. Such connections make it convincing to reflect on Khalifeh's work from a Western feminist framework on the one hand and argue that there is solidarity among women despite being geographically distant from one another, on the other hand. The analysis reveals some connections between Khalifeh's work and Western feminist frameworks namely, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and H  l  ne Cixous's works. The analysis contends that Khalifeh's work mainly insists on the female space and financial independence that Woolf emphasizes in her feminist framework. In other words, all the female characters in the novels discussed strive to become financially independent including, the educated, the widow, the unmarried, etc. The novels show that these female characters could not survive the oppression imposed on them, except with money in their pockets/purse as their main means of killing the angel in the house. In addition, the dissertation discusses some of the myths related to the Palestinian female that Khalifeh's work tries to dismantle and prove as invalid patriarchal myths that exist for the sole purpose of sustaining patriarchy over the female and emphasizing her role as a subordinate subject such as the image of the man as the rain provider and the woman as the passive receiver. The analysis reveals that such myths aim at sustaining the patriarch system and stereotypical image of third-world women. Khalifeh's work tries to demystify those myths by stressing the positive representation that Cixous calls for. Khalifeh's novels reveal that those patriarchal myths are culture-driven practices, which come to 'make the woman', in de Beauvoir's terms, 'to become a woman' and have nothing to do with religion, which is in most cases used as a cover for the patriarchal colonial agenda. This connection between Khalifeh's work and the selected feminist frameworks helps highlight Khalifeh's feminist approach in relation to the global feminist scene and accordingly, includes insights from the Middle Eastern literary production in the discourse on this global feminist movement. The dissertation reveals that Khalifeh's work discusses those feminist themes using colloquial Arabic, along with several literary techniques such as monologues and dialogues that allow her to communicate her feminist views with the readers. However, the dissertation does not extensively elaborate on the use of language because of the limited availability of academic resources that elaborate on the language employed by female writers

within the Middle East region. This could be a call to stimulate further research on the characteristics of language employed by female writers within this region.

The second chapter aimed at covering the comparative aspect of the present dissertation; thus, it tried to make a comparative study of Khalifeh and Satrapi's life stories. The chapter aims to provide an outlook on the feminist scene in the Middle East to avoid falling into the trap of creating a homogenous coherent image of women living in the Middle Eastern region, where the experience of the Middle Eastern female mistakenly being viewed as unified one regardless of the socio-political context. The chapter opens by highlighting the perception of women's life stories in the Middle East, and then it shifts to provide some feminist insights from both Khalifeh and Satrapi's life stories and tries to discuss them in light of some feminist frameworks, including issues related to the female's social context, sexuality, feminist motifs, the narrative forms, etc. The chapter argues that Khalifeh's work could be viewed in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves while Satrapi's work could be connected to the later feminist waves, namely, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> waves. The chapter highlights some connections between the works in question and some Western feminist frameworks such as Judith Butler and Hélène Cixous' works. Through this comparative chapter, the dissertation reveals that Sahar's quest to become a free woman is more complicated compared with Marji's. Sahar has to overcome several obstacles in her quest as a female living within the Palestinian context, Sahar has to surpass her unwelcoming traditional familial atmosphere as a daughter, her miserable marriage, her status as a colonized Palestinian subject living under the Israeli occupation, and her status as a third world woman subject. Sahar's quest is a multi-layered one, whereas Marji has to surpass the patriarchal practices that encounter her as an Iranian subject who is living under the Iranian regime and as a third-world woman/subject living in the Middle East. Sahar's quest contains more thorns in the way compared to Marji's.

This scene paves the road to view Khalifeh's work in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> feminist waves, where the main focus of women was on gaining their very basic rights including, education, voting, freedom of speech, owning property, etc. while Satrapi's work could be linked to the later feminist waves since her familial context supports her which, in turn, allows her to be open to more advanced perspectives and viewpoints regarding the female status such as those later feminist waves which come to negotiate issues related to the female's sexuality and identity. In this detailed investigation of the life stories of both Khalifeh and Satrapi, through their narrators Sahar and Marji respectively, the dissertation manages to reveal the discordant experience of the females living within the Middle East, refuting their representations as a coherent homogenous group who share the same cultural,



