Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol. 11, No. 12
Publication Date: December 25, 2024
DOI:10.14738/assrj.1112.18052.
Kholoussi, S. (2024). Feminizing the Nation: A Re-reading of Selected Cases of Palestinian Female Self-Referential Texts. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal, 11(12). 173-227.

Feminizing the Nation: [1] A Re-reading of Selected Cases of Palestinian Female Self-Referential Texts

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ABSTRACT

The point of departure in this study is the premise that conceptualization of nation begins at the level of self and consciousness; that nation acquires its shape in personal experience before it is projected onto the public. For Arab nations, the 'imagined community' is constructed from foundational elements of history, language, place, heritage, oral traditions, collective memory, indigenous practices, cultural values etc ... Predominantly, it is the male intellectual elite that the hegemonic national narrative empowers to define constituent components of national imaginary, thereby eclipsing female narratives. Given that signifiers of nationhood comprise a fluid field of meaning that can be reinvented/ reimagined, endeavors of female writers in narrating the nation re-cast them according to their vision of subject/identity formation. Selected Palestinian female autobiographies reveal interventions disrupting national forms of patriarchal domination. By re-appropriating components of nationhood, they formulate 'an Arab woman national narrative' integrating women as active agents in mainstream discourses. Deliberations explore relevant issues in Arab female autobiography, inquire into ambivalent relationship between Arab women and communal national imaginary, and examine processes of recovering Palestinian female historical memory in articulations of nationhood. Texts are deliberately selected for their apt representation of junctures of the national crisis. The methodology and research data draw upon cultural models within colonial/postcolonial discourses, critical postulations on nation and nationalism, theories in autobiography, and feminist standpoint theory. Particularly noteworthy in the textual analysis are theoretical considerations regarding the 'woman question' in the context of Palestinian reality.

Keywords: Arab woman narrative, Palestinian female autobiography, Constructions of identity in exile, Citizenship between nationalist and gendered imperatives, Spatial self-representation, Fadwa Tuqan, Hala Sakakini, Ghada Karmi, Hanan 'Ashrawi.

INTRODUCTION

Contextual Overview

As a discursive field, nationalism is characterized by contestation, involving multiple subjects and diverse consciousnesses. Like several socio-political realities, it emerges as a male-dominated establishment that produces gendered and/or gender-blind organization of the nation. Research, over the past decades, has demonstrated that authoritative nationalist structures institute a hierarchical and differential gendering of national subjects wherein male intellectual elite emerges as the primary agent and legitimate spokesperson of national identity. Largely due to the dominance of the national narrative by hegemonic masculinity, rhetoric of the national imaginary co-opted women's voices. Gendered processes of imagining and

narrating the nation have led to the underestimation of women's distinctive experiences and eventually the marginalization of a woman-centered national narrative.

Nation, as Benedict Anderson argues, is an "imagined community," and Partha Chatterjee subsequently asks, "whose imagined community?" [214] In this respect, several questions erupt that are variously addressed in this study, namely, is it possible to grant women an authoritative voice within nationalism, or women can only find their voices outside it? Is it possible to construct national women as subjects or is that only the privilege of male? How can women be inserted as agents into the nationalist narrative without eradicating their individual identities? Amid the demands of patriotic rhetoric, whose narrative is to prevail in defining a national paradigm?

Although representation of woman in national narrative has been the subject of a body of scholarly work that investigated the implications of a gendered national discourse, manifestations of national imaginary in the context of Arab women autobiography can furnish an opportunity for more extensive scrutiny that fills a lacuna. In fact, the progress and maturity of Arab women's self-narrative open a space for further critique of official nationalism that disputes differential integration in nationalist projects.

In hegemonic national discourses, [2] women are often depicted as monolithic and homogeneous category, bereft of autonomous subjectivity. Discussions around their relationship to national collectivities latch onto a problematic assumption that in the fight on the sexual and the national fronts, the voice of a female artist is confined to self-serving feminist concerns, that Arab women's lives as totally centered on issues that prioritizes gender issues above all other categories of analysis. This study expands on readings that descry such presumptions. It investigates the premise that Arab female self-inscription practices generate a discursive domain that moves beyond the scope of merely accommodating the dual mandates of nationalist ideological aspirations and 'the feminine principle'.[3] It is my contention that allegiance to national causes is heightened and further strengthened through female interventions in hegemonic discourses, and the endeavors to dismantle misrepresentation. The analytical framework is situated within the context of an ongoing scholarly investigation focused on Arab women's historical memory. [4] It leverages an archive of personal and collective recollections that serves as resource for excavating counter-narratives that shed light on the heterogeneity of Arab women's lived realities. It moves beyond the hegemonic scene to recover voices of its 'other' with special emphasis on Palestinian reality wherein gender emerges as a potentially dynamic force in the context of the narrative of nationalism.

The title of this research paper is evocative of interrelated foundational issues, mainly; the signifiers that define nation-space, the viability of autobiography as an enterprise traditionally subjective in re-envisioning the sprawling experience of a people, and the conceptualization of nation as a narrative construct framed through feminine lens. The study attempts to respond to the question of the location of personal experience in national discourse and how autobiography is deemed to be the genre of national formation. It is part of my premise that conceptualizations of the nation begin at the level of the self and consciousness. Principal elements underpinning national consciousness are defined and redefined in inscriptions of life experience. Nation, like autobiography, takes its shape in the self, in the private and the personal before it is projected onto the public.

Autobiography and Narrating the Nation

Critical stances vary when considering the appropriateness of autobiography in the elaboration of national narratives that traverse the landscape of an entire community, as well as the discrepancy that surfaces in focusing on autobiography, presumably a narrow vista of private aspirations and psycho-sociological dimensions, to capture an entire community at stake. Toni Cade Bambara's insights in this context demonstrates that the individual is the most fundamental revolutionary unit, and the first prerequisite of revolution demands that each individual completes an inventory of the self in order to be "purged of poison and lies that assault the ego and threaten the heart, that hazard the next larger unit – the couple or pair, that jeopardize the still larger unit – the family of cell, that put the entire movement in peril" [109, 1969]. Miriam Cooke's inference is a case in point; she notes that "it is the growing understanding of the ways in which patriarchy seizes and then articulates women's experiences so that they will seem to be marginal and apolitical that drives women … to re-member their pasts and then to write them" [5]. In an analysis that hones in on autobiographies of female activists, Margo Perkins indicates that self- texts constitute important resources in reconstructing national history through a multiplicity of stories told differently by different individuals. For her, women's stories fill in, complement, challenge or converse with the stories in the dominant male discourse [xiii]. To this effect, Barbara Harlowe indicates that the reports of human rights such as those of the Amnesty organization draw on the necessity of autobiography to record facts and events in national histories and correct official documents which have systematically obscured individual abuses [125, 2002]. In a similar vein, Carol Gilligan professes that life-history and collective history, psychology and politics are deeply entwined, and bringing in women lives changes how the human story is told [qtd in Tzoreff 73]. In fact, autobiographies, implicated in the process of the production of histories and knowledge, are allotted historiographical value. Sidonie Smith attributes the surge of critical interest in autobiography in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey's call for a writing of history grounded in autobiographical documents [4, 1987]. In any case, it has been variously corroborated that in writing the history of a certain period, autobiographies are drawn upon as important resources in reconstructing the era.

My decision to focus on personal accounts is not arbitrary. It is no coincidence, with respect to the subject of this inquiry, that I have chosen the autobiographies of Palestinian women as the focus of my research. Examining personal narratives is a way to encapsulate the significant role of subjectivities in the elaboration of a Palestinian national agenda. The opinion of Cherifa Bouatta is a case in point, "*Even if a study of this particular dimension does not reveal the whole meaning of the struggle concerned nevertheless, the meaning is enriched by giving it a psychological depth and illuminating the humanity that animates it*" [20-21]. The personal narratives of individuals detailing their contributions serve as the basis for revisiting the interconnections between the political, literary, and personal realms. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson contend that communities of people construct and maintain narratives that explain the foundations of their existence as distinct groups and collectivities, and autobiography functions most powerfully as platforms of communication in this context [38,1998]. In fact, leaving out individual and subjective factors in researching this arena creates a gap.

Significantly, the andro-centric nature of the genre of autobiography and national discourse provides justification for considering and analyzing them in conjunction with one another. For long, there has been a deficiency in probing into the potentially disruptive force of female

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

intervention in both domains. In Arab tradition, autobiographies by women and participation in national struggle have been deemed as anomalies and/or outliers. Applying a reading sensibility and critical scenario informed by andro-centric models of selfhood and nationhood, has produced analyses that are lacking.

'Nation as Narration' as a Conceptual Framework

An underlying premise guiding this inquiry is the notion that nation, as Homi Bhabha postulates, is a narrative construct that 'realizes its horizon in the mind's eye' [1, 1990] and thus can assume various forms and move in different directions. Bhabha proposes that reading and analyzing the nation through the lens of its narrative representation reveals its complex, fluid, and multilayered character as an ideological construct. Cultural meanings and signifiers associated with nationhood and national identity, rather than being definitive and unitary concepts or monolithic and static entities, are widely circulated and variably constructed.

In his deconstruction of the imperialist nation, Bhabha plays on the Derridean idea of ''disseminiNation'' where meaning is never fixed but dispersed and scattered. The term sets up the possibilities for seeing how the official idea of the nation can be disseminated in various ways. For Bhabha, 'nation', constructed as a totality in official discourses, is "a space … internally marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending people, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations" [299-300, 1990] that are disguised by a singular image of the unified nation-state.

The fact that the very act of narrative performance 'interpellates' a growing circle of national subjects renders the broad field of national horizon multifaceted. It can be constructed in diverse ways and its modes of representation display an inherent multiplicity. Plotting the narrative of the nation and writing its story demand that we articulate perspectives of its underlying elements that comprise metaphors for national life. Envisaged in such figurative way demonstrated the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. As narration, nation is not monolithic entity. Ideological and discursive frames of nationalism are characterized by pluralism. The narrative of national cohesion can no longer be signified as solid and fixed.

In narrative representation, the constituent components that make up a nation can be conceptualized and reconceptualized in ways that may deviate and/or diverge from the standard criteria of definition within the dominant discourse and mainstream understanding. This leads me to underscore the speculations of Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser in this respect. To them, narratives by virtue of their polysemic and pluri-vocal nature function as means of resistance and challenge subverting the dominant discourses of power. Nation comes into being, according to Bhabha, as the representation of social life and social life being unstable emphasizes the instability of knowledge that produces the nation (Bhabha 1, 1990). It follows that, when written, nation displays social and cultural consciousness that differs among its members. Textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative stratagems are employed differently to represent nation in the form of narrative [Bhabha 1, 1990]. Since it is fluid and dynamic, and since it is populated by different consciousnesses that comprise the marginalized and subaltern voices as well, its signifiers/constituent components are not fixed, always subjected to revision, and re-conceptualized in multiple ways. Different positions produce a discursive conceptualization of nation.

'Nation' emerges as amorphous and impalpable, so what key elements materialize nation-space? What are the signifiers and/or core components that constitute the cultural representation of a nation?

Arab literary tradition has been shaped and rooted in Arab/Islamic nationalism and the concept of the nation as *al umma,* a term traditionally denotes an ideological conception that encompasses the broader Islamic world and identity, rather than a specific territorial homeland. In this study, the use of the term 'nation' is more closely aligned with the concept of *al wattan* (homeland) which is imbued with an emotional and affective dimension and carries within it a sense of settlement, belonging and rootedness. It is a more territorially grounded and a place-based understanding of national identity, in contrast to the more abstract mental construct of *al umma*. The designation of some land as 'the homeland' is a specific form of territoriality engendered by the idea that a particular group of people ought to control a specific territory because that land is part of who the people are.

Nation-space comes into being as a system of cultural signifiers that formulate the national imaginary, the rhetoric of national affiliation, and the construct of nationalism. Its constituent components incorporate a community of language and rhetoric, a sense of place, heritage and its roots (*al turath),* historical memory (*al dhakirah al tarikhiyah)*, ideological affiliations, a constant re-affirmation of authentic cultural values, communal norms, and a people's living and popular memory, as well as indigenous social practices and customs. These elements, in aggregate, encompass a reservoir of traditional belief-systems and collective memory culled from the depths of a communal past, family stories that nourish collective memory, the community's shared artifacts accumulated over generations, folk traditions, and cultural elements of ethnic groups rooted in the past yet still persisting in the present by virtue of arts and crafts, songs and music, dance, foods, drama, storytelling and forms of oral communication. By and large, the 'horizontal' space of the nation is authoritatively represented within the public sphere in which the signifiers of national culture have been codified. When plotting the narrative of the nation, the male intellectual elite is putatively the representative of the traditional 'authority of national objects of knowledge,' as Bhabha indicates (1, 1990), and the sole arbiter qualifier of the national imaginary. Malestream projects monopolize the communal signifiers of national culture. The constituent components of a nation are identified in masculine terms and in the process, women are allotted apolitical function and relegated to the margins of the nationalistic rhetoric. In fact, as a substantial body of thought, discourses surrounding Arab nationalism institute a neo-patriarchal system that wield women's position in the service of male agenda; dictated by the governance of male hegemony.

Thus, given the fact that patriarchal constructs are embedded in nationhood, the emergence of women as participants/subjects of national discourse is predicated upon re-defining these constructs. In this respect, autobiography is an expedient mode to authorize new subjects. One of the tasks which confront Arab women when they inscribe themselves as subjects is to re-negotiate the concepts that homogenize national narrative. Only in the past few decades that women's autobiography has been acknowledged as a mode of making visible formerly invisible subjects. In her speculations on theories specific to women's autobiography, Smith foregrounds motives to produce a self-narrative as "incorporating hitherto unspoken female experience in telling their own stories, women have revised the content and purposes of autobiography and insisted on alternative stories" [Reader 5-6]. Dubbed as the awakening genre, it provides a new vision that transforms long-standing views. As a narrative of contestation, it manifests the

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

different ways women respond to the dyadic relationship of power and resistance, as well as female alternative voices and determinants of selfhood.

In fact, for Arab feminists, rewriting the concept of homeland is best captured through the writing of autobiographies. It is the locus where new identities are formed, a space wherein writing the self and writing the political with all its links to power is reformulated. In fact, Arab women have been important players in the national drama participating in the making of history. However, inscribing their contribution to the nationalist struggle remains a significant political weapon to preserve memories commemorating their presence.

It is within such critical corpus that the autobiography of the Palestinian women is examined in this study. [5] The autobiographer recreates herself as well as the era she recounts. I approach micro-level accounts as vital threads within the tapestry of the Palestinian national story. They provide critical insights into the collective national narrative. An attentive reading of female self-texts points out ways to restore voice and deliver the female subjective dimension of the national struggle.

Deliberations in this study move in three directions. I begin with an exploration of issues in Arab women's autobiography that bear relevance to the nature of this topic. The second part undertakes an inquiry into the ambivalent attitude of Arab nationalist movements towards the woman question. A paramount stratagem in the formidable confrontation of gendered national paradigms lies in venturing beyond the boundaries of conventional gender norms and defying the deeply entrenched societal expectations.

Subsequent sections of this study center a scholarly gaze upon selected Palestinian female self-narratives, scrutinizing an interplay with the multifaceted articulations of nationhood. I undertake to examine the personal narratives and/or chronicles of Fadwa Tuqan (1917 – 2003), Hala Sakakini (b. 1924), Ghada Karmi (b. 1939), Raymonda Tawil (b. 1940), and Hanan 'Ashrawi (b. 1946) as case studies. They offer paradigms that demonstrate the intertwining of nationhood and gender within the discursive space encompassing national resistance struggles and intricate processes of nation-building. While it is acknowledged that these narratives may not encompass the full spectrum of women's experiences across all social strata, [6] political orientations, and religious affiliations, they cast a luminous spotlight on a diverse range of life trajectories that are often sidelined within the prevailing male-centric narratives of the nation. Each autobiographical account encapsulates two basic facets: the personal backgrounds of the narrator and the socio-political and historical contexts that impact life experiences and ultimately influencing the construction of their individual narratives. Despite the nuanced variations in their sensibilities, political activism, and narrative styles, a shared backdrop of struggle emerges as a compelling rationale, warranting their collective examination within the confines of a singular study. Embedded within the very processes of remembering and documenting, their acts of resistance reverberate powerfully.

ARAB WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELVES

For Arab women, irrespective of their age, social status, or religious affiliation, the act of engaging in autobiography represents a profound and transformative "contestatory" endeavor. In her insightful exploration, Farzaneh Milani aptly characterizes these autobiographical voices as "veiled," for they exist within a societal framework that places immense value on upholding

a distinct demarcation between the innermost realm of personal existence and the external world [2]. Private experiences, inner thoughts and emotions are expected to remain concealed and beyond reach. One imperative of self-revelation, in addition to implications of self-glorification, compounds the scarcity of this literary form among Arab women. In the realm of theoretical inquiries, the influence of gender on autobiographical practice has, for long, received less attention. Despite numerous comprehensive studies, the genre as practiced by Arab women is yet to progress towards a stage of substantive scholarly engagement. Ongoing speculations offer a breakthrough in delineating the overarching contours, modes of self-inscription, the politics of representing Arab female subjectivity, as well as the textual strategies adopted in the transition from lived experiences to the act of self-writing.