political and ideological context. Thus, through narrating their life stories in different literary forms and de-veiling their surrounding socio-political contexts, the chapter shows that Khalifeh and Satrapi, through their pens, created a house of language for themselves, a platform, where they de-veil their unique experiences as females living in the Middle East, and negotiate some stereotypical images related to the way the West views them as weak, passive and backward subjects, since both Sahar and Marji come to interact and manoeuvre within a Western context namely, American and Austrian contexts, resulting in their experience of the in-between, third space of cultural hybridity. Such themes serve as unifying starting points/essentials that could make the Middle Eastern woman's voice loud and powerful, through using language or other forms of expression. The dissertation shows that despite the differences in the narrative form where Khalifeh narrates her life story in a traditional written form while Satrapi uses graphics along with words, both female writers come to share some common feminist motifs on their status as being third-world women subjects indicating the idea that the form may be different, yet the purpose is the same, that is subverting some stereotypes. Spivak's concept of "Strategic essentialism" could be a temporary solution for the Middle Eastern female to de-veil her life story in front of the global feminist scene. In addition, the chapter employs Butler's concepts of normative/subversive acts to reveal the way each female reacts within her social context, which helps in arguing that the female experience within the Middle East is not a coherent one. Thus, the present dissertation encourages further comparative research to be conducted on Middle Eastern women's writing. Such a comparative approach can provide a more in-depth understanding of the feminist scene in different regions within the Middle East in connection to the global feminist scene.

Therefore, the researcher would like to end the present dissertation by recommending some topics for further research based on the ideas raised in the discussion throughout the present dissertation. The researcher encourages further research to be conducted on the analysis of the linguistic features and literary techniques employed by Palestinian women writers, focusing on the unique characteristics of their language. In addition, the researcher recommends carrying out research comparing the portrayal of women and their roles in the narratives of Palestinian women and men writers, with a focus on gender representation. Moreover, the researcher highly recommends investigating the presence and significance of graphic novels within Palestinian literature, (if they exist) since this is still an underdeveloped area of study regarding Palestinian women's writing. Finally, in light of the current Palestinian political context, the researcher suggests comparing Palestinian women's writing

with those of Jewish women, considering the role of occupation in the broader context of women's oppression and seeking insights for potential solutions. Such topics could publicize Palestinian literature in light of the global literary scene besides the present dissertation that the researcher enjoys a lot and finds fruitful at all personal, national, and academic levels.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix No.1

#### The Cover pages

1. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999) cover page.



2. *The Inheritance* (1997) cover page.



## Appendix No.2: The Original texts

The original texts are listed below from each novel according to the same order they appeared in the dissertation.

### 1. *My Story to My Story* (2018)

"عدت ركضا من المحكمة الشرعية. قفزت الدرجات الحجرية وأنا أطيّر مثل فراشة. ارتيمت على عشب أخضر ينبث كالزغب تحت زيتونة خرافية في دار العيلة. ورفعت ساقي في الهواء وأنا أكاد أصرخ بأعلى صوتي: حرة، طليقة. أخيرا تحررت." (ص9)

"... الأدب ليس اختراعا أو خلقا، كما يدعون، ولا عملا خارقا لا تقدر عليه إلا النخبة، أو المصطفون الحائزون قدرات لغوية تكاد لندرتهما وقداستها تكون نفحة من نفحات السماء. فالأديب كأى إنسان..." (ص4)

"... وأظنه ما زال كذلك في هذا الوقت ... فما زالت البنات حتى يومنا هذا تعني الخيبة، ومشروع عار متوقع وعبئا ثقيلا لا يبيج إلا الهم، هم البنات." (ص17)

"وكان الإحباط لدى أُمي ولدينا نحن يصل إلى الذروة حين تؤكد الواحدة منا أنوثتها وتصل إلى البلوغ رغما عنها." (ص19)

"لم تكن علاقتي بأُمي سهلة، فقد كانت مليئة بالمطبات والعثرات. وحتى الآن ما زلت أعتبرها المسؤولة عما أصابني وأصاب عائلتنا من عدد لا بأس به من الانتكاسات والكدمات." (ص17)

"تعلمت في ذلك الجو معنى وجودي وقيمتي في هذا العالم. تعلمت أني من جنس قليل القيمة، عديم النفع، ولا يستحق إلا الرثاء. كما تعلمت أني أحوي كما هائلا من التهديد بسبب جنسي، لأنه عورة، ومصدر خوف وتوعد..." (ص19)

"... بل استمر النقاش عن الدراسة الجامعية وإمكانية دراستي في تلك السن، وهل سأفجح؟ وهل لن أخجل من الجلوس على مقعد كلاسق لمقاعد طلاب في سن ابنتي؟ قلت إن طريقتهم في التفكير تقليدية، ففي مجتمعات أخرى أكثر انفتاحا وتقدما هناك المئات، بل الألوف، ممن عادوا الى الدراسة وهم في عمر متقدم. قالت إحداهن: لكن ذلك في أوروبا وأميركا. أما هنا، في هذا المجتمع، فماذا يقول الناس؟ وأنت، كيف ستريين وضعك في عيون الناس؟" (ص155-156)

"تبادلت الشابات الثلاث النظرات حين ذكرت كتابة الروايات، إذ كن يعرفن هواياتي في الرسم والغناء والموسيقى وقراءة الكتب والروايات. أما كتابة الروايات، فما ذلك شطحة جديدة من شطحات سحر الخيالية؟" (ص155)

"هذه الرواية من القطع المتوسط غير محلاه بالصور والرسوم والزخارف ... ومليئة بالسباب والألفاظ البذيئة والمصطلحات السوقية، وكل شخصياتها إما منحرفة وطنيا وإما من مستوى اجتماعي رديء..." (ص210)

"فتح أحد الدفاتر وأخذ يقرأ الفقرات التي أصف فيها الدبابات ومعركة وادي التفاح، فقلت له إنني أحاول أن أجعل لأجواء الرومانس نفحة واقعية كما يفعلون في الأدب الروسي. سألني عن أي أدب روسي أتكلم، وأي أديب أحاول تقليده، فقلت "الحرب والسلام" لتولستوي. أطلق فهقهة ساخرة، وصاح: تولستوي مرة واحدة! فضحكت أنا وقلت بتحد مصطنع: لماذا تضحك. الأنني امرأة عربية وست بيت تجد تولستوي كثيرا علي؟" (ص110)

"طلبت منه، حين حصلت على شهادة الطباعة، أن يساعدني على إيجاد وظيفة فسخر مني. قال إنني من دون مؤهلات، ولا وظائف لمن هن على شاكلتي من دون شهادة ولا خبرة ولا حتى عقل. وأشاح بظهره وهو يضحك ويتمتم." (ص90)

"في طرف الشارع حيث نسكن مركز تدريب للفتيات لتعليم الطباعة وتسريح الشعر والخياطة تابع لجمعية النساء الليبنيات. وهكذا، اتخذت أول قرار عملي في حياتي." (ص89)

"-أصحيح أن كل الفلسطينيين إرهابيون؟ ...

-تقصد بما أني فلسطينية فأنا إرهابية؟ وما هو، في رأيك، إذا سمحت، التعريف الدقيق لكلمة إرهابي، وهل ينطبق هذا التعريف علي؟" (ص386)

"كما تذكرت ما قاله أحد المفكرين الأميركيين عن أن الأميركيين هم الشعب الوحيد على وجه الأرض الذي يصدق كل ما تقوله حكومته، ويصدق على ما تفعله من دون نقاش. شعب مدجن ومبرمج تتحكم فيه أجهزة الإعلام الحكومية، ونفوذ الشركات والمصارف، ووقع الحياة العملية التي تجعل الفرد ماديا أتانيا..." (ص388-389)

"... حتى غادرت وأنا أقسم ألا أعود إليها ما حييت." (ص389)

"وفضلت العودة إلى حياة عربية كنيية، تحت الاحتلال، وممارسة دوري ككاتبة وطنية، وناشطة نسوية، وحيث جذوري وذكرياتي وأبعاد القضية." (ص379)

"وهربت منه إلى غرفة البنيتين وأغلقت الباب حتى لا يهجم علي ويضربني." (ص92)

"إسليحيه من رجلك ولا يهكم، بتاخدي أحسن من سيد سيده." (ص11)

"وهكذا، طارت الطائرة بنا وأنا أراه من الكوة يلوح لنا، فأحس بأني أزدع سجانتي وكاتم أنفاسي ومزهق روحي، وأني سأعيش منذ اللحظة، بجناحين، حرة طليقة بلا قيود ولا دموع ولا شكوى. حرة طليقة." (ص94)

"تعتبر أن إثارة هذا الموضوع، أو هذه القضية، مسألة في غاية الخطورة، لأنها تعمل على شق الصف الوطني." (ص269)

"ككارهة الرجال، ومفسدة النساء، ومدمرة الأنوثة والرفقة، وناشرة الإفك والإلحاد." (ص405-406)

## 2. *Heaven and Earth* (2013)

- "يللا، على رأي المثل، ظل رجل ولا ظل الحيط." (ص219)

"جفوا من الجو كما جف الماء، صاروا ندره." (ص131)

## 3. *Of Nobel Origins* (2009)

"تستيقظ صباحا وترى البحر والبواخر وتسمع أصوات الصيادين، فتحس برغبة في النزول إلى البحر والهرب إليه. تركب باخرة مع الركاب، تنغمس بين الصيادين ترمي الشباك وتصيد السمك ثم تبيعه وتشتري تذكرة تسافر بها حتى بيروت، حتى قبرص، حتى جهنم، حتى تخلص من ذلك السجن. كان الزواج بمثابة سجن وزوجها بالذات هو السجن تحس أنها عصفورة في قفص وهو الصياد." (ص107)

"سألها بغضب واستفزاز:

-استشرت وداد؟

بهنت الأم وانتبه وحيد فردت بوجوم:

البنيت صغيرة ولا تعرف مصلحتها." (ص43)