Arab female self-narrative sheds light on a multitude of interconnected issues that construct a framework for approaching topic of this study. Firstly, self-narration among Arab women is intricately intertwined with dissidence and transgression. A conformist autobiography is viewed as inherently contradictory, as their texts liberate themselves from historically ingrained portrayals. The creative exploration of the self is driven more by aversion to cultural representation and less by a desire for compliance. Smith maintains that subjectivity in female autobiography is a site of resistance, crystallizing around the "oppositional contours of 'I-ness'" [435, 1998]. Authors can only recount their narratives when they distance themselves from female subject positions constructed by social power structure. On her part, Nawar Golley asserts that "the more audacious the departure, the more distinct the sense of identity" [80]. Through self-writing, the journey of self-discovery progresses towards heightened self-awareness and self-knowledge. As suggested by Milani, the autobiographer lifts "the veil of secrecy to expose the manifold facets of reality that lie beneath" [9]. The intention is to reveal the authentic self and divulge a multidimensional identity.

Grappling with gender constraints is but one angle of a complex set of challenges confronted by Arab women as they embark upon the task of inscribing their life experiences. In their hands, autobiography diverging from normative generic conventions serves as the wellspring for "the narrative energies of out-law genres" [Smith, 213, 1998]. Often, fragmentation, a marked characteristic of the instability of the female subject, produces a non- linear narrative contrary to traditional male developmental framework that undertakes to mold autobiographical journeys into a cohesive whole. Furthermore, self-narratives contend with the criteria dichotomizing texts as either literary or non-literary, wherein the distinction is differently drawn.

In fact, the autobiographical enterprise undergoes a subversive metamorphosis. Authors navigate the complex web of constraints that beset them extricating themselves from established conventions and the boundaries of genre, and ultimately transforming the very essence of autobiography into a potent instrument of resistance and dissidence.

Additionally, Arab women's textual self-portraiture does not align with the standards set forth by members of a 'directory' society whose position on the stage of life has always been secure. Within this context, the precondition for autobiography, as expounded by Gusdorf, Lejeune, and Olney, lies in the creation of an egotistical space wherein an independent and distinct self is prominently put on display. Such paradigm presents a problematic premise when applied to Arab women. Their self-texts occupy the antithetical end of the spectrum since they find solace

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

in group identification, and speaking for the collective becomes a rhetorical ground of appeal [Lionnet, 99].

Similarly, the post-structuralist theoretical landscape championed by Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes that declares the text autonomous, disentangling it from any attached significance of its creator, proves ill-suited for and inapplicable to Arab women's life-scripts. Indeed, critical postulations heralding the death of the author hold scant relevance within a cultural milieu wherein women perceive themselves as disempowered members of a non-hegemonic community. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes, regarding analogous sub-cultural groups, that they possess meager opportunities to write under their own names or on behalf of their collective, let alone on behalf of the broader culture as a whole [67]. Furthermore, the depersonalization advocated by post-structuralism clashes with the very rationale underpinning Arab female self-reflexivity, which encompasses a dual process of self-discovery and self-creation. In accordance with Golley's speculative inquiry, one may ponder, “What is autobiography for women but finding a way to define the 'I'?” [74] They engage in the act of self-narration propelled by the imperative to firmly anchor the notion of the self within its textual manifestation.

Another pivotal facet of Arab women's personal narrative that holds profound relevance to this investigation revolves around the intricate interplay between the narrating 'I' and its presence in the collective consciousness, thereby establishing a sense of collective identification. Suad Joseph's concept of 'intimate selving' encapsulates the potent influence of the collective within the Arab cultural ethos. Within a culturally contextualized construct of selfhood, individual identity finds its moorings in the intricate tapestry of relationships, that serve as a wellspring of resilience and strength. Subjectivity is defined in terms of affiliation among the members, national allegiance and communal bonding and solidarity [11, 14]. Arab women embark upon the autobiographical endeavor armed with an acute awareness of a relational model of selfhood. In this respect, Latifa Al Zayyat emphasizes that the revelation of the self occurs through an ongoing process of identification with the collective, its tribulations, and its aspirations. She asserts, “One can only find one's self by initially losing it into a much wider issue than one's own subjectivity, into a reality bigger than one's own – we do not attain our true selves unless the self in the first-place melts into something outside the limits of its ego” [57, 1996]. One discovers one's true self by initially relinquishing it to a cause far grander than one's own subjectivity and merging it with a reality that transcends the narrow confines of individual ego. Our authentic selves remain elusive until the self dissolves into something greater than its own limited existence [57, 1996]. In this sense, the identity sought to be promoted by the autobiographer encompasses a broader political and national reality that extends far beyond the individual speaking subject.

The public-private construct lies at the heart of women's strained relationship with autobiography. The dichotomy between both realms exerts a significant influence on shaping their modes of self-narration. "Autobiographical acts" (Bruss 8-9), like the dress codes allowing women’s physical access to public spaces, govern their transition from cultural obscurity to self-representation in the public sphere. In their autobiographical endeavors, women adopt strategies of deflection and draw upon techniques borrowed from other forms of discourse to temper the extent of self-revelation and render it socially acceptable. In a study examining collective memory and nationalist iconography, Beth Baron maintains that women who played a role in the fervent Egyptian nationalist struggle in the early twentieth century

strategically leverage and capitalize on their political mission as a means to legitimize audacious ventures into the autobiographical realm [188].

The autobiographer possesses a keen awareness that her actions and identity are profoundly shaped by historical forces that construct her as a subject. In his emphasis on 'a historically real readership,' Ramon Saldivar states, "Even in its most private and self-indulgent confessional style, a published autobiography is, after all, addressed to a public, an audience that is historically tangible" (160-161). According to Golley, the act of self-narration must be recognized as a historical endeavor, situated within specific contexts, and produced through intellectual labor, rather than solely attributed to individuals possessing inherent brilliance or divine inspiration (xiv). On her part, Magda al Nowaihi argues that in most autobiographical journeys, two processes play a pivotal role: the act of remembering and the quest to capture the interplay between the public and private spheres as two constituent realms of human existence, engaging them in a dialogue (485).

Indeed, a comprehensive examination of Arab female autobiography transcends the evaluation of its literary merits. An account of life experience is juxtaposed against the backdrop of the tumultuous era of modern Arab history. Genuine endeavors to comprehend the self are inseparable from the pursuit of historical inquiry. The realization that the self-narrative is, to a great certain extent, a public act securely grounds the autobiographical process within the socio-historical milieu.

It is noteworthy that the emergence of Arab female autobiography coincided with the rise of nationalism, as women began to assert themselves as national subjects in the realm of public activism. In this respect, Sabry Hafez depicts a symbiotic relationship between the advancement of women's consciousness in their pursuit of cultural assertion and the evolution of their quest for, perception of, and embrace of national identity (173-174). In fact, national upheavals have often had a propitious impact. As the flame of nationalism ignited and a profound sense of national belonging took hold, a new consciousness of the self began to emerge. The initial stirrings of the autobiographical impulse and the cultivation/development of women's consciousness are intricately intertwined with female-specific resistance within a nationalist framework. Autobiographical inscriptions reveal that events in women's personal lives cannot be isolated from surrounding political upheavals. The imperative to recover and retrieve personal memories becomes a parallel pursuit to the re-reading and reexamination of historical events. This brings us to consider critical speculations on the dynamic intersections between Arab nationalist discourse and the question of women's place within it.

THE ARAB WOMAN AND THE COMMUNAL NATIONAL IMAGINARY [7]

Arab history attests to the recurring phenomena of the instrumental role that women tend to play in public life during moments of national plights when the established gender order begins to crack, and societal functioning becomes destabilized. Phases of national uprisings, where individuals feel a sense of reclaiming their own destiny, present opportunities for the advancement of women's emancipation. However, the association of feminist consciousness with national liberation struggles has both facilitated and hindered its development. When examining possibilities of new frontiers, Rosemary Sayigh finds that often women have to wait for a national emergency to create an opening for their initiatives (1993, 190-191). Drawing upon the data and insights gathered through her investigation of formidable obstacles that

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

define everyday realities led Latifa Ajbabdi to posit that the interdependence of the women's movement and the ebb and flow of national revolution has a major downside, often the failure of one coincides with the failure of the other (95). Along similar lines, Shahida al Bazz's study of the feminist movement in Egypt attributes the regression in women's visibility to national setbacks (109). In fact, as revolutions lose momentum, women's participation tends to decline. When national identity is perceived to be under threat, public debates on gender tend to solidify and rigidify.

In post-independent Arab reality, the emergence of women as full-fledged citizens in their own right is often curtailed. Within the framework of a strategic planning for creating an Arab female political movement, Nawal al Sa'adawi asserts that women are encouraged to be at the forefront of national struggle during revolutionary upheavals, only to be relegated to subordinate roles or confined to the 'kitchens' once the crisis subsides. The male-dominated agenda of nationalist politics instrumentalize women as "fuel with which to feed the flames of popular action," but their agency is suppressed after independence is achieved (16). One notable case in point is the aftermath of the Algerian war of resistance and independence, which witnessed a shift in the rules of women's engagement. Likewise, with the end of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991), Jean Said Makdisi demonstrates, in her generational memoir, her concern about the reassertion of the dominance of state institutions, as "the old conventions have returned and the freedom brought by anarchic conditions had been lost" (389). On her part, Denis Kandiyoti explores the contradictory implications of nationalist projects in post-colonial societies. Her study suggests that the nationalist discourse, in all its permutations, exacts a toll on women's freedom, and thus their autonomy is constantly at stake (378).

In fact, extensively, hegemonic national agenda reinstates an oppressive system that disempowers women and obstructs the path of their political progress. As boundary markers of the community, women are subjected to forms of discipline, forced to adhere to constraining traditions to ward off foreign domination and intrusion. Elements of national identity are articulated as forms of control thus infringing upon women's rights as enfranchised citizens. Both liberal and conservative agendas symbolically incorporate women into the political process. Reformers of liberal persuasion enshrine women as emblems of modernity engaging them in developmental projects to enhance the façade of a civilized country and to evoke the dynamism of a newly- found nation. Conservative parties, on the other hand, define the ideals of authentic national culture in sexist terms casting women as guardians of values and instillers of virtue through their role in cultural reproduction.

More detrimental to women's autonomy is the homogenizing power inherent in the rhetoric of cultural nationalism's historical narrative. Formulations of the unifying vision of wattaniya (patriotic sentiment) and loyalty towards wattan (homeland), daula (state), sha'ab (people), and umma (nation) emphasize the necessity for individuals to submerge themselves (yufni) in the collective identity, often eclipsing the woman question in favor of the project of constructing a cohesive national identification. In post-colonial Morocco, Ajbabdi explains that women's organizations became hostages to national ideologies and thus were co-opted as auxiliaries of the ruling party (99). Similarly, official priorities for state-building of Ba'ath regime in Iraq sanctioned a functionary/citizenry form of feminism that adheres to the objectives of the government.

Indeed, the reality is that women were primarily treated as pawns serving the allegiances promoted by mainstream agenda. The cultural politics of hegemonic nationalism aims to construct an inclusive narrative that binds the collective together. Consequently, engaging in the feminist struggle is dismissed as divisive, unpatriotic and detrimental to the integrity of the national group.

Female activists involved in the nation-building process feel compelled to articulate their gender interests within the confines of the nationalist project, thus restricting the extent of their demands. Any deviation from these parameters is met with circumscription. In this context, Leila Ahmed's examination of activism of early feminist movements highlights an agonizing predicament: Arab feminists are caught between two opposing yet equally cherished loyalties; one related to their sexual identity and the other tied to their national and cultural identity. They are effectively "forced … to choose between betrayal and betrayal" (Ahmed,122). Evidently, whatever stance women adopt, they are accused of a rift in their patriotism and allegiance.

In official nationalism, a hierarchal gendering of national discourse provides the foundation for establishing the nation. During times of war, the emergence of female combatants is viewed as an anomaly, reinforcing dichotomous notions of masculinity and femininity. Liyanah Badr's sheds light on the gendered dimensions of national discourse in armed conflict; an angry retort of a fighter dismisses his fiancé's training in weaponry who growls, "Arms are an ornament for a man …[and] have never been an ornament for a woman" (1989, 46). He threatens to break off the engagement if she insists that this is the duty of men and women caught up in an existential conflict. In her exploration of the connections between gendered images in discourses of the nation and the politics of elite Egyptian women in the interwar period from the late nineteenth century to World War Two, Beth Baron identifies an irony in "the allegorization of nation and the degree of access granted women to the political apparatus of the state" [2]. The analysis of the manifestations of woman as symbol of nation in the Arabic novel leads George Tarabishi (1981) to demonstrate the depredations that the rhetoric of nationalism commits against both woman and nation: woman pays the price as a human being in terms of her freedom when she is reduced from an individual in her own right to emblematic abstractions, and the nation suffers when it is represented by an entity that is overpowered, truncated, subdued and devoid of autonomous subjectivity.

In fact, given the inconsistency in the rhetoric of nationalism, a woman's individuality as human being is compromised. There is a substantial representation of the female figure in allegorical terms, yet in the public arena, her role is unacknowledged and no matter how crucial her participation is, it remains intangible. The conspicuous presence of woman as symbol of the nation is in stark opposition to the limited access granted them in the political apparatus of the state.

PALESTINIAN POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS: DIVERGENT APPROACHES TOWARDS WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATIONAL CAUSE

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, the strategy of mobilizing nationalist forces has aimed to engage the entire population, including women. However, focusing on internal human rights issues has been criticized and sometimes punished by the Palestinian authority, viewing such efforts as sabotaging the national cause and serving

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

imperial Western powers. The inquiry of Islah Jad (1995, 2000) into gender and citizenship under Palestinian authority examines activism between feminism and nationalism and indicates that the founder of Fateh, a prominent nationalist organization, advocated for the integration of women into formal national politics with an emphasis on the importance of social unity for effective mobilization. In 1977, the declaration that men and women share identical political interests concealed deeper implications that denied the existence of specific women's oppression, undermined activism solely dedicated to women's issues, and diminished women's autonomy over their policies.

In fact, platforms of Palestinian political groups navigate between perceiving female public participation as a means to expand the resistance struggle, and endorsing women's responsibility to safeguard Palestinian identity and heritage; a linchpin of nationalist ideology. Often, encouraging women to join the struggle ends up utilizing them as vehicles of support and mobilization. Despite the emphasis on including women in its ranks, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) barred them from holding leading positions. Female activism served the cause yet within traditionally acceptable roles such as caring for the families of fighters, prisoners and martyrs, as well as preparing their sons to participate in the struggle. Women's reproductive role was assigned a new political meaning. The mother of the martyr was celebrated as the highest political act, symbolizing the supreme contribution to the movement. As a form of 'state feminism' that verged on tokenism, such approach diluted the advocacy for women's issues and undermined the efforts to espouse gender equality (Haddad 162, Sayigh and Peteet 1986).

With the establishment of the nationalist guerilla organization in 1968, women's function underwent a significant transformation, transitioning to actively participating in armed and unarmed resistance activities. They we were trained in military tactics and deployed alongside men for various assignments, such as political insurrections, leaflet distribution, organizing demonstrations, arms smuggling, and providing safe havens for freedom fighters. Notwithstanding such shift, no substantial policies were implemented to address obstacles specific to women. Liyanah Badr explains the scarcity of female cadres, “The PLO broadened my outlook but has offered me nothing to help me translate all the dreams with which it has inspired me into reality” (qtd in Shaaban, 159).

The rise of Hamas marked a significant turning point that compelled women to accept the reassertion of male authority, which, in earlier decades, was challenged due to the conditions of the occupation and *al intifada* (1987-1993, 2000- 2005). In her analysis of women's navigation of identity within the shifting sociopolitical landscape of *al intifada*, Rema Hammami argues that women became both victims of Hamas' rejection of Western values and its resistance politics (199). The hijab was mobilized as a nationalist issue, symbolizing respect for martyrs and serving as an expression of political commitment and nationalism. Forced to curtail their public activities and withdraw to the private sphere, activists relinquished leadership roles to men.

Eventually, a liberation movement, akin to the emancipation struggles in other Arab countries, resurfaced. However, unlike women across the Arab nations, Palestinian women found themselves in a distinctive position, their struggle for social liberation was intricately intertwined with the concept of nation and the struggle against Israel. Critiquing or transcending the notion of nationhood was precarious since the struggle was deeply entwined with the

broader national movement. Throughout the protracted decades of the Palestinian struggle, both before and after the 1967 occupation, women's movement continuously redefined priorities and agendas in response to the shifting dynamics of national resistance. It mirrored the twists and turns of the nationalist movement, sharing its fortunes, burdens and the collective vision of Palestinian independence. Consequently, an intractable dilemma arose demanding a resolution: which struggle should take precedence, nationalism or feminism?

It is noteworthy that Palestinian women have a long history of organizing for the liberation of their homeland. Hamida Kazi's seminal study examines three distinct phases intertwined with the progression of national events (29). The first traces back to 1884 when, for the first time, women participated alongside men in raising their voices against the establishment of the first Israeli settlement near the town of *'Afulah*. This marked a turning point, demonstrating women's early involvement and resilience in the struggle for their land. The second phase comprises a period from 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel, until the June war and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. During this period, Palestinian women faced immense challenges and disruptions as their homeland was irrevocably transformed. Despite the national adversities, their determination to reclaim women's rights alongside resisting the occupation remained steadfast. The third phase spans the duration from 1967 to the present day, encompassing the ongoing struggle against Israeli occupation and the pursuit of Palestinian self-determination. Throughout this period, women have continued to play a vital role in shaping and leading grassroots movements, advocating for justice, and striving for the realization of their national aspirations. By examining these three phases, Kazi's analysis sheds light on the evolving nature of women's activism and its intricate connection to the larger national narrative, and the enduring commitment to the cause alongside a relentless pursuit of gender equality.

Through deeply rooted in historical events, phases of Palestinian women's activism defy linear chronology. In the first phase, emerging during the anti-British and anti-Zionist riots of 1929, women's political action, as Ijlal Khalifeh's pioneering study reveals, took shape as a spontaneous response to the upheavals (39). On his part, Ghazi Khalili emphasizes that women engaged in this struggle independently, preceding any female organizations and operating outside mainstream male political parties. It was a resistance fueled by self-constructed framework of militancy (78). The disruption caused by the Nakba in 1948 necessitated the reframing of the Arab Women's Union to address the socio-economic challenges imposed on the society. In the aftermath of the 1967 defeat, Jad (1995) observes that Palestinian women found themselves engaged in a dual struggle against foreign domination and societal oppression. In fact, despite its male orientation, nationalism remained the primary space for women to assert their presence.

The period marked by *al intifada* witnessed a milestone in women's involvement in the national struggle. In her study of the cultural production, Suha Sabbagh notes that it provided a protective umbrella against patriarchy's criticism and challenges [3]. On another level, Eileen Kuttab devotes substantial attention to the extent that *al intifada* politicized class issues thus mobilizing women from all walks of life [142]. Masses of camp refugees and peasants who lost their land through settlement policies became the backbone of *al intifada.* They represented the front line that grappled with the occupier on daily basis.[8]

Organizing efforts of Palestinian women over time are interconnected, with present-day protests echoing the demonstrations of the past. National protests in 1929, when the first Arab Women's Congress in Palestine took to the streets chanting slogans against British ruling powers, are echoed later in 1968 by demonstrations of hundred Palestinian women in Jerusalem denouncing Israel's deportation of Palestinians and the expropriation of Palestinian land [Jad, 226, 1995]. Sayigh adds that a young woman throwing herself against an army tank in Sabra in 1985 replicates the actions of Juliette Zakka killed in a street fighting in Akka in 1947 [189, 1993]. Such historical echoes signify the resilience of Palestinian women's activism exemplified by the actions of young women today mirroring the defiant initiatives of their predecessors.

In fact, issues of women's emancipation and their relation to national liberation is an arena of dialectical tension. Among Palestinian women, there is a widespread belief that the pressing urgency of the nationalist predicament necessitates subordinating feminist issues. Across two generations of women leaders, there has been little change in their perception of the interplay between national concerns and women's liberation. Issam Abdel Hadi, a Palestinian activist since the 1940s, declares that "the Palestinian woman … since 1920's … placed the general rule of protecting the homeland against Zionist and colonial aggression above any other consideration" [qtd in Talhami 9, 1985]. Similarly, in a study discussing women's stance between nationalism and feminism, Orayb Aref Najjar, indicates that Mai Sayeh, a much younger Women's Union leader, proclaims that the female experience is seen as one of many aspects within the larger context of exploitation, humiliation, exile, and dispossession [144]. It is noteworthy that in 1978, Dalal al Mughrabi sought legitimacy for her militant operations executed with ten male commandos under her leadership not by advocating for women's rights but by fighting for the Palestinian cause. An overview of women's contributions to the community shows an immersion in nationalist activities that often occludes agitation for women's rights.

Nevertheless, several activists underscore the interdependence of the exigence of the state of *al qadiya* (the Palestinian cause) and attention to the woman question. When Liyanah Badr focused on the emancipating role of women as freedom fighters, she admits, "My struggle for emancipation as Palestinian is inseparable from my struggle for genuine liberation as a woman; neither one is valid without the other" [qtd in Shaaban 164]. In a declaration that grounds the discussion in the voices of the activists and participants themselves, Khadija Abu Ali, an active cadre, affirms the centrality of women's involvement in the national struggle by stating, "I am not with stopping the woman's question until we become liberated" [qtd in Kawar 57]. Leveraging her grasp of the conceptualization of the subaltern, Sahar Khalifeh articulates her understanding of the realities of the disenfranchised and dispossessed by drawing attention to the correlation of the oppressive mechanisms of the Israeli occupation and patriarchy [11, 2002]. The fight against the repressive policies of occupation is also a challenge of restrictive patriarchal values.

In fact, for several sectors of women spanning disparate socioeconomic realities, the demand for homeland rights and Palestinian dignity are closely linked with gender concerns. The struggle on both fronts is inextricable. They espouse the conviction that the woman question cannot be set aside until full liberation of homeland is achieved. As women fight the occupation, they also fight against restrictive traditional values inculcated in people's consciousness.

Deemed as the bedrock of the national struggle, the belief in their own rights and independence is equally essential for effective resistance against the occupation.

Yet, the question remains; does the nationalist route form the shortest path to attain women's rights? Can emancipation come through their participation in the revolutionary struggle? Upheavals in the 1920s and up through watershed events such as al intifada, the harsh reality of occupation, displacement and coercive military measures engenders various outlets for visibility and conceptualizations of gender roles. Islah Jad notes, 'the cultural logic' of resistance was re-directed towards collective resistance struggle immersing everyone in the cause [228-229, 1995], yet an emphasis was laid on the importance of women's voices and space in the agenda of national causes. Suha Sabbagh points out that for 'feminist-nationalists,' creative writing was an apt strategy; their fictional output incorporated liberal roles for women in the national scene [78, 1989]. It may not have been a blatant defiance of patriarchal control, yet women's presence in *al 'amal al wattani* (national work) conveyed a message of untraditional initiative. At large, national aspiration offered a form of protection to feminist objectives and afforded activists a defense against social criticism. Needless to say, that the chronic insecurity and strained conditions of Palestinian duress eroded the public and private dichotomy which undermined women's contributions, alongside the distinction between front line and home front. Domestic tasks have been utilized to serve public ends and thus assert a political position.

On an alternate plane, there was a prevalent conviction that national liberation provided no impetus to catalyze a fundamental reimagining of gender dynamics. Sexism remained pervasive within the national movement. Even leftist factions mainly; PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) that espoused progressive reforms involving women's participation in decision-making, cynically dismissed attempts to foreground and/or address the women question. Soraya Antonius' testimony is a case in point; she states, "Men are my comrades but deep down they don't believe I'm really their equal … At public meetings they talk about liberating women but … some … say it openly, that a woman does her revolutionary duty by … providing a … restful ambience for the warrior" [74-75]. Taking a firm stand, Souad Dajani asserts that unless women found ways to benefit from the revolutionary experience, no one else would do it on their behalf [45]. She attributes lapses to the failure of activists to incorporate an agenda that consolidates women's political roles and social liberation within the national struggle [52]. Additionally, Najjar holds women's committees accountable; their lack of joint action on women's issues rendered them vulnerable to and easy prey for regressive conservative forces that foiled any achievement and hindered their progress [144-145]. Viewed from a Marxist-feminist perspective, the struggles of women in the refugee camps and villages lack manifestos and hence eclipsed and go unnoticed. Sayigh points out that her field research revealed that they have their own history of struggle, orally transmitted, highly localized, and produced in daily life settings of camp habitat [188, 1993]. For the most part, they have limited knowledge of the official history of the national movement. Their experience, grounded in daily confrontations and clashes with Israeli soldiers and settlers, mobilizes them and prepares them to act politically.

On the whole, the written history of the Palestinian women's movement, much like in other stratified societies, suffers from issues of representation. Mainstream political culture failed to reflect the new realities faced by women. An examination of Palestinian poetry composed during *al intifada* reveals the marginalization of women's public role. Despite their presence in

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

the streets, women are portrayed as remote passive storytellers waiting at home for updates on the situation [Cooke 178, Sabbagh 91-113, 1998].

In fact, participating in the national struggle did not automatically translate into effective strategies for advancements for gender equality. Female public activism has not been decoded into viable strategies for gender equality. Despite making remarkable strides in understanding the roots of their oppression and making their voices heard in the community, women in the West Bank and Gaza fell short of their goals. Feminist consciousness had not taken root. Women have not concentrated on emancipation as a goal and regarded it as a fraction of the constituent elements of the broader struggle for national independence. Hence, it has become exigent to establish an agenda that highlights a female political culture that promotes women's inclusion in public life. The overwhelming sense of premonition with the backlash from rising religious reactionary elements has not stalled an agitation instigated during the nationalist activism of *al intifada*. Pivotal junctures as such gave rise to genuine stirrings of feminist consciousness that sparked a debate on a future gender-based agenda and the priorities that need to be addressed. A retreat into invisibility became a remote possibility. What was achieved in the social terrain is irreversible; there is 'no going back.'

PALESTINIAN FEMALE HISTORICAL MEMORY AND THE NATIONALIST DISCOURSE

In the realm of Palestinian writing, the abundance of personal account literature constitutes a significant phenomenon through which Homi Bhabha's theory of nation and narration is most clearly manifested [142]. Self-disclosure subsumes under a narrative of the nation in which sites of memory act as identity markers for the community and serve goals of nation-building. In her groundbreaking anthology, Salma Khadra Jayyusi depicts the varied aspects of Palestinian life experience from the turn of the century to the present and captures Arab Palestine before 1948 and during the wars of 1948 and 1967, and the ensuing calamities experienced by Palestinians in the diaspora and under occupation. She contends that Palestinian self-narratives share commonalities with other de-territorialized literatures that contribute to the consolidation of nationalist projects. Most prominent aspect is the concern with national identity, which is closely tied to "the special suffering that has been the hallmark of Palestinian life since 1948" [Jayyusi 67]. The absence of a sovereign nation-state that encompasses the world's Palestinians intensifies the relevance of this issue. In his foundational and well-documented study on the strength of Palestinian identity and struggles for nationhood, Rashid Khalidi, a pre-eminent historian of Palestinian nationalism, elaborates on the resilience of the Palestinian national identity as it continues to evolve and 'reconfigure' itself, despite the duress of expulsion, dispersion, exile, and control by external forces. He attributes such perseverance and tenacity to generations-old historical national narrative [xii, viii, 8, 1997] that bestowed the distinct uniqueness upon the Palestinian identity.

Another key aspect of de-territorialized literatures that transpires in Palestinian personal narratives is the political immediacy of the writings. Political issues in the personal accounts are far from being mere abstract preoccupation or matters of distant irrelevant events. Chatterjee observes, in the context of discussing nationalism in Asia and Africa, that the memories documented in the creative work of the nationalist imagination are held together into a cohesive narrative more by the political history of the times than the life history of the narrator and the development of the self [138].

Equally forceful in Palestinian autobiography is the way everything takes on a collective value. The conflict with Israel displaces the focus of the critical apparatus of the genre. Thus, instead of delving into the inner workings of individual personality, the emphasis shifts to the collective life of the nation. Self-text transcends the individual self and engages with the communal whole. In a thoroughly researched survey of Palestinian female self-accounts, Susanne Enderwitz maintains that out of the two pillars of autobiography i.e. individuality (I am unique) and identity (I am the same), clear precedence is given to the latter over the former [53]. Personal narratives depict a 'situational consciousness' where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience ultimately involves the collectivity.

The self is not viewed as an isolated individual but as a member of an oppressed collective with responsibilities towards others, possessing a political identity drawing sustenance from the community's past experiences. In fact, the autobiographical genre in the Palestinian scene flourishes as an undertaking that consciously contributes to the establishment of a collective memoir via individual memories. Maurice Halbwach's seminal study on collective memory is a case in point. He argues that human memory can only function within a collective context relying on collective sources for nourishment, and persistently rooted in other people [40]. Individuals remember by placing themselves within the perspective of the group, and the memory of the group manifests itself in individual memories.

Palestinian autobiographers situate their stories within the concrete historical events of Palestine. Personal history evidences the troubles of the entire community, and the two realms flow seamlessly into each other. The critical gaze of the autobiographers is focused internally and externally, and the meanings they read into life experience are historically contingent. Although critics have contested the historical accuracy of autobiographical writing, Halbwach cites theories of historical sociology and collective remembering that depict autobiographical memory as the means of re-creating historical reality (1980). In the context of the question of Palestine, Historians and researchers recognize the holistic perspective personal narrative provides on historical events. Self-texts are allotted historical value and serve as a documentary that complements and expands upon other historical sources. In the autobiographical texts selected for case study in this research, the aforementioned issues gather strength.

Tuqan: From the Subjectivity of *qumqum al hareem* and *qumqum al dhatiyya* to the Inter-Subjectivity of National Identity [9]

Fadwa Tuqan writes her autobiography *A Mountainous Journey* (1985, trans.1990), hereinafter referred to as *MJ*) as a plea for recognizing women's resistance to cultural practices as political activity. It was not the intervention of nationalist male reformers that set her consciousness into motion; her commitment to instigate change predated nationalist projects. *MJ* depicts *qumqum al hareem* (women's cocoon) and *qumqum al dhatiyya* (the prison-house of the self) as the forces that thwart the potential of a woman artist to connect with others and participate in constructing a female national discourse. Women's domain in Nablus in the 1920s and 1930s is described in dehumanizing and suppressive terms. Submerged in a collective identity and denied recognition as individuals in their own right, women's realm is referred to as a chicken coop "filled with domesticated birds, content to peck the feed thrown to them, without argument," and as "faceless victims with no independent lives" [Tuqan 110, 106].

In a trailblazing contribution to debates on women's oppression, Sheila Rowbotham identifies the social order under which woman's consciousness develops as "a great and resplendent hall of mirrors' [1973, 38] that reflects an image of conventional societal expectations of female marginality and inadequacy. The reinforcement of such representation denies women the complexity and depth that comes with acknowledging an identity unique to each living woman thus hindering the realization of an affirmative sense of self.

Early phases in Tuqan's life manifest myriad forms of manacles. The household, depicted as a *qumqum,* has a "deadly" impact "weigh[ing] [her] down with feelings of repression and servitude" [77-80]; she "shrinks and recoils … bottled up" [111]. The domestic surrounding atrophies any penchant for politics or engagement with the events churning in the outside world. In a sociological approach tackling the traditional social structure and the Palestinian political and economic situation at the time, Yvonne Haddad discusses the patriarchal social system of *hamula* that enforces the sequestration of women to safeguard family honor [151]. Radwa 'Ashour's study of Arab women's writing infers that isolation from the dynamic process of life is most grievous due to its association with negating women's will and violating their right to 'know' [96]. For Tuqan, this is compounded by an overwhelming sense of worthlessness instilled by father who, she comments, "has no feelings for [her] except indifference, as though [she is] nothing, as though [she is] a nonentity, a vacuum" [59]. Equally aggravating is her mother's recollection of having had "ten pregnancies … [and] did not try to abort herself until [Tuqan's] turn came" [13]. At birth, not only has her name been selected from a fictitious tale, but also the date sank into oblivion. To recover it, she is referred to a "cousin's gravestone," through which, she ponders wistfully, "I was able to obtain my birth certificate " [14-15]. More distress is inflicted when her mother fails to remember any anecdotes about her childhood. To her, it brings her mere existence into question reckoning, "I am nothing. I have no place in her memory" [19]. As an adolescent, suppression is enforced by her aunt who rebukes her, "Silence, shut up … a girl must be subdued every time she raises her head" [32-33], and thus she reflects, "My voice would suddenly break off leaving the song hanging incomplete in the air" [32]. Later in her life as the inclination for poetry begins to surface, the ownership of a poetic voice is jeopardized as rumors circulate and "sharp tongues used … to say: her brother … writes her poetry for her and appends her name to it" [Tuqan 95]. It is the prejudice entrenched in the pervasive gender-based discrimination and lack of equitable representation. In fact, reminiscences in *MJ* align with documented historical reality that the authoritative realms of the written discourse have systemically relegated women to the peripheries. Patriarchal power structures reinforce their underrepresentation and omission of their contributions and valorize male-centric modes of thought and expression.

Ironically, the seclusion and the coercion into silence sharpened the narrator's consciousness as she admits, "Detachment fortified me" [50]. She acknowledges an empowering effect making her more vigilant. In an article that discusses the interconnected structures of oppression and strategies of resistance, al Nowaihi deduces that the Arab female autobiographer is a self-aware narrator–author who internalizes the degraded treatment to which she is subjected, yet she manages to rise above its damage, resent it and affirm self-worth [478]. An existence threatened with extinction fosters insurgency and rebellion. When her father attempts to steer her towards political poetry, Tuqan scoffs at the idea; "A voice from within would rise up in silent protest: how and with what right or logic does father ask me to compose political poetry, when I am shut up inside these walls?" [107]

In *MJ*, 'double consciousness' at the center of the autobiographical process is aptly manipulated. A dualistic experience arises from the need of the autobiographer to inhabit multiple perspectives, identities and time frames as she engages in the act of self-representation and endeavors to construct a coherent narrative. The attempt to balance her desire to express the inner self with the awareness that her self-narrative will be delivered into the hands of a reading populace and subjected to critical scrutiny creates a tension between the intimate, subjective experience and the construct of a public persona. Further splits occur with a temporal disconnect as the author attempts to bridge the gap between past and present selves interpreting earlier experiences and identity from a current vantage point. Equally important is the autobiographical challenge of navigating the narratorial distance between the narrating 'I' writing the self-text and the protagonist 'I' who is the subject of the narrative. In fact, Tuqan's *M J* integrates several of the key aspects of the concept of 'double consciousness' that work towards a reconstitution of the autobiographical subject allowing the narrator her to examine, interrogate and bring about change.

Writing about the self is acknowledged as an empowering act for the vulnerable and voiceless. It has a strengthening effect, both introspectively and in relation to the external world. For Tuqan, reflecting on early painful memories solidifies self-validation. A cathartic effect allows the author to process damaging impact of emotionally scarring life experience and attain a sense of resolution. Through shaping her self-representation, she asserts control over the telling of her own story. Additionally, a connection with readership bolsters self-confidence and self-worth.