"كان قول الناس هو المحور. الناس هم، أي اخوتها وأمها والحارة والجيران. الناس هم، هم يقولون وهي تسمع. هم يطلبون وهي تلبى. هم يأمرن وهي تنفذ." (ص46)

"أمها نهرتها وقالت لها إنه لا يجوز أن تتقوه بمثل ذلك الكلام ... فماذا يقول الناس إذا فسخت؟ يقولون مطلقة منبوذة بلا حياء ولا قيمة؟" (ص101)

"... لأن المطبخ وفرم السكين شغل النسوان. أما شغل الرجل فهو المكتب وعمل الميناء وركوب البحر وحرث الأرض وبناء الدور وما شابه." (ص162)

"وفي يوم ما حلف عليها إن هي خرجت ألا تكون على ذمته حين ترجع. فتحت الباب وقالت بعناد:

-لا أنا خارجة." (ص15)

"وأخذت تردد كالمسحورة: معقول فيه حب زي السينما؟ معقول فيه حب؟" (ص190)

"ألا طلاق في عيلتنا. طلاق البنات يعني فضيحة." (ص262)

"تكون قد ضمننت لابنتها عشا رساخا بزواج البديل، وضمننت لابنها أدم ميراث وأرقى زيجة." (ص37)

"بدأت تفكر بالانتحار... وهي تعلم أن ذلك الزواج ليس زواجا بل هو صفقة." (ص107-108)

"ولومضة خاطفة تذكرت نومها معها. بضع مرات نام معها وأذاقها طعم الرعشة. وفي ليلة ما، وكان سكران وبلا وعيه، قبلها قبلاات محمومة فشعرت بالحب." (ص305)

"... لا شيء يملأ الحياة ويعمرها إلا الأولاد. امرأة عاقر بلا أولاد مثل الشجرة من غير ثمر. ورجل بلا ولد يملأ دنياه مثل الجامع بدون مصلين. لو يسمع منها ويتزوج." (ص289)



"... ما عادت تحس بكرامتها. أية كرامة لامرأة مطلقة مهجورة؟ أية كرامة لامرأة بدون علم، بدون شهادة؟ أية كرامة لامرأة بدون عمل، بدون دخل، بدون وظيفة؟ بدون القدرة على اتخاذ قرار. وفوق ذلك كله، بطن يعيق حركتها ويلبدها ويبلدها، ويجعلها تحس أن الزمن توقف عند حدود الولادة والرضاعة ورعاية الطفل والأمومة." (ص353)

"نظام العيلة، نظام التعليم، نظام الأخلاق والسياسة." (ص364)

#### 4. *The Image, The Icon and The Covenant* (2006)

"وكيف الأمور؟ تمام التمام؟ والله شاطر! وأنا اللي فاكرك ما بتفهم إلا بالكتاب! خذ يا سيدي، فرجيني شطارتك وتشطر. خليك قبضاي. بكره نجوزك ونفتح لك هناك أكبر مشروع." (ص65)

"هربت من الجو ومن عقلي وخرجت الى السطح لأتنفس فسمعت صياحا لامرأة تصرخ في الليل "منشان الله!" اقشعر بدني من ذلك الصوت لأنه مصحوب بلطم وعويل وعواء بعيد لكلب ضال ينبق كاليوم." (ص138)

"أكيد سكينه المفعولة بتاكل قتلة. بس انشا الله ما يطلقته." (ص138)

"قاعدة تسولف عند الجيران وخلت الولد يسوق الباص. هيك النسوان، هيك عادتهم. هم يخزقوا واحنا نرقع." (ص139)

"سأله "أزوجك؟" قال الآخر "ألدك عروس؟" قال الوالد "بنت مليحة، كبيرة شوية، 35، لكن ناضجة وتتفع أولادك وتقوم بك لأنها ما شاء الله، من جميعه، حلوة وبنت ناس ومحترمة، ست بيت وخياطة وطباخة على كيف كيفك." قال الآخر "وبتاخدني؟ عندي أولاد زي العفاريبت." قال الوالد وهو بيتسم "وهي عفريته على كيف كيفك." ... قال الوالد، على التلفون، "كبرت يا سارة، عندك بديل؟" سكتت سارة ثم همست "على 3 أولاد؟" (ص32-33)

"والله النسوان أكبر لعنة. لا عندهم عقل ولا عندهم فهم ولا عندهم دين. الواحد منا اذا الله غضب عليه وبعث له بنت يدفنها ويخلص من همها." (ص135)

"ما من وراهم غير الهم. خمس بنات يا جماعة الخير، خمس بنات. ليش أ، شو عملت؟ بصلي وبصوم وبعبد الله والسنة حجيت ودعيت كثير، طول ما أنا في الحج أنا أدعي ولما رجعت لاقوني بزفة وخبر الشؤم وقالوا مبروك جابت لك بنت." (ص136)