Tuqan grew up in a land seething with armed strife, in a country plunging in one disaster after another where demonstrations, protests and arrests were rife, in a family whose male members were prominent figures in the political leadership of national upheavals of the twenties and the thirties, and where the poet's primary role was to engage with the struggle against imperialism and Zionism, express a political consciousness, and adopt the persona of the spokesperson for the collective voicing the conscience of the people. However, for Tuqan, held captive in *qumqum al dhatiyya*, a nascent political consciousness was not yet fully realized. She states, "My attempts at poetry revolved mainly around my personal feelings and sufferings" [70], and poetic expression was predominantly intimate and self-centered.

Notwithstanding the tumultuous and turbulent climate of the period of national liberation, for her, an unwavering and resolute assertion of personhood and individual presence remains the bedrock and cornerstone of the broader struggle for collective freedom. In the opinion of al-Nowaihi, one of the main organizing principles of the text is the imperative to be true to the personal voice before meeting communal goals [486]. The confinement and neglect Tuqan suffered as a child and adolescent, coupled with the negative perception of female society, led her to yearn for female autonomy as most invaluable. Overwhelmed by an exigent urge to retrieve her lost self and come to knowledge of her own worth, a sense of self needed to be asserted and celebrated before it fuses with other selves in a collective voice. Eventually, a perilous landscape that looms over her people leads to regrets and apologies for a narcissistic self-absorption, and to a struggle to break through the circle of self and voice communal plights. It is a recognition that the self could not become complete except in a community of people.

Junctures en route towards the attainment of an individual voice, and the realization of her potential as a poetess coincide with national catastrophes. "When the roof fell in on Palestine in 1948" [Tuqan 113], she breaks out of *qumqum al hareem.* A sense of liberation culminates with the June 1967 war; she triumphs over *qumqum al dhatiyya*, and the irresolution of identity between the egotistic space and the collective entity. She states, "With the winds of change and revolt, poetry left its ivory tower to march along with the Arab masses" [117]. She embarks on writing overtly nationalistic poetry with a wholehearted merger with the collective. From her critical standpoint, al Nowaihi discerns a shift in the struggle at this point that is now waged against the *qumqum* of occupation in which everyone is immured, and against the reality of marginalization, powerlessness and vulnerability that threatens the survival of the nation [484]. Poetry came to her in the form of adamant persistence to stay the flood of oblivion that threatens to inundate the entire nation whose people though not mute, their voices do not penetrate world attention. The relevance of autobiography, as George Misch argues regarding the role of writers, lies in the engagement in public life, being for others, for the collective, and for one's people. In the Palestinian context, being for oneself also means being for the collective [8-10]. It is an identity that merges the unique and the shared, highlighting the interconnectedness of their struggles.

At the outset, *MJ* unfolds disharmony and dissonance between a woman's private realm and public causes. The author –narrator conveys aversion to political involvement; she writes, "I was afflicted with the sickness of the hatred of politics" [133]. Such disdain is attributed to its association with the male domain; connected mainly to masculine-ist values and defined predominantly as a male prerogative. However, the final pages and closing segments conclude with a reconciliation where Tuqan's gendered and national identities harmonize. She embraces dual realities and vantage points relishing the lens of her intersectional identity as a female and Palestinian. It is a newly acquired ability to write drawing on the totality of an identity that combines the perspective of Palestinian roots and womanly sensibilities without sensing a discrepancy between these two facets of her life experience. In a study that focuses on the linkage between the personal her-story and collective biography, Mira Tzoreff investigates Tuqan's narrative of early life experience as an admonishment to nationalists that realizing goals of national liberation is unlikely as long as the society is shackled in the fetters of patriarchy that paralyzes half of its members and stunts its progress [59-60]. *M J* extends beyond the limits of an individual woman protesting religious, traditional and cultural strictures that mold female personality and predetermine the essence of her life; it restructures personal history into a Palestinian national narrative.

As an act of subversion, Tuqan's self-text leverages different modalities of non-compliance as it reflects various manifestations of iconoclastic expressions. It generates an oppositional interpretation of the social order through questioning the authority of the dominant ideology and deep- rooted tradition and rendering visible the proscribed and the forbidden. In formulations of the unifying vision of *wattaniya* (the feeling of patriotism) and *qawmiya* (nationalism), there is a pervasive proclivity to refrain from divulging the unfavorable attributes of the collective. According to al Nowaihi, it has been a widely accepted assumption that exposing and criticizing one's group is a betrayal that provides ammunition to the enemy [487]. Notwithstanding such admonishment, Tuqan takes on the task of uncovering the cultural schizophrenia and gender hypocrisy within her community. She indicates how her father and uncle "strove to inculcate firmly in the family [an educational tradition] of sending the boys to

foreign schools to acquire … western education [36] … [how] the men dressed in European style … [and] they fell in love" [78]. Yet, when it comes to women, an apparent double standard is the dominant and pervasive status -quo. They revert to traditional rigidity, subjugating the females to the intractable societal restrictions and inequities.

At this point, it is worth noting that women across the Arab world often take for granted their belonging to nations that do not have to prove their existence. In such contexts, the concept of nation can be critically examined. This is not the case for Palestinian women for whom voicing discontent and dissent can be particularly troubling and fraught with ambivalences. Manifestation of resentment and contestation are acts of betrayal in a context where national identity is precarious and constantly under threat. While many Arab feminists argue that the struggle for national independence should not compromise women's freedom, Palestinian women face the daunting task of navigating the intersection.

Significantly, women flourish and bloom in the liberating atmosphere of public life. Despite the grievances against maltreatment and parental indifference, the loveless mother-daughter relationship changes when the mother is released from the confining shackles of *qumqum al hareem.* Observing her in *el hammam*, Tuqan exalts, "Mother appeared more beautiful and attractive than ever" [24]. The mother's public persona facilitates a shift, allowing her to express a buoyant essence. When she joins in national activities, her inherent sense of wonder and spirited nature come to the fore; "Mother was the first of her generation in Nablus to remove the veil, and from that moment she began to breathe the air of freedom … her vitality increase[d]" [Tuqan 25]. Evidently, she can be tender and kind but only when basking in a permissive space; she reclaims her public voice and sings as her liveliness transpires.

Ultimately, *MJ* encapsulates Palestinian history at a given period of time through the lens of a Palestinian woman's life. The personal narrative is woven into the fabric of national experience. It depicts the author-narrator's agency as she proactively molds the events rather than merely reacting to them. Historical facts selected are relevant to her message and reinforce her vision. Her journey embodies as inextricable link between individual flourishing and the broader struggle for collective empowerment. It locates personal quest for what it means to live a life of purpose and dignity within the shared yearnings of a people in pursuit of self-determination. The narrator's plight and struggle speak to the core human drive for the realization of one's full potential and find expression in both the personal and the national levels. She states, "There is no shame in losing the battle. The main thing is not to give up - Within the limits of my ability and in the conditions in which I was steeped, I succeeded in what would have been insurmountable without will power" [11-12]. Life experience, in this context, captures the essence of resilience that animate both personal and national narratives.

Sakakini's Autobiography as Quest for Place

Various ideational modes, crucial to the perpetuation of national discourse are implemented by rhetoricians and intellectuals to disseminate and reinforce conceptions of national identity and belonging. This is performed through narrative modes involving storytelling about national struggles, historical figures and defining events, expository discourses on national interests, threats and rhetorical defenses of national sovereignty, exceptionalism and moral superiority, descriptions of national symbols, and detailed portrayal of geographical landmarks and cultural traditions, as well as reflective modes of personal narratives that connect individual

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

experiences to national identity and a deeper public identification with the nation. In all cases, they aim at cultivating a common national narrative and a sense of shared identity, fostering feelings of shared heritage, creating a unifying national mythos, bolstering a sense of collective purpose that influence political agendas and cultivating shared ethos and sense of shared emotional investment.

In Hala Sakakini's *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record* (1990), the above-mentioned ideational modes gather strength. However, authenticating a place of belonging is given precedence and occupies center stage. The self-narrative is about the author and her city, Jerusalem, prior to 1948. Given the various modes that rely on rhetorical framing and expression of ideas to define and shape national discourse, in *Jerusalem and I,* affiliation among members of a group is established through the geographical location. Although the way people experience themselves in connection to locality is a notion of widespread currency across cultures, in Palestinian reality, spatiality plays a crucial role as an experience deeply lived.

In a study that examines the dialectical interplay of place and identity, Barbara Parmenter focuses on the significance of place in the experience of Palestinians since the formation of their diaspora in 1948 and the relationship of geography, belonging, and Palestinian self-expression. Parmenter maintains that for the Palestinians, place has multiple meanings that evolved over time. Throughout the nineteenth century, the relationship was often abstract. People connected to landscape in spontaneous and unconscious ways. After 1948, a thick description of place became an emotional refuge in which the exiled can establish a sense of at home-ness and security. Land rhetoric was designed to advance nationalist aims and provide *a genius loci* for conveying Palestinian identity. The link with physical space in a literal sense became a fundamental motif of resistance. Commonplace features mainly, rocks and olive trees were assigned practical and emotional value evolving into an evocation of struggle and an advocate for national identity. In fact, myriad invocations of homeland in Arabic language such as *bilad* (country), *wattan* (homeland), *mawtin* (native place)*, thara* (ground soil), *ard* (land), and *turab* (dust) strengthen sensibilities of national belonging [Parmenter 5, 26,36]. For Palestinians, ancestral land variously articulated emerged as a binding feature for all.

In *Jerusalem and I*, place serves as locus of self-narrative. Sakakini's personal record reframes the typical question posed in the genre of autobiography; "Who am I, how did I become and what I am now?" shifting it to a modified version focused on the question of location and belonging namely, "Where am I and where do I belong to?" [Enderwitz 53] A reunion with her occupied home in Katamon, Jerusalem, for the first time after nineteen years in exile, on July 4, 1967, one month after the 1967 war, becomes an epiphanic moment. Sakakini states, "It was a sad encounter, like meeting a dear person whom you had last seen young, healthy and well-groomed and finding that he had become old, sick and shabby… All through the years since 1948, we had lived in exile … we had almost given up hope of ever seeing Katamon and our house again. When at last the opportunity came to visit our old quarter, we hesitated to do so. That was not the way we wanted to go back" [xi-xv].

Epiphanic moments, in autobiographical accounts, triggered by experiences ranging from a chance encounter to a profound emotional experience, are employed as narrative devices marking crucial turning points in the narrator's life, during which a new awareness and revelation emerge. In *Jerusalem and I*, an epiphanic moment of illumination unravels a flood of

memories and provides a sense of clarity and understanding. It refers to a profound realization and insight that has a transformative impact shifting the autobiographer's worldview and altering the trajectory of her life. The return to the once familiar surroundings, and elegiac reminiscences of events and cherished moments of warm family gatherings and friendly acquaintance introduce a paradigmatic representation of the *atlal*[10] motif which establishes itself as a fundamental part of the Palestinian autobiographical repertoire.

In nationalist narratives, land is a marker of stability yet in *Jerusalem and I,* land itself is unstable, elusive and slides out of reach. In an article that investigates crafting an autobiography that captures political convictions, Janet Varner Gunn defines land poetics as "resistance to mutilation … to loss or to what Marcel Proust called temps perdu" [76]. As a tool of empowerment, Palestinian memoir functions as a medium for the autobiographer to reclaim her narrative. In this sense, Sakakini's text evokes, in the words of Gunn, "a learning how to walk again … [and] walking again requires a new sense of the ground, a trust that the ground will hold up and not give way. But what happens when it is the ground itself that gets lost, not simply a leg to stand and walk on?" [76] A wistful longing to bygone times evolves into resistance to loss and a steadfast determination to find a sense of ground and belonging. Sakakini avers, "Jerusalem is my hometown. Both my parents were born in that great city, so were my grandparents on both sides, and so were seven of my great grandparents … Although I myself spent the first twenty-four years of my life as a resident of Jerusalem, I rightly feel bound to that great city by centuries of family history. Wherever I may live I will always remain a Jerusalemite (1) … I cannot help but feel nostalgic for the way of life in Jerusalem prior to 1948" (106). Trials of dispossession and displacement and the wounds of dismemberment and deprivation do not deter an unwavering quest to establish a firm foothold and secure a sense of being at home. Emphasis laid on her deep familial roots in the city, spanning generations, substantiates her resolute declaration that she is, in essence, a Jerusalemite, a designation that endures beyond her immediate geographic circumstances.

Additionally, the process of 're-territorialization'becomes a potential resistance to the status quo, and a subversive site of ongoing negotiation, contestation and reimagination of identity and political agency. In their conceptualization of minority literature, Deleuze and Guattari conjure up the image of a sharpened stick cut off from its branch and released from its previous role as a component of a living tree. It becomes something out of its original element (67). Just like that stick, the Palestinian woman is out of her element; but unlike the stick, for which de-territorialization is absolute, she is constantly endeavoring to re-gain and reclaim a pre-existing authentic identity and territory, constantly grappling with fronts of struggle asserting the self and challenging the status quo. In fact, this undertaking constitutes an essential part of Deleuze and Guattari's vision. After the initial act of deterritorialization, the subsequent process of reterritorialization becomes a new battleground for political and cultural resistance. To them, the process of reterritorialization is not a regression and /or capitulation, but rather a dynamic and productive mode of political and cultural resistance. It is where the minoritarian discourse can find new ways to assert its presence, voice its concerns, and enact its transformative potential. In *Jerusalem and I*, the narrator-author refuses to be simply erased or subsumed, and instead keeps finding new ways to manifest its political and creative power, to stake a claim, to make its presence felt, and to carve out new discursive and material spaces of belonging and resistance.

Within the simple form of character reminiscence, the author-narrator allows the reader to follow her through the events of her everyday world. Locating life experience in daily surroundings provides the ground for the very representability of her community. Land and life on it; the city and its inhabitants provide the symbol of communal solidarity. Sakakini recalls the personal connections with peasants in nearby villages, "I … remember the Arab villages in the vicinity - Battir, Walajeh, Beit Safafa, Malha, Sharafat, Beit Jala, EI-Khader - which used to provide us with fresh vegetables and fruit ... It was a persona1, human relationship that connected us Jerusalemites with the villages" (106). In mapping the literal city, the self–text presents an immediate perception of the geographical terrain combined with the imaginary relationship of the individual to the actual conditions of existence. It is a striking instance of what Frederic Jameson terms "cognitive map" (353). An emancipatory potential to map cognitively one's position within the system is crucial for political agency and collective resistance against the forces of late capitalism. Jameson's concept relates to structures of domination and the relationship between space and power as well as ways in which experienced lived space of late capitalism shape individual and collective subjectivities. His theory addresses issues that capture thematic concerns in *Jerusalem and I* mainly, the role of 'cognitive mapping' in developing modes of spatial representation that allow individuals to situate themselves within larger social and geographic totality. A mentally reconstructed Palestine incorporates memories and ideals that survive unperturbed in the individual psyche.

In Sakakini's autobiography, the spatial and temporal dimensions of Jerusalem become sources of identity construction. Detailed description of scenery is more than mere exposition of a sprawling landscape. It is instrumental in materializing time in space infusing the chronotope of the place with the ideological implication of the autobiography. Sakakini forges ahead with her introspective musings: "In those years Jerusalem was still an easy-going city. Katamon, Upper Baq'a, Tori, Lower Baq'a, Talbieh were all Arab quarters, and the traditional Arab courtesy marked the behavior of the people… People living in the same quarter were like one large family … Life moved at a dignified pace … the traditional Arab courtesy marked the behavior of the people… … the Arab Jerusalemite has always been known as a proud person, perhaps even an arrogant person" (104).

The re-writing of the city is carried out through stories and memories. Sakakini resorts to a commonly employed narrative device of implied contrast in reminiscences namely, the phrase 'in those days.' This narrative technique of evoking nostalgia is a repetitive occurrence in memoirs that acts as a hallmark of writer's musings and retrospections. Sakakini lingers on crafting compelling portrayals, "I remember vividly the early morning scene … when peasant women, proudly carrying their wares on their heads, would arrive at our house. Father would help them put down their heavy baskets and they would then sit down on the floor … invite my mother to pick her choice of fruit and vegetables at leisure … While the business was going on … [they] … would … air their family grievances, and Mother would … encourage and give advice when necessary" (106-107). The vivid recollections weave a tapestry of sensorial details of daily life in Jerusalem that underlines the communal bonds of Palestinian Jerusalemites.

Sakakini indulges in a more expansive and immersive rendering of a scene that unfolds the dynamics and interplay that characterize modes of interactions. She writes, "A daily source of excitement for us children was the arrival in the morning of a big cart drawn by a mule and heaped with all kinds of vegetables and fruit … its owner, an old Jew would call out his own

name 'Yacob!' by way of announcing his presence, and all the housewives of the neighborhood would come out to buy. This scene provided Dumia and me with wonderful entertainment. We were fascinated by the hustle and bustle, the coming and going, the picking and choosing, the weighing and paying" [7[. Women writers in the diaspora are firmly committed to preserve the art of storytelling. Reminiscences in *Jerusalem and I* unravel the common traits of the Palestinian Jerusalemites and the shared facts behind specific life stories, the inner part of homes inhabited by women, the rituals and celebrations of births, deaths and marriages as well as the sudden interruptions of everyday lives by calamitous events. Renderings of minute details carry intensely emotional meanings.