#### 5. *The Door of the Courtyard* (1999)

"كانوا إذا حضر الوالد يصطفون على الدرج مثل صغار العساكر، الكبرى فالأصغر فالأصغر، وحسام طبعا في ذيل الصف. وتقول الكبرى برهبة: "مسا الخير بابا." (ص51)

"لكنه حين يشتري أغراض البيت ينقي أسوأ ما في السوق. فالخيار مكعبل مثل البطاطا، والبادنجان يكاد يكون مطبوخا، والكوسا مبذر مثل القرع، ... فمن المعروف انه قد حلف عليها بالطلاق ثلاثا ألا تصل الدوار وألا تمشي في السوق التجارية والبلد القديمة ... ثم تقول بخشوع يكاد يبلغ حد الدعاء: "أبو عزام، الله يخليك، جوز جرابات، فيرفع حاجبيه المنفوشين ويهتف عجا: جوز جرابات؟ وبين راحوا كل جراباتك؟" (ص49-50)

"قال له ادرس الهندسة أو الطب فدرس الفلسفة والتاريخ. قال له ادرس بره، شهادات الخارج مرموقة، فدرس هنا في جامعة النجاح. وبعد اعتقاله أول مرة قال له اخرج بره، اذهب لأمریکا أو لندن ولك عندي أن أبيع نمره جديدة وأحولها لحسابك في الخارج. فقال له: حولها لأعمامي أصحاب الحق أو عوض أختك بدل حصتها المأكولة." (ص48)

"كان يزهدنا عيشتنا وعامل علينا شيخ المشايخ. ويا ريتيه هو الثاني كان منظوم! كان داير وداشر وبشتغل بإسرائيل ويجيب معاه بنات ويقعدوا في الحاكورة يحششوا لحد الصباح. يعني كان يعمل السبعة وزمتها ويرجع يتشاطر علينا." (ص95)

"- هل كانت طفولتك سعيدة أم شقية؟

- اذا قلت لك سعيدة بكون كذابة واذا قلت لك تعيسة بكون كذابة. بس أخوي الكبير كان دائما يضر بني.

- أخوك اللي بأمریکا.

- هو، ما غيره.

- وليش كان يضر بك؟

- كان يقول عني وقحة وقليلة تربية.



ليش كان يقول عنك هيك؟

-من غيرته. كنت حلوة وسنيورة وزى القمر، وما حدا يشوفني إلا تشط ريالته." (ص94)

"وأخذ يلطمها دون وعي، على وجهها. وعلى رأسها، على ظهرها" (ص136)

"... وهذا القرف من كل شيء، منه ومن أمها ومن أخيها الأصغر الذي وقف يتفرج دون أن يمد يده أو يقول كلمة. ونسي ما بينهما من أسرار وأفكار. تعطيه الكتب لكي يقرأ، تشغلت الصوف لكي يلبس، وتساعدته في ترجمة النصوص. أخوها الأصغر يتفرج، وأخوها الأكبر يتصارع مع عضلاته." (ص136)

"... معقول الشوكة تخلف وردة؟" (ص29)

"مين اللي كشف حالها وتسبب بقتلها" (ص27)

"مش عشان الغولة، عشان أحمد." (ص222)

"وسمعت صوت أواني المطبخ. وقفت في الباب تتأمل أمها أمام المجلى تجلي الصحن. وكانت تقف على رجل واحدة وقد رفعت الأخرى لترتاح. وأحست بالألم وتذكرت أنها تركتها طوال تلك المدة لتقوم وحدها بأعباء الدار. فالأخوة لا يحركون ساكنا إلا إذا مدوا أيديهم للأكل أو لعب الورق. وكم ناقشتهم، بلا فائدة. فهذا يكشر، وهذا يسخر، وذاك يحيل الموقف نكتة تنتهي بقيامها من الجلسة والاختباء على السطح خلف القباب." (ص131)

"- أمك جوزتك؟

-بعد ما مات أبوي وصرنا عالارض البيضاء جوزتنا لكل من هب ودب. زورت فينا المرة وقردفتنا بقرد ودب.

يمكن من الفقر ...

-مش بس الفقر، والتيااسة بعيد عنك. ما تعلمتش من اللي صار فيها، راحت رمتنا كل وحدة بوقعة أسخم من الثانية. أختي صبيحة جوزتها على ضرة، وأختي أمنة جوزتها لواحد حيوان معبدها العجل، وأنا لواحد كبير وبيهيم." (ص89-90)

"اصح يا شاطر، أنا لست الأم ولست الأرض ولست الرمز. أنا إنسانة، أكل أشرب أحلم أخطيء أضيع أموج وأتعذب وأناجي الريح. أنا لست الرمز، أنا المرأة." (ص176)

"... فهل للمرأة مملكة إلا بيتها، وهل من تاج لرأسها إلا زوجها؟" (ص161)

"افتحي يا نزهة، أنا حسام... ودخل حسام ليختبئ في دار سكينه... وقال بلهجة أمرة: "ساعديني". (ص67)

"قالت سمر بحماس واندفاع:

-أول شيء رح أسألك الأسئلة التقليدية عن عمرك ووضعك الاجتماعي والاقتصادي وطفولتك ومشاكلك وبعدين نحكي عن الانتفاضة." (ص85)

"لأ لأ. قصدي كيف تجوزت يعني هل كان زواجك زواجا تقليديا؟" (ص88)

## 6. The Inheritance (1997)

"كان يتكلم الانجليزية بصعوبة، لكنه استطاع أن يتدبر أمره بفهلوة شرق أوسطية. كان يعرض حاجياته من الألبسة البراقة والمشابك والخيطان ويقول لست البيت الأمريكية: شوفي يا ليدي ما أحلاه! هذا القطن مشغول بالأيد بأربيبا هناك، بتعرفي أربيبا؟ صحرا وجمال وتمر وخبور ومسكة وقرآن. بتعرفي مكة؟" (ص12)

"شو عم نستنى يا اخوان؟ ما شبعنا من أميركا وقرف أميركا؟ كلنا عندنا أولاد وبنات، يعني بدكم بناتكم يطلعوا فلتانات زي بنات أميركا؟ بدكم تحافظوا على بناتكم نظاف لطف و تربوهم تربية محترمة وتجوزوهم جيزة محترمة." (ص16)

"-ممر للحياة الأخرة عند النبي وأصحابه والمؤمنين والمؤمنات والطاهرين والطاهرات.

-عظيم يا بنتي، عظيم، عظيم، الله يحميك من الدنيا ويسهل طريقك ويفرشها بالنوايا الطيبة والحسنات. تعالي جنبني وخدي هالحة، ديرى بالك عالمزة وواعك العرق ينكب. مالك يا بنتي؟ ايش مالك؟" (ص20)

"بلا قلة عقل، بعد هالعمر وهالشيب واللي شفناه وتحملناه عشان الأرض، أبيعها بالسوق؟ الموت يسبق. طول ما أنا عايش على وجه الأرض ممنوع تتباع. هالبيرة أبدا عن جد كانت النا، لعيلة حمدان، واللي يبيعها رح أغضب عليه، روي من القبر رح تلعنكم اذا بعتوها" (ص121)

"أنت فاهمة أنه مازن داخ فيهما، داخ فيهم. هناك بيروح يسكر ويخمر وياكل ويتنيز عالآخر." (ص69)

"... مازن بيحب كل النسوان، هيك طبيعته. مازن ما بيقدّر يتنازل عن حريته ولا لك أنت. كل واحدة حلوة وذكية لازم يحبها وهي تحبه، وبيضل يركض وراها لحد ما توقع. ولما توقع بيركض وييجري وييهرب منها ... " (ص134)

"وبالأول كانوا يعوزوني وبيعثوا لي رسائل وتلفونات: أختي حبيبتني، أختي روعي، أختي عيوني، أنت ست الكل وست الفهم وست الناس، أنت نهلة، أحلى نهلة أحسن نهلة، بالله أنا متضايق بدي قرشين. طيب يا خوي، خدلك قرشين." (ص70-71)

"حركت رأسي ثانية وأنا أتأملها وهي تتألمني. لم تعجبني، لكني لسبب لا أفهمه أشفتت عليها" (ص55)

"بس أنت بنت..."

-لولا النصيب كان عوضته وجبت لكم ولد...

-الولد بيحب الميراث، من غير ولد عمك بيورث. فاهمة شو بقول؟" (ص61)

"لكنها في نظر الأم شاطرة وفصيحة لأنها تزوجت الوالد و أمّنت حياتها حتى الموت." (ص87)

"... ما عملت اشي يزعل الله. كلها عملية عملها الدكتور في المستشفى وهو لابس كفوف وكمامة ومعه ممرضة." (ص90)

"صحيح للولد ضعف البنات، بس أنت كمان نصيبك محفوظ.

هزرت رأسي بدون تعليق، ومشيت نحو الطيارة." (ص317)

"إلى الحفيدة الصغيرة

سحر الديسي

عساها تكتشف الميراث ... " (ص7)

"... يا ألهي العظيم! ما حل بأمركا والأميركان! ماذا حل بنا نحن؟" ...