Images of nostalgic reflections convey a meeting place of what 'we' once were and what 'we' now are, and an assessment of the relationship between the two. They carry multiple layers of meaning that critics approach from varied perspectives. Azade Seyhan ascribes great significance to the role of such nostalgic impulse. She examines how displaced writers engage with memory and nostalgia in their literary practices as a means of negotiating their relationship to home and national origins. Her commentary in another context on the value on such texts is pertinent to Sakakini's work. They assume the role and responsibility of "the guardianship of personal and communal stories that face the danger of fading into oblivion in the shuffle of history" [144]. For Sakakini, engaging in nostalgic reminiscences in which communities partake is not merely a sentimental indulgence nor simply an individual psychological phenomenon. They constitute an essential cultural practice; one that helps to maintain the continuity of a community's shared identity, values and ways of life. They function in sustaining the conservation and perpetuation of a culture's living heritage, and the transmission of collective memories to future generations in the form of daily lived experiences and lifestyles. Significantly in this respect, Seyhan posits that emotionally resonant nature of nostalgia imbues stories with a powerful ability to forge connections across time, allowing younger generations to internalize the cultural narratives of their forbears. In *Jerusalem and I*, indulgence in the past chronicled in stories become the means by which the experiences and traditions are carried forward into the future. Nostalgic remembrances function as a conduit for safeguarding and passing down the cultural heritage and traditions of a people.

On his part, Chatterjee classifies vignettes of nostalgic reflections as principal source for reconstructing the social history through lived experiences of subaltern groups (139). His theoretical considerations posit that official historical records and archives often neglect and/or overlook the everyday lives of common people. Nostalgia, in this view, becomes a vital lens for recovering subaltern experiences and perspectives. To him, politics of representation and subalternity engages with questions of how marginalized groups are represented and/or misrepresented within nationalist discourses and the challenges of recovering subaltern voices and experiences. In this respect, *Jerusalem and I* reveals alternative perspectives and modes of being that challenge dominant historical narratives. It elevates the significance of affectively charged recollections of ordinary people as a crucial resource for gaining a richer, more textured understanding of the past; one that moves beyond elite-centric narratives typically found in dominant historical accounts. The thrust of Sakakini's approach democratizes the process of historical reconstruction, giving voice to the memories and lived realities of subaltern populations that have traditionally been marginalized or excluded from the historical record. Anecdotal recollections preserved in popular memory, folklore and personal

testimonies provide insights into the obscured social realities and cultural worldviews of marginalized populations.

Significantly, Sakakini's renderings of lost hometown bestow upon the city a mythic quality imbued with a rhapsodic version of the past. A study by Popular Memory Group states that "*Knowledge of past and present ... produced in the course of everyday life ... [and] encapsulated in anecdotes ... acquire the force and generality of myth* (210). The concept of the mythic quality imparted to lost hometowns through recollections point to the complex interplay between individual/collective memory, place, and the constructed narratives that are used to make sense of the pasts in the face of displacement, loss and trauma. Mythmaking around lost hometowns taps into a broader process of popular mythologization. In *Jerusalem and I*, the lost place becomes imbued with a heightened symbolic resonance transcending its material reality to become a vessel for collective memory, nostalgia and shared cultural meaning.

Furthermore, Sakakini's Jerusalem is depicted, in the terms of Gaston Bachelard uses, as the "realm of intimate space … the exterior spectacle that helps intimate grandeur unfold" (192). Her personal narrative expatiates on the experiential, subjective dimensions of human interaction with and perception of physical spaces and places. It is the affective attachments and sense of belonging that humans develop towards certain meaningful spaces and locations. An interaction of the external, physical domain and the subjective realm is crucial to making meaning and finding fulfillment in the spaces she inhabits. A symbiotic relationship between the outer world and inner imaginative lives contributes to the richness and complexity of human spatial experience. In this sense, Bachelard's phenomenological approach bears relevance. It draws upon an interdisciplinary synthesis to develop a holistic understanding of the human experience of space. Bachelard's concept of 'realm of intimate space' alludes to emotional dimensions of lived experience of space and how we imbue spaces and environments with profound personal significance. Alternatively, the 'exterior spectacle' - the objective, outward-facing aspects of a physical space - the observable and material qualities of a space serve as catalysts or conduits for evoking deeper and more profound emotional resonances.

Jerusalem and I comes forth as a pastoral that juxtaposes the innocence and serenity of a simple past life and the mutilation, loss and chaos of the depredations of the present. From his perspective, Ted Swedenburg discerns an underlying significance in setting yearnings for an innocent and serene past against current harsh reality of dislodged Palestinian population. In a study that examines the symbolic power of preserving historical memory, Swedenburg points out that reminiscences, in this respect, are more than "nostalgia for a lost past," they constitute a "criticism of a burdensome present" (25). While they may evoke aching desire to reconnect with the past, they serve as a critique of the challenging circumstances of dispossession and ultimately a recognition of the collective responsibility for shaping the future. Memories of rebellion in the Palestinian national past continue to inform and inspire subsequent Palestinian resistance against occupation. The legacy of revolt and anti-colonial resistance is mobilized in national identity formation, and eventually become invested with symbolic meaning within the Palestinian national imaginary.

On her part, al Nowaihi argues that our presence in language and stories of the past is crucial. It anchors us by offering a self that is fixed in specific moments, and our change becomes a form of continuity rather than rupture (486). Stories in autobiographies signify more than a haven

of warmth and consolation in which one can temporarily revisit the past as it once was. They offer a sense of continuity by anchoring individuals in specific moments and contributing to the construction of enduring selves. In fact, specters and visions of the past become instrumental in maintaining an enduring sense of self.

In any case, vignettes of the past in *Jerusalem and I* are more than mere impressionistic scenes. They contain multiple layers of meaning that critics explore and integrate into their overall understanding of the text infusing it with depth and richness. The ability to discern deeper significances inherent in nostalgic retreat enhances the resonance of the personal account as a whole. Critical approaches from diverse perspectives add complexity and nuance, elevating the text beyond a singular interpretation.

In a study that examines the role of the autobiographical 'I' in articulating collective struggle and transformation, Smith explores how it can be mobilized to represent and advance broader social, political and cultural projects of emancipation and change. In this respect, Sakakini's mode of self-writing "functions as a kind of nationalism" (1998, 437) assuming nationalistic tendencies namely, shaping a sense of singular identity, delineating the self from the external, and asserting one's distinctive status. Additionally, it has political and ideological dimensions as self-narration takes on a nationalistic quality and modes of self-expression that go beyond mere individual identity and personal storytelling.

It is worth noting that re-conceptualized through the realm of quotidian particulars and temporal structure of daily living, Sakakini's narrative of life is translated into textual configuration of national subjectivities. National identity and cultural belonging are not imposed by official nationalist discourses but rather re-shaped and performed through the micropolitics of everyday life. Cultural identity is 'performed' through such routine activities. In Bhabha's view, it is in the everyday "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life" that the performative re-definition of cultural identity occurs, and through these mundane elements that people become 'subjects' undergoing 'a process of signification' that constitutes national identity (145). People are simultaneously shaped by and shaping the evolving meanings of national culture and belonging. For Bhabha, this is where the boundaries and content of national/cultural identity is continuously being contested, reimagined and rearticulated from the ground up, rather than simply decreed from above. In *Jerusalem and I*, ordinary practices, rituals, and representations of daily life are the sites where cultural identity is constantly being negotiated and redefined.

In her discussion of the politics of memory, Bernice Johnson Reagon engages with the act of constructing a 'cultural autobiography' as a means of reclaiming marginalized histories and narratives, and a vehicle for preserving collective cultural traditions and histories. In her conceptualization of 'cultural autobiography,' author-narrators emerge as nationalists, people -builders and carriers of traditions contributing to the formation and continuance of culture (81). They are not passive vessels, but driving forces in the ongoing process of cultural self-definition. As people-builders, autobiographers forge a sense of communal belonging and continuity, shaping the cultural identities of readers/listeners.

Jerusalem and I, the personal record linking the author-narrator to a particular community at a given historical juncture comes across as a critical mechanism for the maintenance of culture

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

itself as Sakakini's reminiscences add to and reinterpret the collective cultural tradition. The self-representation, as touchstone for collective memory, identity and belonging, is instrumental in shaping broader cultural and communal identities. The author -narrator is not just telling her own story but positions herself as steward and transmitter of shared cultural knowledge and values. The text underscores the role of individual narrative in shaping the larger cultural landscape, and the insights of its composer encapsulate the function of personal storytelling as a profoundly social and political act; one that is integral to the very construction of cultural communities and their sense of identity over time.

Further scrutiny of the genre's broader significance reveals how the seamless connection of individual and community reworks the autobiographical genre into an act of cultural survival. In Bell Hooks' theoretical framework, autobiographical enterprise produced in communities in crisis and resistance is a contribution to endeavors of 'staying alive' (431) both in the literal sense of physical survival, and in the deeper sense of maintaining cultural continuity and resilience in the face of adversity. In these contexts, autobiography is fundamentally a vehicle for documenting and safeguarding the collective lived experiences, and ultimately a tool for cultural and historical preservation. For Sakakini, Hooks theory is pertinent. *Jerusalem and I* is an act of collective self-determination and a means of sustaining the community's very existence. Given the context of crisis and resistance in which communities face multiple forms of oppression, it is strategically utilized to ensure the survival of lived realities and traditions, a way of 'staying alive' both in the present and for future generations. The act of autobiographical narration takes on a profoundly political and communal dimension.

Existing research in the Western world relies extensively on Zionist historiography and Zionist-oriented scholarship that overwrite Palestinian presence in the city of Jerusalem. Mainstream historical narratives fail to fully represent and account for the narratives of the Palestinian population. Rochelle Davis' critique underscores the importance of interrogating biases and power dynamics within academic disciplines in order to work towards a more comprehensive understanding of contested histories and geographies. Her critique speaks to the need for balanced and inclusive approaches to studying the past; one that makes a concerted effort to center and amplify voices and experiences that have often been overlooked or underrepresented (1999). According to Barbara Harlowe, the battle to control the historical record is "no less crucial than armed struggle" (1987, 7). Her perspective, outlined in her work on resistance literature, offers a compelling insight into the importance of political and ideological dimensions of historiography and textual production. It highlights how the struggle over textual representation and the written word is fundamentally intertwined with broader struggles for political self-determination. The ability to narrate one's own history becomes a key battleground in the overall fight for justice and liberation.

Sakakini's *Jerusalem and I* contributes to endeavors to control the historical narrative. It acts as a revolutionary gesture, reclaiming memory and countering selective remembrance. Framing of this dynamic emphasizes the profound stakes involved in the battle over historical representation, positioning it as a crucial front in the broader struggle for political autonomy. *Jerusalem and I* incorporates documents, letters, photos, maps, certificates and entries of diaries that function as 'strategies of authentication' which grapple with the damaging effect of elision and misrepresentation. Controlling the historical record is a means of asserting legitimacy in the face of oppression or marginalization. The implication is that the power to shape the official

account of historical events and experiences is just as vital as the direct confrontation of military or violent resistance.

In fact, this view underscores the inherent political nature of all acts of writing and disseminating information about the past. It calls attention to the ways in which dominant discourses can silence, erase or distort the experiences of marginalized groups. In this light, the production of alternative, resistant forms of literature and historiography takes on an essential role challenging hegemonic power structures and asserting the validity of subaltern narratives and memories.

By and large, *Jerusalem and I* functions as a multifaceted community history blending elements of sociological analysis, historical documentation, and ethnographic chronicle of the period. The boundaries between these various modes of recording and interpreting the past are indistinct. Rather than neatly fitting into a single genre, the text combines autobiographical recollections with rigorous sociological and historical research. It reads like an oral history while also incorporating analytic frameworks more typical of ethnographic studies. In this way, the work resists easy categorization. It draws from and interweaves multiple approaches to understanding the experiences and perspectives of the community it documents. The result is a rich, multi-layered account that defies simplistic genre distinctions.

Karmi's *In Search of Fatima:* Inscribing the Ambivalences of Nationalist Constructions of Identity in Exile

The autobiographical narrative of Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima A Palestinian Story* (2002), stems from the experience of '*the un-healable rift"* of exile (Said 1984), and the uprooted-ness which directed the course of the personal lives of many Palestinians. Several critical speculations capture the dynamic of nationalism and its association with exile. Benedict Anderson characterizes nationalist movements in nation-building as "*a project for coming home from exile*" (65). At their core, they represent a desire to reclaim a sense of belonging and connection to a collective homeland. They emerge from a feeling of displacement, alienation or marginalization, where groups seek to establish their own sovereign state or autonomous territory, and their success lies in their ability to channel sentiments into a coherent political project of state-building. In his reflection on life in exile, Edward Said depicts the language of collective sentiments and group passion as essentially a means of overcoming the predicament of exile and the sense of estrangement. He states, "Nationalism is an assertion of belonging to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and by doing so, it fends off the ravages of exile" (1990, 359). The dialectical relationship between nationalism and exile is also expressed in the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence which defines the nation as "the state of all Palestinians wherever they may be" [qtd in Saliba 160] inclusive of all Palestinians, regardless of their geographic location.

Perspectives as such explain powerful emotional and symbolic resonance that nationalist causes hold as they tap into deep-seated yearnings for rootedness, belonging and the reclamation of a perceived ancestral homeland. They highlight the restorative and redemptive quality of nationalism. The nation-building process becomes a means for communities to reaffirm their rightful place in the world, to shed the mantle of exile and retrieve a sense of political self-determination.

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

Debates on whether the concept of nationalism is one of culture or politics are pertinent to constructions of nationalism in exile. Deliberations of Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski offer a nuanced perspective on the relationship between cultural nationalism and political sovereignty, one that challenges assumptions about the necessary correspondence between the two. Their argument conveys a fluid conceptualization of nationalism that is not contingent on the establishment of a nation-state. They suggest that the notion of a coherent national identity and cultural community can exist independently of formal statehood. To them, the case of the Palestinians demonstrates how a distinct ethno-national consciousness can arise through shared language, traditions and history, a strong sense of collective identity, and nationalist aspirations, without manifesting in the formal creation of an independent state and in the absence of sovereign political control over a defined territorial homeland [89]. On the other hand, Adeed Daweesha's study of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century, argues that the existence of a state is a prerequisite for the formation of a nation and nationalism. Formal political recognition is necessary for a cultural bond to manifest in the form of an actual state. Daweesha posits that the combination of a shared cultural heritage plus political recognition is what produces a nation; cultural ties binding the Palestinian people need to coalesce into a defined geographic and political entity. The cultural foundation is there, but it requires the added dimension of statehood to constitute a complete nation [13]. The Palestinian case demonstrates how a strong ethno-cultural bond alone is insufficient - it must be accompanied by the establishment of a sovereign state and formal political structures of statehood be considered a fully-fledged nation. National aspirations cannot be fully realized without political sovereignty and international recognition of territoriality.

To clinch the argument, studies of Arab nationalism, for the most part, recognize that both cultural autonomy and political independence are essential components in defining the concept of nationhood and the ideology of nationalism. In fact, by acknowledging both the cultural and political dimensions as integral to nationalism, scholarly perspectives provide comprehensive view of the nation-building process. Nationhood is not an organic cultural phenomenon; it necessitates territorial boundaries and the separation of that cultural community into an independent state. The formation of a nation arises from a combination of two significant factors: the existence of a shared cultural identity, heritage, and sense of collective belonging among a particular group of people and the achievement of political self-governance and the establishment of a distinct territorial state for that cultural group. In other words, the definition of a nation is not based solely on cultural unity; it hinges on forging a common cultural identity while also attaining sovereign statehood.

On another level, inhabiting a map of discontinuous locations, the Palestinian community in exile is particularly dependent on national narrative for its curative quality. The urge to narrate the tragedies of exodus and dispossession becomes a way of dealing with ravages by turning them into what Rosemary Sayigh describes as "narrative absorbing it in all its details rather than suppressing it, unassimilated and unshared into the unconscious' [1994, 199]. It is noteworthy that family stories contribute crucially to the construct of nation by nourishing the collective memory. After 1948, the defensive nationalism of exile fostered self-awareness. Exile stimulated the cultivation of scrupulous subjectivity, individual self-reflection and a questioning and /or probing of one's inner world. Re-constructing the self out of the refractions and fragments of exile became a central concern. Therese Saliba's analysis of the writings of the Palestinian diaspora points out that they, in essence, are designed to reassemble an exile's

broken life and history into a new whole [146] and in the process, as Said maintains, transform the suffering under the rigid proscriptions of exile into resistance [1984, 51].

The autobiographical genre flourished as part of the re-constitutive projects. Approaching self-texts with a focus on the eruptions of the unsettling forces of exile prompted a thought-provoking line of inquiry namely, what is subjectivity in transit? How do the crossings and re-crossings of borders between places, spaces, identities and destinies affect self-representational practices? To the autobiographer, what are the personal and political costs of homesteading and of homelessness? How do autobiographical subjects negotiate strangeness, whether of language, cultures or histories?

Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima* presents a construct of nationalism informed by the aforementioned issues. It embodies a complex of pressures and constraints that constitute the exile's predicament. Identity crisis takes center stage as the exiled intellectual strives to come to terms with the transplanted condition and navigates the complexities of cultural hybridity and the struggle to articulate a sense of belonging. Karmi walks an uneasy line between Western and Arab worlds disturbed by the inability to articulate a sense of cultural purity. She remains unyielding, resistant, un-accommodated and unco-opted. For her, self- validation is a major pre-condition. The diasporic status leaves her vulnerable to erasure at any minute. She mulls over the dilemma, "Was I Arab or English or a hybrid, and was there such a thing? [294] … I wondered who exactly I was. For years, I had wrestled with the impossibility of being two opposing personalities, Arab and English. Eventually, I had settled for being predominately English, although I knew underneath that I was not … In marrying John … I had sought to belong to England … and to build my fragile sense of identity along English lines. But the Middle East war put paid to all that. The polarization that it caused forced on me the question, 'If I am not one of them, then who am I? ... whom was I one of?'" [376-377] In fact, since 1948 Palestinian sociologists situate national identity consciousness within the context of dichotomies involving self and other, kin and stranger, Palestinian and Israeli, locality and region, as well as Arab and Euro-American. For Khalidi, exploring such dynamics is crucial as "transnational identities … have competed for loyalty" [1997, 10].