وكانت "نحن" تؤلمني، فما معنى نحن؟ ومن نحن؟ نحن الأميركان؟ أنا لست أميركية. "من أنت إذن؟" ... لم أقل عربية لأنني لست كذلك. من أنا إذن؟ بالرغم من جنسية أُمّي، شهادة ميلادي، شهادة مدرستي، كُتبي، لهجتي، ملابسي، وكل حياتي، لست أميركية حقاً. وفي الأعماق، لست أميركية حقاً. تلك الأعماق المسكونة بروى وصور، بمواويل شوق تلوح كنفح النسيم، عبير البنفسج، شذى الذكريات، وتترك في القلب ذوب عسل." (ص27-28)

"-أنا بدي بناتي يطلعوا عرب، خفاف نظاف زي الشمعة.

... ثم تعقبني في الشارع وفي يده أطول سكين، وكنت في الخامسة عشرة." (ص17)

"... خلص اعتبريها ماتت. لازم تدفع ثمن غلظتها، لازم أغسل عاري وعارها ... وفي مثل تلك الحالات التي قلما كانت تصيبه كان يصبح أشبه بوحش كاسر، بدون عقل أو إدراك. لم يعد أبي الذي أعرفه، بل بات رجلاً غريباً تماماً." (ص23)

"اهدأ يا حج ... زينب باقية هون وأنت روح لجماعتك وبلغهم أنك دبحتها أنك رجال." (ص25)

"كان الخريف في آخره وأوراق الشجر تتساقط." (ص25)

"-سامحني، بابا، سامحني." (ص25)

"... ماتت أُمّي فورثت أنا. باتت لدي شقتان إحداهما في واشنطن، والأخرى في سان دييغو. صارت لدي سيارتان وأحضر حفلات اليخوت ..." (ص30)

"عجلي قبل أن ينقطع الخيط ويسقط حَقك في اليراث." (ص43)

"وبقي يحدق إلي بضع لحظات وكأنه يحاول اكتشاف ما إذا كنت - كأنتي أيضاً- أستحق كل ذلك الميراث." (ص52)

"... وصحيت ولقيتني ختيرة بلا جوز ولا بيت ولا مين يناديني يا ماما." (ص71)

"... وأنا في الكويت زي البقرة أحلب وأعلم وأربي وهم دايرين ومش ساتلين." (ص70)

"... أنا مش معتادة أقعد في الدار، طول عمري يشتغل ويتحرك، وهلقيت ألقى حالي هيك قاعدة بلا شغلة ولا عمله الا المسح والقش والغسيل وعمل المخمل والمكدوس؟! انا رح أطق، أنا رح أموت. بعم هالعمر وكل السنين أقعد في الدار مثل النسوان؟" (ص117)

"... ويقول أبوها: "وين راحت نهلة"، وين متخبية؟" وتظل مختبئة في غرفتها أمام المرأة تشلح وتلبس وتلعب رياضة لكي تنحف، ... ثم بدأت تكتب، تكتب مذكراتها، وأحيانا قصائد لا تكملها. تبدأ بكتابة صفحة ثم أخرى ثم أخرى ثم تتوقف ولا تعرف كيف تكمل ولا ماذا تقول." (ص95)

"جلست نهلة أمام المرأة وبدأت تدعك بشرتها بالكريمات وبزيوت أحضرتها من عند العطار في نابلس." (ص96)

"... عانس؟ عانس؟ كلمة مسطحة سقيمة لهموم فردية محدودة وإمرأة بور، والمرأة البور كالأرض البور غير مثيرة، لا تنثير الفكر والقريحة. وكذا المرأة من غير مطر." (ص66)

"بضاعتها كسدانة" (ص147)

" ألم تجد في هذا الكون مكانا للحب إلا الحمام؟ أمام المرحاض؟! " (ص200)

" افتحي يا عايبة يا بنت الكلب، وهي تصرخ من خلف الباب: "اخرج بره، والله لأناديلك البوليس". لكنها كانت تعرف، وهو يعرف، ألا شرطة وألا بوليس، فالبلد فوضى بدون حكم وحكومة وبدون رقيب. ... "بهذي، بهذي، شايقة هذي؟ شو مفكرة حالها بدون رجال؟" (ص163)

"-آه مش جوزي؟ حتى لو راح وهرب بجلده، برضه جوزي، أنا مش مرتته؟ والمره لازم تصبر عالمر وتتحمل. ...