After desperately trying to make sense of a shifting and interstitial experience and reconcile the incompatible sides of her life, Karmi comes to the inevitable conclusion: "I was beginning to see that in effect I had no natural social home in England or in any other place … The truth I could not face as yet was that I was truly displaced, dislocated in both mind and body, straddling two cultures and unable to belong in either" [421-422]. Attempts at assimilation into English society were gradually thwarted by both internal and external pressures. Her plight took a different turn in each phase of her life. The ambiguity of the situation was grave in her childhood. For her parents, England never acquired more than a utilitarian function for the family. Her father regarded their stay principally as a means of pursuing educational goals and making a living. Her mother endeavored to redeem the safety net of similarity and familiarity by recreating Palestine in London, "as if we had never left … the clock stopped in Jerusalem in April 1948" [Karmi 174]. Such mindset imparted to Karmi a disordered sense of reality. She states, "We were left to find our own accommodation to the schism in our lives between our Palestinian Arab origins … and the new society we had joined … between the awareness of our bruised and dislocated history and the British indifference and hostility towards it … we were forced to feel our way forward uncertainly" [208]. *In Search of Fatima* tackles the Palestinian crisis of national

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

identity from a multi-dimensional perspective. Like several post-colonial narratives written in a Western language, the text is trapped in a contradictory move towards the rejection of the host culture and the inevitable entrenchment in that culture.

At one point, Karmi sought to achieve some sense of stability by burying one side of her identity: "I was relentlessly being absorbed into the English way of life" [215]. An anglophile sentiment overwhelms her. "It never occurred to me … as a Palestinian, I owed the loss of my homeland ultimately to [the English people]" [Karmi 227]. She dealt with her split identity by constructing a personal edifice as a buffer zone that allows her to live at peace with herself: "Outwardly, I was the same Arab looking … girl my family knew, but inwardly I grew ever closer to the society around me, identifying with its history and its norms" [218-219]. Yet, when she sees her sister happily married to a Syrian, conflicts were stirred up anew. She admits, "I suddenly felt bereft … I was envious of her certainty about herself, her comfortable sense of her own identity … it was she who was the authentic one" [Karmi 332-333]. As she floundered, she sought a constant and reassuring presence in her life, and a similar context and social structure in a relationship with an Englishman. When her family resents her choice, she retorts: "How, I wondered, could my parents … be so crass as to imagine that a childhood spent in England, a five year stay at an English university with scarcely an Arab in sight, and an entirely English education, would leave no mark? It was as if Englishness to them were a form of clothing, a coat or a dress which you wore when you went out into English society, but which you removed as soon as you were back with Arabs" [342]. The conjugal experience results in disillusionment more due to John's unsympathetic attitude towards her plight during the 1967 war, than to differences in cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations: "I felt he had betrayed me" [376]. The divorce has been an epiphanic moment which brings revelations of the core of the quandary: "The tortured love affair that waited inescapably for me, as for all Palestinians, was the one with Palestine. And, for good or ill, it would last a lifetime" [Karmi 380].

The Palestinian exilic experience should not be understood within the common context of the turbulence of migration wherein as Said avers, choice is an essential element to be put into account [1984, 52]. *In Search of Fatima* highlights the specificity of the Palestinian condition in which exile is the result of forced expulsion and war and therefore much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for the disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. Karmi expounds, "Many migrant groups are known to maintain their previous cultures … But this is by way of … creating a bridge between the past they had chosen to leave behind and the present they had opted for. None of this held true for us. My parents did not choose to leave Palestine, and they never willingly acquiesced in its loss. They did not see England as a place of the future, but only as a staging post on a route to where they could never go. And it could not have been otherwise, for abandoning that view was tantamount to accepting the irrevocable loss of Palestine. And so unlike the case of the conventional migrants who try to build bridges to the future, the only bridges my parents built were ones which connected them to the past – to Palestine and to the Arab world" [Karmi 220-221]. *Al awdah* (repatriation) figures as a tortured dream. It looms large in Karmi's memoirs as a major factor in her uneasy assimilation and a principal reason for her physical and psychological displacement.

Driven by the conviction that only by settling down among Arab people and establishing a relationship with an Arab man would bring about a sense of reconciliation, she leaves England for Syria. However, the aspirations she sought to nurture are dispelled, "It soon became clear

that I was alien to them as they to me … I did not understand their cultural norms and was thus prone to commit social indiscretions … Astonishingly no one understood the human effects of exile or displacement; what I took to be a self-evident case for sympathy left them indifferent" [Karmi 413]. Finding a husband has been equally futile; she realizes, "however attractive [Arab men] might have thought me, my previous life and experiences suggested that I was fatally tainted by corrupting western influences" [416]. In fact, *In Search of Fatima* traces the meaning of Palestinian exile for women. It unfolds a space to examine the interlocking oppressions of patriarchy, occupation and exile, and the shifting relationship between feminism, nationalism and exile within the context of Palestinian diaspora. Significantly, Karmi's narrative is a personal story that transcends its author's own experience. Karmi is caught in the chains of memory seeking to render herself more identifiable, but she can only do so by defining the history of her people. The structural organization of the three parts of the narrative reflects a movement from the individual to the collective. The first part deals with childhood memories of homeland and Fatima, a peasant woman who helped Karmi's mother with housework and whom the family entrusted with the key to their house when they fled the deadly explosions occurring on daily basis in Jerusalem in 1948. The second explores the subtler privations of psychological displacement and a growing spirit of restlessness.

In fact, the rehashing of the past in Karmi's self-narrative is not meant to be a dwelling on reminiscences, as much as it is a catalyst to sketch out a role in envisioning a future for a nation-state. Ghassan Kanafani's argument in this respect has direct bearing on her position. He states, "A researcher who does not play an active part in the resistance is not in a position to write its history" [qtd in Harlow 103, 1993]. Thus, to properly write the history of a resistance movement, the researcher must be deeply committed. Detached, outside observers are not qualified to accurately document and interpret the experiences and perspectives of those engaged in the struggle. The researcher's positionality and immersion in the resistance is necessary to fully capture its nuances and significances and with the subject matter when writing histories of resistance movements.

In the third part in Karmi's *In Search of Fatima*, the zeitgeist of seismic events on the personal and political planes underpins a determination to enter organized political struggle for forming coalitions. She explains, "The accumulated frustrations, humiliations and sense of being misunderstood as a Palestinian in Britain had reached a climax. I was determined to reverse this dismal fate by action that would counter such ignorance and contempt" [393]. Karmi evolved from a young girl whose preoccupation centers on fitting into English society into a political activist, agitating for the rights of Palestinians and galvanizing support. Affirmative action becomes the controlling discursive mode of the final pages of the self-narrative.

In fact, the interplay between nationalism and exile is a critical aspect of understanding Karmi's work. Rallying movements across multiple borders has generated multiple modes of resistance to Palestinian dispossession. Those living in diaspora outside the Arab world have been acknowledged for building a nation in exile through narrative and feats of nationalist resistance.

TAWIL AND 'ASHRAWI: AUTOBIOGRAPHY QUA ACTIVISM

In a study that undertakes a scholarly inquiry of the autobiographies of female political activists, Margo Perkins investigates the conventions which govern the writing of such genre,

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

and the values embraced by activists- autobiographers trans-nationally and cross-culturally. She draws attention to the way political autobiography serves as both personal and political interventions. As a personal intervention, it provides an opportunity for activists to seize control of self-image and reconstruct the public image in a manner that is more consistent with their own perceptions of the self [Perkins 88]. As a political intervention, it stems from an urge to use stories of life experience to document the history of the struggle and to further a political agenda. The way political autobiography makes vital connections with historical records, rereading major events and recapitulating pivotal moments, qualifies it as an undertaking to reclaim crucial omissions in the master discourse [Perkins 23-25]. As such, autobiographies of female political activists foster oppositional rhetoric and practice that destabilizes dominant assumptions, and hegemonic ways of perceiving and knowing/ understanding.

For women who pursue self -consciously political autobiographical acts, there is a pedagogical aspect to their writing; they view writing about the self as a tool to educate as broad an audience as possible about the issues at stake. The case of Latifa al Zayyat's activism is a case in point. For her, the personal experience is most meaningful when it is projected onto the level of the general allowing the reader to gain insight into and connect with political challenges [247, 1994]. The objective is to raise consciousness vis-à-vis the conditions that necessitates resistance. Additionally, models of radical female lives demonstrate what Henry Giroux refers to as "insurgent subjectivity" [62] showcasing the potential for individuals to transform their material conditions.

In Raymonda Tawil's *My Home My Prison* (1979) and Hanan 'Ashrawi's *This Side of Peace: A Personal Account* (1995), self- narrative functions as extension of their activism. Paradoxically, it is the subjugating of the personal 'I' that renders self-writing authority. The alignment of the autobiographers with national issues plays a crucial role in lending their voices as women some form of legitimacy. Tawil and 'Ashrawi utilize the autobiographical genre to evaluate their lives in accordance with the political significance of their experience. The self-texts foreground a woman's sense of herself as both bearing witness and building legacies.

Tawil's *My Home My Prison*: Citizenship between Nationalist and Gendered Imperatives

Citizenship is the process by which subjects of the nation-state are constituted. Practices of citizenship are highly gendered on all levels judicially, politically, culturally and economically. For Arab women, emerging as full-fledged citizens is contingent upon reforming restrictive cultural conventions perpetuating their subjugation to prescribed gender roles and overcoming ingrained practices that undercut their societal participation. In Palestinian reality, the impact of gender hierarchy is a forceful and determining factor in attainment of citizenship rights. Women's rights have been defined primarily in accordance with their subordinate status within patriarchal structures. In her discussion of gender and citizenship under the Palestinian authority, Islah Jad points out that the legislation in this context prioritizes women's familial roles as wives and mothers even when they have gained societal recognition for their public presence and standing [140, 2000].

Tawil locates her autobiography, *My Home My Prison* (hereinafter referred to as *HP*), in this contentious terrain of intersection of gender and citizenship. The endeavor to reread discourses of rights of citizenship from a women-centered perspective generates various considerations namely, whether the present Palestinian situation is ideal for waging wars for

gender equality, and what can citizenship mean when the Palestinian authority has no control over its boundaries and the designation of a Palestinian state is continually contested? Nevertheless, *HP* unequivocally advocates for reassessment and amendment of the gender-based restrictions inherent in the national liberation movement. As an astute advocate of civile rights and social justice, Toni Bambara recognizes that any struggle for transformation must begin with self-critique and a resolute commitment to consider one's own shortcomings before turning outward. Addressing effectively external challenges and inequities is, to her, contingent upon first amending internal issues and ensuring one's own "house is in order" [110]. Along similar lines, Sahar Khalifeh, in her autobiographical account interprets the 1967 defeat in terms of cultural regression. She claims, "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 rules and basics of the upbringing of the individual at home, in school, and at university, and then progress to the street" [11]. Tawil's self-narrative resonates powerfully with a women's need for recognition of her agency in public sphere despite the institutionalized sexual biases that marginalizes them. Censures she faces elicit her vehement responses, "What was the point of striving for freedom for my people if our struggle did not bring freedom to women – indeed, to every individual?" [220] Such impassioned reaction questions the purpose of national liberation if it does not truly liberate all individuals, including women. It underscores the inextricable link between personal and political emancipation, and the imperative to address systemic gender-based oppression within the broader struggle for social and political transformation.

Tawil is a journalist-activist who endured an arbitrary ruling of house arrest for a year in 1976, and in May 1988, her Jerusalem publishing house was shut down and her monthly news magazine *al awdah* was discontinued indefinitely by the Israeli authority's crackdown. Deliberations on the forces of oppression provided the driving impetus and compulsion to document her experience. She states, "I shall record the story of all my prisons [9]. Her grassroot mobilization is undertaken on multiple levels simultaneously acknowledging the various forms of captivity. She explains, "The policeman outside my door is only one of my countless captors. In the course of my life, I have been denied my freedom in many ways: as a Palestinian, belonging to a people deprived of rights and dignity; as a woman in a semi-feudal, patriarchal society; as a citizen of a territory under foreign military occupation; as an individual in a traditionalist, oppressive environment that restricts individual liberties" [8]. Her self-narrative reflects a yearning for recognition of her agency in the public sphere despite institutionalized gender biases.

Once the time has come to settle on a path, she sensed a dawning determination to act. She declares, "I became convinced that I had an important role to play ... Since I could not escape my environment, I had to make it into the battlefield of my emancipation [83]. The endeavor to disrupt entrenched structures of oppression fundamentally requires a nuanced awareness and understanding of the multifaceted ways in which individuals can actively participate in catalyzing meaningful social and political change. In a study on gender and representation, Jean Franco elucidates that female activists have been pivotal in embracing the concept of organic intellectuals. They find ways of "aligning gender politics with other forms of struggle without subordinating gender issues and without subordinating politics" [xxii-xxiii]. They navigate the imperative of integrating gender-based issues with collective resistance, ensuring that neither

the specific concerns related to gender, nor the overarching political demands are unduly marginalized.

For Tawil, confrontations with Israeli occupation authority and agitation for personal freedom resulted in clashes on daily basis. She deals with manifestations of a double jeopardy and a double alienation. She explains, "I was fighting for the freedom of my people and, simultaneously, for my emancipation as a woman" [Tawil 165]. The agonizing repressive forces rather than producing defeatism had an expedient effect in stimulating and fueling what was later described by one of her countrymen as "a real social revolution" [Tawil 82] in Nablus during the sixties.

Drawing on her diverse heritage, which incorporates tributaries from Arab and Western cultures, Tawil evaluates the changing patterns of female participation in nationalist struggles from a privileged perspective. She reckons, "I thought of father and the time-hallowed values of his world, of mother with the spirit of emancipation and individual liberty [83] … I was largely formed by my Arabic heritage. But my home also imbued me with a deep affection for western culture … my contact with my Jewish schoolmates … Their religious and national upbringing had given me a profound awareness of their Jewish identity" [43-44]. Different influences render a strategic advantage to her position, and a comprehensive approach to national issues.

A critique of the politics of gender in nationalist struggles is undertaken in the context of the feminist discourse of the 60's. However, it is adapted to the exigencies of Palestinian reality. In *HP*, feminism incorporates the possibilities of a larger collective vision. It means women's liberation, and women's liberation has its roots in the material struggle of the people, and thus is seen as part of the popular struggle. Nevertheless, Tawil cries out adamantly, "While making progress in public activities, gaining experience and building self-confidence, I could not afford to neglect my own personal emancipation" [165]. Political achievements alone could not satisfy her as long as she is constantly reminded that as a woman, she is shackled by the bonds of hidebound conventions. She emphasizes the need for personal emancipation alongside political achievements.

Significantly, the anxiety and fear of operating under intense police surveillance steel female activists in their war against reactionary gender expectations. The unconventional positionality of activists as revolutionary disruptors of social norms elicits a diversity of reactive responses from them. When Tawil's husband resents her non-conformist liberal conduct because it is "harming his reputation" [219], she defies his reproaches with retorts, "You go out – why shouldn't I?" [83] Typically, women activists who are also wives and mothers suffer similar reprimands. Tawil's attitude exemplifies defiance of pressures of societal expectations. She flings herself into political activities, "ignoring protests of … conservative environment, which condemned [her] for neglecting [her] children" [Tawil 83]. Generally, accusation of recklessness is used as a bludgeon to cast aspersions on their undertakings of activists to undermine and diminish their contributions.

By and large, *HP* underscores the gender issues that arise in nationalist struggles cross-culturally. Women often feel betrayed by nationalist narratives that neglect their rights and perpetuate regressive patriarchal norms. At the core of national projects lie the inherent contradictions and paradoxes that undermine their professed ideals. The rhetoric of liberation

and progress often obscures a negligence of women's rights and their full enfranchisement as citizens. Chatterjee's opinion is a case in point indicating that "the ethical domain of nationalism remains very much a contested terrain" [156]. The rhetoric of national liberation stands in stark contrast to the concurrent perpetuation of gender inequality. Amidst the calls for freedom from oppression, the entrenchment of regressive patriarchal norms within these national projects remains a glaring contradiction.

For long, women's public presence in history has not been duly recognized in official institutions, and venerated figureheads of Arab national history have uniformly been men who have often been granted iconic status. *HP* balances the male-biased collective memory through recovering an equally forceful iconography of publicly active women, who are traditionally ignored or marginalized in the dominant discourse. It restructures historical memory from a gender-sensitive perspective in order to integrate and ground women in political reality.

Tawil's personal narrative reformulates Palestinian historical narrative with different actors and different chronology. The Palestinian history is presented through a chronology of the changes which have come over the position of women. It injects gender awareness into mainstream consciousness through re-envisioning the transformation which the Palestinian society underwent from a female vantage point. While the 1967 defeat, in the opinion of Tawil, was primarily due to the regressive effect of hidebound traditions, it served as a catalyst for marked transformations in women's conditions. An upsurge in women's education and their increasing employment, with the consent of the most conservative of the families, become the defining characteristic in her narrative of the reality of dispossession and uprooting instituted in 1948. The Israeli occupation plays an ambivalent role in this process. Tawil explains, "We found ourselves at the collision point of two dissimilar civilizations … Israeli culture … we rejected as alien but … affected us nonetheless … the free uninhibited behavior of the young Israelis, both men and women, in the long run made a deep and lasting impact on our social mores" [130]. It is the clash between two divergent paradigms. Despite a rejection of Israeli culture as foreign, the Palestinian society is impacted by it, particularly through the influence of the freedom of young Israelis on Palestinian ingrained mores and behavioral patterns. Furthermore, since men's wages became an unreliable source of income due to their deportation, imprisonment, or assassination, it became acceptable for women to assume economic responsibilities. As a result, their ancillary status took a historical twist, with their earnings becoming vital for family survival. Job opportunities arose due to the demand for cheap Palestinian female labor in Israeli industries and agriculture. Tawil remarks that they "did not enjoy the full rights given the Israeli women workers … worked hard for low wages … had to put up with hostility and even humiliation" [129]. However, it is axiomatic that wage work has a liberating effect. It undermines the traditional family patterns of male domination and female submissiveness. In her study of Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories, Kitty Warnock argues that one of the most transformative societal shifts since 1967 has been the increased movement of women into paid work [117]. A widespread entry of Palestinian women into employment allowed many to transcend the confines of the domestic role and step out of the traditional sphere into the public domain.

The process of change did not end there. Many Palestinian women left for the relatively liberal atmosphere of Beirut for education, which exposed them to new ideologies that initiated their militancy in revolutionary organizations. According to Yuval -Davis, participating in the

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

military struggle offered them automatic access to citizenship rights, serving to construct models for female autonomy and establish new identities [96]. Besides, struggling for causes they believe in, it endowed women with emotional and physical empowerment. In fact, women's participation in armed resistance of the *fada'yeen* was a turning point in the conceptualization of their role. Tawil states, "*I myself saw young men of the fedayeen, on trial before the Nablus military tribunal, stand up and give a military salute to their leader, a girl. Such a tribute symbolized the revolution that was shaking the very foundations of our society*" [128]. Men who had previously opposed all liberal ideas now made no secret of their admiration of women as dedicated advocates of the resistance.

More drastic and acute in its impact on radicalizing the status of women is the abusive interrogation methods utilized to force confessions from the prisoners. Teresa Thornhill affirms that Israeli prison officials exploited the Arab concept of female honor to extract confessions and contain women's participation in armed struggle [16]. Warnock, on her part, explains that the conditions in the Palestinian community made the engagement in resistance struggle a likely cause for arrest. She states, "*The country is small, the Israeli intelligence service large and the Palestinian community is riddled with collaborators and informers*" [149]. Engaging in political activity is perilous and militancy often led to detention inevitably exposing the participants to imprisonment at some point. Tawil notes that "*The first large protest action by women took place in 1968, after which the Israeli authorities arrested a large number of resistance members, including some thirty women, mostly girls in their late teens or early twenties. The women were brutally tortured under interrogation"* [133]. Significantly, the extreme conditions of incarceration and the exposure to sexual harassment challenged and revised the traditionally enshrined concept of *sharaf* (honor), which in turn contested the conventional image of women's presence in the public domain. In her study on women and political detention, Harlow observed that the Israeli prison system has brutally scared the Palestinian social body, yet nevertheless, it functioned as a historical site for the transformation of Palestinian social structures [1992, 16]. Tawil comments, "*The Israelis did not comprehend this change in our mentality … Palestinian public opinion did not fall for this trick. On the contrary, it boom-ranged. I was pleased to see how furiously people reacted against such stories"* [132]. The association of prison with the shame of female physical violation and the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual purity weakened as more women went through the prison ordeal.

The experience of imprisonment also influenced the larger society's perception of women's roles. Harlow argues that relation between the women incarcerated for their resistance struggle and the population outside prison walls has been re-envisioned [1992, 19]. Tawil regularly attended the sessions of the Nablus military court, particularly when female resistance members were being tried. She contends that the most striking aspect of the trials was the attitude of the families: "When … Rada al Nabulsi was brought to court, she told the judges how her interrogators had tried to rape her. She spoke openly … even though she knew that her family was sitting in the courtroom and listening to every word" [131-132]. In an article alleging women's defeat of the Zionist concentration camps, Nada Muzaffar quotes a detainee responding in the face of her interrogators saying, "Our honor [lies] in removing you from our land, honor is when the nation has become free, honor is the end of occupation'" [6]. Along similar lines, Tawil, quotes one sheikh, whose niece was a resistance member, saying "These girls were the spirit of the revolution" [132]. They were acclaimed as national heroes. Fathers acknowledged their daughter's role taking pride in their *sumud* (steadfastness) in facing the

trials imposed by the occupation authorities. This circumstantial necessity was exercised and developed as a critical weapon in the struggle. Priorities shifted from protecting the traditional mores to risking everything in order to loosen the grip of occupation.

Ultimately, *HP* performs the organizational function of the autobiography. Like a library catalog consolidating scattered information, it provides readers and researchers with a centralized starting point to access important narratives that otherwise would be dispersed and eventually lost. Throughout Tawil's autobiography, the names of activists are identified, and their feats and the violence committed against them are chronicled. Evidently, Tawil's self-narrative serves the purposeful aim of preserving these excluded stories. This undertaking works to counter the tendencies of forced forgetfulness that silences the presence of those denied access to public and official platforms. Remembering their sacrifices is a crucial reminder not to subject them to historical erasure.

'Ashrawi's *This Side of Peace:* What We Need is A Memory for The Future

Frantz Fanon's seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth,* outlines revolutionary theory and praxis in which he situates thinkers as catalysts galvanizing the oppressed masses towards initiatives of self-determination. His concept of revolutionary humanism, central to his vision for the transformation of colonized societies, urges intellectuals to leverage the power of the past to fuel the struggle for a liberated future; to reinterpret the oppressed nation's past to mobilize people to reject the colonial narrative and assert their humanity and agency, thus envisioning an emancipated future towards which people can strive. On her part, Gunn's deliberations on the politics of reconstructing experience in self-narrative indicates that the process "involves both a coming to an awareness of the past that has shaped … reality and a designing of a future that can transform that reality" (69). The autobiographical project presented in Francoise Lionnet's theoretical framework proffers a utopian vision that embodies "a waking dream of the possible … which might inspire us to see beyond the constraints of the here and now to the idealized vision of a perfect future" (110). Another model by Smith conceptualizes a future-oriented aspect of autobiography that conveys a process of anamnestic projection wherein the autobiographer projects reminiscences into the future history (1998, 438). For her, the act of autobiography acquires a manifesto-like quality that shapes a legacy and determines how life story would be interpreted and remembered by future generations.

For various theorists, in this sense, autobiography goes beyond mere recollection and a static record of past events. It is a holistic enterprise that is foundational in the decolonization process, deeply imbued with a visionary quality as the author seeks to assert agency in shaping their own legacy and influencing the future. This perspective highlights a performative nature of autobiography as a dynamic force of remembering. The past is not passively recounted and documented, but actively engaged with in order to project an aspired for future.

In Hanan 'Ashrawi's *This Side of Peace: A Personal Record*, (hereinafter referred to as *Side of Peace*) several perspectives gain more traction and accrue greater potency. As both retrospective and prospective, it moves beyond the more conventional approaches to the genre. Instead of simply recounting the past ("what I was") and describing the present ("what I am now"), the text emphasizes a generative thrust. 'Ashrawi describes her autobiography as collective memory for the future. It embraces a future orientation ("what my people and I will become") making forward-looking statements. The 'I' writes under the sign of aspirations, new

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

interpretations, and the projection of a utopian vision. Re-entering the cave of memory offers a point of departure for the current generation, maps out new spaces for subjectivity, and gestures an agenda for 'I' transformations. 'Ashrawi states, "I finished this book with a renewed sense of identity and the affirmation that the story of Palestine must be told, again and again, not only to re-affirm the past, but to also sketch out a future for an autonomous Palestinian State … Amal and Zeina will look back on their childhood later and realize just how different their experiences were from those of many children elsewhere" [54]. The self-text is an analytical reflection on the past that has shaped her reality, as well as groundbreaking future shaping perspectives. It unfolds on the stage of history. In a pledge to a political cause, the autobiographer puts forth a visionary articulation of a revolutionary subject that she positions in a liberated future extricated from the constraining and oppressive status quo and freed from the strictures of everyday practices of Israeli authorities.

The role of the autobiographer as a political activist and a mother constitutes unique challenges. As an activist, parenthood is experienced differently. A major disconcerting aspect is the anguish of an imposed sense of guilt associated with prioritizing her activism over traditional motherhood roles. More significantly is the way agitating for a cause and a controversial political platform compromises her safety. Concerns that she betrays motherhood; taking risks that no mother has the right to take are underlined: "Was I being selfish? … Did I have the right to expose my daughters to such fear and anxiety? … Amal and Zeina deserve a mother who is safe and available, whom they can take for granted" [43-44]. Unlike Tawil, the struggle with self-doubt persists as she is continually haunted by questions about her sense of priorities. A guilty conscience is not easy to dispel.

When analyzing the presence of Palestinian women in the national movement, Hamida Kazi notes that in this male-dominated space, women participants in the forays of nationalist arenas who rise to positions of public responsibility come mainly from bourgeois and educated middle-class groups [37]. Kazi's outlook highlights an intersectional and socially grounded analysis in understanding the complexities of women's political participation. Within the Palestinian national liberation struggle, gender dynamics intersect with class and social status in shaping the parameters of women's leadership. Their involvement was largely limited to those with educational, economic and social privileges as major factors that shaped patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

In this respect, 'Ashrawi is a case in point. She achieved prominence as an academic and researcher who contributed to the dissemination of information about 'the question of Palestine' worldwide. She threw herself into political and diplomatic activity on behalf of her people without constituency, party, power base or organization. Solidarity with the masses has been her forceful ally. As people approach her on her way to the Madrid Conference, a pivotal diplomatic meeting held in 1991 aiming at addressing the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, she reckons, "I felt the … emotional intensity of the crowd reach out to me … I was buoyed and embraced by well-being … some women began calling out … you're our hope, our amal, we're proud of you … 'We are a trust, *amanah,* that we place in your hands. We have entrusted our future to your care. Don't let us down'" [131]. The quote reflects a collectivist orientation where the activist situates her personal narrative within the context of the community of which she is a part. This communal framing contrasts with more individualistic modes of autobiographical writing, where the self is the primary focus. Autobiographies provide activists with a space to

highlight their role and contributions on a level broader than individual feats of accomplishments. By centering the community, the activist-author uses personal form to amplify the voices and experiences of the marginalized groups for whom she advocates. In her study of the function of autobiography in political activism, Perkins provides insightful observations on its significance for authors who consider it a platform to acknowledge support and connection to community [9-10]. Rather than framing activism as a solitary endeavor, the recognition of such endorsement signals the activist's embeddedness within a larger network of solidarity and shared struggle. Emphasizing communal bond speaks to how the activist's sense of identity and purpose is intimately tied to the collective interests. In this respect, authors use self-narratives to honor support systems that enable and sustain their political struggles.

Engulfed in the throes of a historical confrontation, 'Ashrawi gives a behind-the-scenes exposition of the conference negotiations in which she featured as official spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation. Her autobiography reveals the psycho-sexual dimensions of power as it transpired within the highest echelons of the Palestinian authority. By being integrated into the male political realm, Haleh Afshar, in her study of women and politics in the Third World, contends that women's groups risk being co-opted into the official structures of power adopting male postures of domination and exploitation. Significantly, 'Ashrawi is wary of the institutionalization of her role. She notes, "I had made a promise to serve the people and the cause with *amanah* and to do so I was convinced that my place lay outside the political domain" [297]. The official position is only an addendum to much larger responsibility. She states, "perceiving myself to be, of the people and not officialdom … I brought to that encounter … the most salient quality of Palestinian political discourse: the human dimension" [58]. In her opinion, her place lies outside the political domain, bringing a human dimension to the discourse, mainly one of women's politics that operates outside mainstream and elitist ideologies that fail to take into account the voices of the masses that 'Ashrawi ultimately endeavors to ensure that they are not overlooked.

When engaging in the autobiographical act, activists, regardless of cultural background, promote the personal story as the story of their people. For them, spheres of life are not bounded and autonomous entities. The 'I am We' formula constitutes the axis of the texts. As demonstrated in the autobiographies that Perkins examines as part of her research, activists navigate generic conventions and adopt a relational understanding of the self [7]. In this light, 'Ashrawi's self-narrative captures the ethos of a shared autobiographical project implementing it "as a vehicle to convey a reality much larger than [the self]" [15]. She introduces herself by saying: "Ashrawi is my personal and collective narrative" and ends by stating "history has never left me to my own devices and time has evolved its own sardonic sense of memory in which the meager grains of privacy and the expansive dunes of communal terrain intermingled" [134-135]. The self is redefined through the story of the nationalist struggle and the boundaries are undifferentiated, porous and shifting. In fact, community acknowledgement is viewed as a standard and/or expected element of the activist's life- writing.

Drawing on the lessons and experiences of the Women's Movement in the US cultivated in 'Ashrawi feminist convictions a penchant for dissent that she self-consciously channels through her autobiography to teach about the history of Palestinian women's activism. When addressing the daily adversities during the intifada period, she highlights the presence of

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

women in evocative terms stating, “a sharp fierceness of a denied but not broken spirit … those [women] who did not lash out in defiance adopted the deceptive demeanor of the subdued. Beneath that, lay the smoldering embers of a guarded fire” [227-228]. Despite the ordeals of imprisonment, torture, and harassment, ‘Ashrawi declares, “Our women displayed a sense of pride that went beyond victimization … looking up in the middle of kneading dough … with that faraway look of someone listening to an inaudible internal voice of someone hoarding that secret message for a more opportune moment” [228]. Women endured the grueling experience of oppression and humiliation, yet they have not succumbed to defeat. A subtle concealment of their true feelings speaks to the immense psychological toll of their ordeal. A defiant resilience refused to be extinguished, even in the face of immense hardship and affliction. The simmering defiance that burns within them, awaits the opportune moment to reignite. They learned to mask their inner turmoil, projecting an outward appearance of submission in order to navigate the treacherous realities of their circumstances. Despite the unimaginable adversity they faced, they " displayed a sense of pride that went beyond victimization." It is a refusal to be defined solely by their suffering. Even in the midst of the mundane tasks such as " kneading dough," these women possess "that faraway look of someone listening to an inaudible internal voice;" a reservoir of strength and resilience that sustains them. Ultimately, ‘Ashrawi’s depiction of the unspoken narrative of the Palestinian women conveys the complexity of human experience under duress. It is a testament to an unwavering spirit waiting patiently for the day when it can be fully expressed and realized.

In political negotiations, ‘Ashrawi places her faith in bold vision and firm strides that she identifies as *“exclusive to women”* [201]. On the occasion of signing the peace treaty in Washington, she writes, “The work was so enormous and complex that only a woman could do it” [263]. At the risk of facing accusations of betrayal, and sparking claims of divided loyalties, a schism in her steadfastness, a rift in her commitment and a fracture in her devotion, ‘Ashrawi adheres to a daring enterprise to form a coalition of liberal figures on both sides of the conflict. She places great trust in women’s interaction across the borders of the conflict. She captures the dynamics of a fruitful and ultimately productive companionship with an Israeli woman: “Ours is a bond of sisterhood and instinctive recognition that defies history and national boundaries … Our daughters Zeina and Talila are milk sisters … Neither child speaks the verbal language of the other, but on family picnics they hold hands and go off merrily in search of wildflowers or muddy streams” [38]. Outside the confines of formal negotiations, exchanges of female interlocutors, dedicated to saving rather than sacrificing lives, are depicted as “a different set of encounters … exploring uncharted terrains … changing the discourse” (‘Ashrawi 59). Unlike the deliberations among members of the upper echelons, ‘Ashrawi finds that non-official dialogues with the Israeli women’s groups were “the most consistent … never losing sight of the need to create realities besides the official dialogues” [219]. In fact, ‘Ashrawi generates a gender specific identity grounded in a consciousness of community among women. It is through such solidarity that feminist claims attain validity and credibility in challenging existing structures of authority. Fostering friendship across national boundaries, constructing a form of alliance with Israeli women and engaging in non-official dialogues changes the discourse.

The potential for women to excavate pathways to collaborate effectively, even in the face of deep-seated differences is the focus of several critical studies. In an anthology focused on the endeavors of ‘women transforming politics,’ Najjar's article argues that ‘The Palestinian

Answer' may be reside in strategies employed by Palestinian women's committees as they build solidarity with Israeli women who support Palestinian self-determination and believe in negotiating a peaceful solution [154]. Along similar lines, Yuval-Davis' analysis of gender and nation highlights the challenges involved in forging transversal alliances between women, as they often need to grapple with fundamentally irreconcilable differences. Despite these obstacles, the scholar suggests that women from diverse backgrounds may still be able to rally around shared values and common ground, providing a basis for productive collaboration [25]. In essence, the various approaches of establishing cross-border alliances with sympathetic Israeli counterparts represent avenues through which Palestinian women's organizations seek empowerment and advancement of their political agenda. Nuanced perspectives underscore the complexities inherent in building cross-cutting solidarities among women, as they navigate their divergent social locations and political commitments.