-على آخر عمري أطلق؟ ايش رح يقولوا الناس عني؟ بدك يقولوا مفصوحة؟ بدك يقولوا تجوزته عشان الورثة؟ أو بدك يقولوا تجوزته عشان تذوقه؟" (ص201)

"وكانت صدمته كما توقعنا مضاعفة لأن نهلة، ضاعت مرتين: ضاعت بالجسم وضاعت بالعقل. و بدا متأثرا وخائفا من الفضيحة أكثر من قلقه على نهلة." (ص159)

"لو أن نهله بألمانيا. لو أن نهلة بفراנקفورت." (ص155)

"اكتشفت أن أحساس الأفراد ببعضهم بعضا ليس قويا كما كنت أظن، أو كما يحبون الظن. فالعلاقات بينهم مجرد رموز أو تقليد." (ص160)

## 7. Sunflower (1980)

"كنت أول ما تجوزت أكل القتلة أصبح أقول يا بوي. يبجي أبوي وبدل ما يعني يخبني. وبعدين يقعد هو الثاني يعيط مثل النسوان، ويقول تعلمي الصبر يا خضرة، تعلمي الستر يا خضرة. خلي اللي في القلب يسطح ولا بين الناس يفضح." (ص126)

"أنت بحاجة لرجال يحميك" (ص107)

"... المقصود أن الرجال يهاجرون والمرأة تبقى. بحكم التركيب الاجتماعية بظل الرجل أكثر تحررا وقدرة على الحركة. معظم دول النفط ترفض تشغيل المرأة الا حين تكون مصحوبة بولي أمر. ولي أمر مراهق. ولي أمر عاجز. ولي أمر أبله، فهو ولي أمر." (ص272)

"والرجل العربي ما زال مريضا،منفصما منقسما يرغب في شيء ويطبق آخر .. مشدود الى الماضي ويتغنى بالمستقبل. تجاربها وتجارب زميلاتنا وزاوية المرأة علمتها. هو ضحية، كالمرأة تماما، لكن مرضه أخطر لأنه الأقوى والمتجبر. هذا هو الواقع. ولن تكون ضحية الضحية. ولكن، من ثم الوحدة." (ص24)

"كنت أقصد أن أقول أن الطريق للمشاة قبل أن تكون لراكبي السيارات. كنت أريد أن أقول أن الأضواء خدعة ومؤامرة. من وضع الأضواء وحدد لها نظاما؟ نوو العقول البليدة هم الذين يصدقون. أنا لا أصدق. ولهذا أقطع الشارع متى أريد. أنا حرة. أقطع الشارع متى أريد، ولا أنتظر ضوعا منهم. أصنع ضوئي بنفسني." (ص11)

"... وصفة لكعكة الزبيب والزنجبيل وطبخة تدخل معدة الرجل لتدخلك الى قلبه يا سيدتي، وكيفية ارضاع مولودك دون المرور بمرحلة تشفق الثديين الأليمة، وكيف تكونين امرأة عصرية جذابة..." (ص213)

"أنت يا نصف المجتمع أيتها المرأة، مظلومة ظلما كبيرا، ولكننا نؤمن بحريتك ونعمل على الوصول اليها، فقري عينا أيتها المرأة." (ص213)

"إن كانت تقديمية فعلا فعلينا التوقف فورا عن معاملة المرأة كما لو كانت شريحة اجتماعية منفصلة. هي إنسان وعليها أن تقرأ ما يقرأه الرجل. اهتماماتها هي اهتماماته نفسها، فلماذا نخصص لها زاوية منفصلة؟ سخافة. أنا لن أستمر في هذا." (ص158-157)

"أحس وأفكر وأعرف البديل وأعرف تاريخي وأحمل عبئه. منذ بداية عصركم وأنا أعيش لغيري ولا أعيش لنفسي. طبخت فاكلتم. زرعت فقطتم. حملت بذوركم في بطني ... وحين تتلقف أيديكم المولود يحمل اسمكم بدل اسمي ... وحين انخمدت غيرتموني بجهالتي وحين استفتقت غيرتموني بغضبي." (ص311)

"... يا عيني عليها من بلد. نلقاها من اليهود وإلا اللسانات السود!" (ص31)

"- ايش نلت من هالبلد؟ في ساعة الغفلة والحاجة ما ينفحك غير قرشك. قعدت في الدار ثمان شهور ما حد مد ايده بقرن موز أو تفاحة للأولاد. ليست الأسود وعصبت راسي وقعدت على مصطبة الشباك أبكي وأنوح وأقرأ الفاتحة عن روح المرحوم. والحاصل، لا الأسود رد المرحوم ولا العصبية رفعت الرأس بين الناس." (ص32)

"... الجبال للأغنياء، أما بقية الخلق ففي هذا الوادي الكئيب المتآكل قدما وغفونة .. متى يحن الله وترتفع هناك مع المرتفعين؟" (ص45)

"... وستكون لها دار ولا كل الدور. غرفة لها وغرفتان للأولاد. وصالون متسع تضع فيه طاولة الأكل وكراسي السفارة." (ص94)

"- هه، ضريوني، والله قتلة حرزانة تعبي الراس، طز، أكلت مثلها بعدد شعر الرأس. الأب يضرب والجوز يضرب واليهود تضرب، ضرب في ضرب، لا والله ضرب اليهود أحسن، على الأقل الواحد بحس أنه محترم." (ص119)