In any case, the 'I' in *Side of Peace* is anchored in female collectivity. It is the 'I' that Rita Felski designates as "counter public-sphere" of women and the socially disenfranchised who find themselves excluded from the mainstream public discourse [167]. In the context of feminist literature and activism, Felski's concept refers to the creation of alternative spaces that assert advocacy for social and political change. In fact, the potential of this concept is expansive serving as platform for the articulation of the concerns of the underrepresented. As it gains visibility and influence, it becomes a site of resistance contesting hegemonic ideologies and narratives of the existing power structures, fosters empowerment and solidarity among its members and provides a space for the development of critical consciousness and the organization and mobilization of political action.

Essentially, 'Ashrawi's autobiography stands as an act of validation and an alternative rhetoric, fulfilling the plea for Palestinians to have 'permission to narrate' and 'tell their story' encapsulating Edward Said's proclamation that the Palestinians "are there all right but the narrative of their present actuality which stems directly from their story of their existence in and displacement from Palestine – that narrative is not" [xvii, 250, 1995]. In the struggle over narrative to control interpretation, dealing with facts is not enough; facts need to be "embedded in history and then reconstituted and recovered by human agents" [Said 1995, 267]. To a significant degree, 'Ashrawi's autobiography provides the framework to sustain and circulate these facts from the vantage point of the underrepresented. As she states, "Palestine was taboo" [133], and the experiences of Palestinians after their eviction from their homes remain invisible and inaudible. She wields her "fascination with words" to recuperate the missing narrative and "wage the battle for legitimacy." The autobiographical enterprise is, in her words, "possessed by the urge to capture in language the essence of the Palestinian experience and to distill it in such a way as to render it a compelling and irresistible force of change" [191, 143, 146]. Given its critical and reflective qualities, *Side of Peace* functions as a rehabilitative activity, reclaiming the facts of the Palestinian struggle and challenging the dehumanization as well as the invisibility and silence surrounding the presence of its people.

CODA: UNRAVELING PATHWAYS AND CHALLENGING FINALITY AND CLOSURE

Given the above extensive treatment of the topic of this research, lingering inquiries warrant consideration, namely, where is Arab woman's nation located? What does it mean to re-narrate the nation in the feminine? For Arab women, the boundary line between public and private is being constantly re-negotiated thus upsetting any firm division. Nation, in their lived

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

experience, traverses that space making connections between disparate experiential arenas and occupying the gap between both domains. Their national narrative is situated in a 'multi-spatiality' that does not seal women's experience in the private and men's in the public. It is located in the in-between ambivalent spaces where binary opposition of 'hegemonic' and 'subaltern' is rethought; a zone underrepresented by hegemonic discourses that intervenes in essentialist readings of nationality and produces revisionist arguments.

Arab woman's nation, like women's autobiography, is poised between maternal and paternal narratives conveying, "a doubled identification" that Smith describes as "a double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric … (with) the voices of man and woman … (vying) with one another … in a constant play of uneasy appropriation or reconciliation and daring rejection" [42, 51, 1987]. The sense of female self is always in reaction to or in compliance with male and female discourses. It comes through differentiation from and/or alignment with either discourse.

In delineating the conceptualization of nation in the thought of the Arab woman, Shereen Abouelnaga draws on Bhabha's 'withinist' lexicon for a foundation of her study [Abouelnaga 16-17]. In his conceptual system, the construct of 'the third space' frames 'withinist' sites, encompasses gaps, the ambivalent, the in-between, the interstices, the hybrid and the liminal. On her part, Abouelnaga reappropriates this perspective as a privileged arena for understanding resistance in Arab woman's re-narrating the nation; a space enabling a capacity necessary for subversion of authorizing narratives and revolutionary praxis of transformation of power structures. As the ground of resistance, it provides a discursive terrain instrumental in handling intractable political realities. It is furthermore the location of a space of empowerment wherein emancipatory politics takes root fending off assimilation into the dominant culture thus allowing for cultural difference to emerge. Abouelnaga underscores border situations and thresholds for their positive and instrumental value [26]. This is where woman's nation is located, where female presence becomes integral to the overarching argument in the formation of discourse.

In fact, nation narrated in the in-between 'third space' re-emerges in an alternative form. For Arab women, it is the location of a balanced 'imagined community'. Narrative constructs as forceful impositions amend imbalances. Subjects formed in-between supersede difference and possess the potential to dismantle division and conflict between unofficial and official discourses, thus allowing for greater scope for strategic maneuver and negotiation expanding the significance of 'writing the nation' and rendering it all-inclusive.

Within the interstices, the intervention of female voice in the dominant male rhetoric recasts the constituent components of discursive formation of nation-space. When confined to the public, they are monolithic and thus lacking, yet once situated in 'The third space', they become whole. In the process, female narrative emerges as a prism through which crucial elements of nationhood are re-configured within a space that bridges and/or subverts polar realms. No longer viewed as separate entities, their negotiation enables an ongoing interface and exchange of cultural performances generating a reciprocal and /or fluid recognition and representation of cultural differences.

In 'The third space', the private sphere specific to women is restored to the discursive formation of the nation. Writing about the domestic and private life becomes part of the public political act itself. Women write their nation implementing female linguistic tools; a language, as Abouelnaga maintains, that allows for difference and multiplicity of voices capturing the priorities and concerns of disparate segments of the society [15].

Additionally, national identity, in this space, is not stable or fixed. It is conceptualized in terms of smaller units from various ideological, religious, class and gender affiliations that contend for the power of representation. Formed out of social contestation through a process based on response and interaction, it takes shape, as Bhabha explains, in the intersubjective and collective negotiation of competing claims of national constituencies rather than through the adherence to a singular and homogeneous standard of unified representation of national body and culture [142, 1990, 213, 1994].

Reclaiming historical memory veers away from male-centered readings. Retrieval of memory and recovery of submerged history integrate, and ground women as engaged contributors in the process of history- making. In this respect, Smith's statement is case in point. She declares, "Autobiography has been employed by many women writers to write themselves into history" [5,1998]. The struggle over the historical record is launched from within the boundaries of the interstices yet transcending them. The dailiness and privacy of the inner female familial space are assigned historical significance. Indeed, incorporating excluded voices in re-narrating the nation activates forces that interrogate assumptions underlying historical memory.

It is noteworthy that when constructing a 'women- nation-space', authors-activists operate from within the official discourse implementing yet modifying its tools. They challenge authority from within its very domain and re-write the terms of national belonging. Writing from the margins would have confined their undertaking to the subordinate periphery yet by asserting a voice from within the official framework, their presence partakes of the hegemonic national narrative of the intellectual elite and claims the agency of a woman-centered/woman-made discourse.

Voices in the 'withinist' arenas of "dialogue and contestation," as Bhabha postulates, engage in a process of probing and questioning that allows "denied knowledges" [156,1985] to permeate the dominant discourse and destabilize its basis of authority. In like manner, Arab female-centric narrative constructions of nationhood, Abouelnaga maintains, divulge and disseminate 'denied' voices and open up authoritative discourse to heterodox paradigms that compromise the certainty of patriarchal discourses. The process of re-narrating erodes the solidity of the national narrative, the canonized image and fixed conceptions of the nation's representative authority. Ultimately, an Arab female 'location of culture' nurtures the conditions that facilitate a balanced 'imagined community' where the binary opposition of oppressor and oppressed, male and female, master and victim becomes irrelevant.

Additionally, Abouelnaga utilizes Bhabha's concept of the pedagogical and the performative to read the location of nation as manifested in Arab women's narrative. Bhabha's cultural model of nation as a narrative posits a fundamental split between the pedagogical, that draws on a pre-given past that gives discourse an authority based on a fixed tablet of tradition, and the performative spaces of negotiation that authorize cultural hybridities and produce

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14738/assrj.1112.18052

transformation [2, 1994]. By the same token, Abouelnaga infers that Arab woman's nation is a discursive arena in which "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (the pedagogical), and yet allows "the same signs to be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (the performative) [37, 1994]. Narrative is a performance that rewrites the pre-given pedagogical aspects of national identity wherein people exist with a split consciousness; they are simultaneously objects of a nationalist pedagogy and performative subjects actively developing the present through political action.

Hence, Arab female construct of nation and national narrative is situated in the interstices between various dichotomies, namely, the private and the public, the performative and the pedagogical, the semiotic and the symbolic, the object and the subject, and the elite and the subaltern. Located within these divides, it is neither wholly belonging to one nor the other side. The 'withinist' positioning of 'nation' that focuses on the fault lines and the convergent boundaries is an enabler; innovative cultural forms emerge grappling with, quoting Bhabha, the claims for the "holism of culture and community" and a "fixed nation-space" [142, 1994] and ensuring that no political ideology would claim sole authority for itself. As a terrain of alternative nationalist discourse, it manifests the inadequacy of the canonized conception of the nation, as well as the invalidity of essentialist readings of national body and culture as a cohesive system where all parts have fixed place and treated as social totalities that represent collective experience.

"There Can Be No Credible History Without the Inclusion of Women's Voices"

Discussion of nation and nation building is incomplete without acknowledging the contribution of female critical perspectives. Self-authored accounts cultivate a legacy in national discourse. Situating female subjectivities and 'the problematics of gender' in the forefront enables a re-examining of the signifiers and constituent components of national culture. The texts, each charting its unique trajectory, constitutes a disruption within the androcentric discourse of the determinants of gender-linked constructs of functionary feminism and symbolic abstract mystification.

In the conceptualization of nationalism that evolves from and works with feminism rather than against it, Arab female self-inscription engenders a woman national narrative that re-envisions the communal national imaginary and carves out a space for a reformed nationalism stripped of male chauvinism forming a springboard from which male stranglehold over the national imaginary is interrogated and challenged. It construes a nexus of the nationalist struggle and the woman question that reinforces endeavors to accommodate nationalist and feminist aspirations maneuvering a coexistence of their competing demands.

In the hands of Palestinian women, autobiography becomes a tool to safeguard against exclusion from discourses of national and civic belonging. Recourse to forms of personal narrative serves a strategic purpose to reclaim the entirety of identity integrating and accommodating its various facets. Personal politics endorses a rethinking of the self in non-divisive ways in which loyalty to liberation struggles does not preclude advocating for empowerment; rather, it complements it. By taking hold of the power of representation, Palestinian women project an identity onto history that is neither purely individualistic nor purely collective; an acknowledgment of the diversity of their roles within what is traditionally seen as male-dominated domains.

Although none of the autobiographers selected in this study emphasize a singularity or uniqueness, there is an underlying recognition that each is both atypical in expressing subversion shaped by distinct circumstances and inclinations, and typical sharing the plight of all Palestinians. Tuqan, Sakakini, Tawil and 'Ashrawi engage nuanced representations to navigate their roles as national subjects without eradicating their individual identities. One of the rewarding aspects of reading Palestinian autobiographies against each other is the way they appear to converse with one another. Reading them in tandem makes apparent the "long history of the people" as Leslie Silko writes in the context of her analysis of Native American oral tradition [qtd in Perkins 147]. Reality is best captured when many people remember together. When each writer reflects on her experience, she adds to the telling of the story that enlarges the understanding of the reality.

In the autobiographical process, the retrospective interpretation of early life experiences in light of a given period of time in Palestinian history, and trope of development chronicling the evolution of consciousness are major practices that contribute to textual design and purpose. The teleological form, referred to as *l'apres –coup* and identified by Frank Kermode as the 'double consciousness' of the autobiographical writing, allows the writer to re-read the early years of her life according to the new living reality in such a way as to illuminate her journey toward her current situation. The trope of development, on another level, is instrumental in depicting the change from an unsophisticated state to a point of heightened understanding and agency. In fact, the very conventions and structures of autobiographical writing enable the author to retroactively reinterpret the significance and meaning of their past, informed by their subjective insights and the dynamics of contextual factors.

Revolutionaries are, in essence, a product of their circumstances. They are not born with an innate revolutionary fervor; it is a disposition generated by the injustices permeating their sociopolitical landscape. The journey toward becoming a revolutionary is profoundly influenced by broader societal and political realities that individuals navigate. External forces act as catalysts for revolutionary consciousness, transforming ordinary people into dynamic agents of change. Self-texts humanize the subject; charting the revolutionary evolution demystifies the process by which the cloistered Palestinian woman changes from the discursive status of object to become a radical active subject capable of participating in transforming her environment and effecting a change [Perkins 42]. They offer fascinating performances of the revolutionary subject that Frantz Fanon refers to, in the context of decolonization, as effective in "transform[ing] spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them'" [36].

To bring this analysis to a close, it behooves me underscore the fact that autobiography, in the context of Palestinian women, is not just a text; it is a dynamic embodiment of possibilities and alternatives for self-identification. Selected self-referential texts constitute an expansive discursive space that goes beyond accommodating nationalist aspirations and 'the feminine principle'. They carve out an arena that catalyzes the emergence of discourses charting trajectories that transcend the boundaries imposed by the competing demands of nationalism and feminism and contributing to broader cultural and political landscape in transformative ways that break through constraints of overarching frameworks.

Endnotes

[1]. Arabic literary tradition is informed by Arab/Islamic nationalism and the concept of the nation as *al umma.* Traditionally, the term *al umma,* used to refer to nation, denotes an ideological conception that encompasses the broader Islamic identity, rather than a specific territorial homeland. In this study, the use of the term 'nation' is more closely aligned with the concept of *al wattan* (homeland) which is imbued with an emotional and affective dimension. It carries within it a sense of settlement, belonging, and rootedness. It is a more territorially grounded and a place-based understanding of national identity, in contrast to the more abstract, mental construct of *al umma*. The designation of some land as 'the homeland' is a specific form of territoriality engendered by the idea that a particular group of people ought to control a specific territory because that land is part of who the people are.

[2]. The plural signifies variations of competing androcentric discourses with distinct representations of national identity that influence their understanding of gender roles within the national context. While there may be commonalities in male national discourses, it is more accurate to recognize the existence of multiple discourses that can coexist within a single nation. They evolve over time, reflecting changes in societal attitudes and cultural shifts.

[3]. Female/feminine principle is a term coined by Paula Gunn Allen. Woman is conceptualized as the generative power of the universe and the bearer of life-force, never a property to be owned, used, consumed or merchandized; 'The Female Principle' being the source of all order, infinitely generative and fecund.

[4]. Arab women scholars have undertaken significant projects examining the intersection of Arab women's lives, personal/collective memory, and historical narratives. See The Women and Memory Forum (WMF) https://wmf.org.eg/en/

[5]. Selected authors and their narratives may not be representative of the diverse regions Palestinians inhabit nor do they reflect the status quo of women across class-divisions, they do suggest a range of experiences not generally accounted for in mainstream narrative. They are groundbreaking and formative in the genre as practiced by Palestinian women in which nation is re-narrate through carving a female space that intervene in the dominant discourse of nationalism. As cultural combatants, Palestinian women come from diverse regions: those living in the state of Israel, those who live under Israeli military rule since 1967 (in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip), those who live in the diaspora and are often assimilated into other states, and those in the refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. Terms like 'inside' *al dakhil*, 'outside' *al kharij*, occupation *ihtilal* and exile *manfa* derive from demographic scenes of Palestinian reality. [6]. Oral testimonies more than book-lengths autobiographies are more representative of women from refugee camps, women in the Israeli prisons, those who are left to fend for themselves and their families when their husbands are sent to jail, and those who suffered collective punishments by land confiscation and demolishment of homes. In fact, the spectrum is broad.

[7]. This segment of my research is indebted to comprehensive studies carried out by scholars exploring Arab communal national imaginary. Conceptual models have been laid out by Nahla Abdo 1994, Ilham Abu Ghazaleh 1989, Leila Ahmed 1984. Latifa Ajbabdi, 1996. Liyanah Badr, 1989. Beth Baron, 2005. Shahida al Bazz, 1996. Miraim Cooke 1996. Souad Dajani, 1994. Ellen Fleischman, 2003. Yvonne Haddad, 1980. Sylvia Haim, 1962. Rema Hammami, 1997. Joost Hiltermann, 1988. Islah Jad 1995, 2000. Suad Joseph, 1991. Denis Kandiyoti, 1994. Hamida Kazi, 1987. Ijlal Khalifeh, 1974. Sahar Khalifeh, 2002. Ghazi

Khalili 1977. Eileen Kuttab, 1996. Jean Said Makdisi, 2005. Orayb Aref Najjar, 1992. Julie Peteet, 1986. Nawal el Sa'adawi, N1990. Suha Sabbagh, 1989. Rosemary Sayigh, 1984. Sayigh, Rosemary and Julie Peteet 1986. 1993, 1994. Bouthaina Shaaban, 1991. Ghada Talhami, 1985. The specific selection of these critical theorists is a deliberate and strategic choice. Their contributions serve as crucial points of departure and touchstones for the analysis of the various components undertaken in this study.

[8]. In winter of 1988, women knitted 5000 sweaters to show solidarity with the prisoners of *al intifiada* sewing thousands of flags as symbols of the resistance struggle. Stitches in embroidery embodied a commentary on political decisions affecting Palestinian people. By not donning traditional mourning attire when children were killed, mothers upheld the belief that their offspring were martyrs. Despite their grief, it is further declaration of continual commitment to *al qadiyya*. In 1977, Palestinian women prisoners declared a hunger strike and a refusal to sew uniforms for the Israeli army. In 1988, prisoners in Neve Terza refrained from cooking for the Israeli guards (Najjar 147).

[9]. *Qumqum* is a sealed jar in which genies are imprisoned.

[10]. In classical Arabic poetry, *al atlal* motif is a deeply meaningful theme. It refers to elegiac meditations and expressions of grief and longing of the poetic voice on the encounter of weathered ruins abandoned by departed loved ones. It continues to be a powerful literary trope in modern Arabic literature and culture allowing poets to transition from the external physical landscape to the internal emotional landscape of memory and loss.

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