

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN IN REPRESENTATIONS OF PALESTINE IN GHASSAN KANAFANI'S *UMM SAAD*

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**ABSTRACT:** *This essay will argue that the multiplicity of identities is the main feature in the construction of representations of women in Palestine. Moreover; this essay will explore a range of different identities and positions that Palestinian women take on. In order to demonstrate this aim, the paper will contrast and compare the representations of Palestinian women both before and after the Intifada as represented by the male writer Ghassan Kanafani and the female writer Suad Amiry. And will analyse the multiplicity of female identities in the works of Kanafani and Amiry. Two specific texts by Kanafani and Amiry were chosen in order to give a more profound analysis – Umm Saad which represents a Palestinian woman before the Intifada with 'a nationalism that draws as a political movement which challenges the colonial state' and Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries that symbolises the Palestinian woman after the Intifada with different kind of nationalism that draws on 'a cultural construct which enables the colonial to posit their differences and autonomy'. The choice of these texts is explained by the fact that they provide the most vivid representations of both the colonial and anti-colonial mentalities of Palestinian women. These texts are also chosen because they clearly reveal a distinction between 'under occupation literature' and 'exile literature'.*

**KEY WORDS:** identity, palestinian woman, feminism, post colonialism, nationalism.

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### INTRODUCTION

*"She is a woman...with a strength greater than rock and a patience more than endurance itself." (Ghassan Kanafani, 'Umm Saad'). The construction of women in representations of Palestine"*

The position of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian women has significantly changed after "the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, the popular uprising of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip" (Sharoni, 1995). Due to the intifada, women have started to struggle for their freedom and rights and actively engage in various spheres of socio-political life, thus increasing their consciousness and shaping their diverse identities. Depending on religious beliefs, social class, and location, Palestinian women took part in different activities during and after the intifada. The activities ranged from participation in education programmes and employment to participation in "direct confrontations with Israeli soldiers" (Sharoni, 1995). But as Cheryl Rubenberg points out, writers and researchers tend to pay great attention to those Palestinian women who belong to middle or upper classes, who actively participate in politics and who thus "socially and demographically represent only a fraction of the whole" (Rubenberg, 2001). However, other Palestinian women are also important for better understanding of the positions of Palestinian women within a society.

Rubenberg has discovered that "there is enormous heterogeneity among the camp and village [Palestinian] women" moreover, these two groups of females differ in their positions and roles from

urban Palestinian women ((Rubenberg,2001). The multiplicity of the female identity is also explained by the economic and political isolation of Gaza, East Jerusalem, and West Bank; this isolation has forced Palestinian women to adjust to complex living conditions and assume new roles and identities(Rubenberg ,2001). Another researcher, Suha Sabbagh, has revealed in the process of her research that mainly middle-aged and younger Palestinian women took an active part in the intifada(Sabbagh,1998). In particular, Sabbagh demonstrates, that Palestinian female labourers “sustained the youth and made it possible for them to participate in the resistance”, while shopkeepers and urban and rural women supported those who engaged in the intifada with food and other necessary goods or provided medical care (Sabbagh,1998). As the intifada progressed, Palestinian women blurred the distinction between male and female roles and penetrated deep into the unknown, gradually acquiring numerous opportunities for personal growth and identity formation. While some performed household duties, others acted within complex political and social spheres. According to Sabbagh, the intifada brought about “the mass mobilization of women from all walks of life: rural women, camp dwellers, and camp refugee women poured into the streets, marched in demonstrations, and organized sit-ins in front of “blown-up homes” (Sabbagh,1998).

Although initially Palestinian women’s involvement in the struggle was inseparably connected with their desire to protect their husbands and sons, they soon realised that the outcome of the struggle depended on their own participation in the intifada. Thus , they began to challenge conventional female roles and positions, opposing the patriarchal structure of society and gradually shifting from the domestic arena to the socio-political one. This shift clearly “indicates a transformation of consciousness”( Sabbagh,1998).

In contrast to female researchers and writers, male authors paint a picture of a homogenous female Palestinian community, although they acknowledge that the position of Palestinian women within a family is no longer the same as it was earlier. However, some male researcher, such as Samih Farsoun have pointed out that the intifada has destroyed the “traditional mold of women’s role” and has brought about the formation of a new female identity which is characterised by great strength and patience (Farsoun,2004) . It is through the image of a strong woman who can endure much for the sake of her sons and husband that these male authors reveal their understanding of the position of Palestinian women within a society. Seen from this viewpoint, the role of Palestinian women as saviours of the family is as important as the role of active participants. This is consistent with the assertion of the female author Jad Islah who acknowledges that despite the fact that many Palestinian women did not take an active part in the intifada, they nevertheless played “a crucial political role, [acting] as saviours rather than weak creatures needing protection”(Islah,1999). In view of the different visions and viewpoints presented above, it is crucial to draw parallels between female and male writers who represent Palestinian women in quite different ways because of diverse perspectives they take when writing about experience of Palestinian women either in exile or in the occupied territory.

However, this essay will argue that the multiplicity of identities is the main feature in the construction of representations of women in Palestine .Moreover; this essay will explore a range of different identities and positions that Palestinian women take on. In order to demonstrate this aim, the paper will contrast and compare the representations of Palestinian women both before and after the *Intifada* as represented by the male writer Ghassan Kanafani and the female writer Suad Amiry. And will analyse the multiplicity of female identities in the works of Kanafani and Amiry. Two specific texts by Kanafani and Amiry were chosen in order to give a more profound analysis – *Umm Saad* which

represents a Palestinian woman before the *Intifada* 'with 'a nationalism that draws as a political movement which challenges the colonial state'' and *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* that symbolises the Palestinian woman after the *Intifada* with different kind of nationalism that draws on 'a cultural construct which enables the colonial to posit their differences and autonomy'(Loomab,1998). The choice of these texts is explained by the fact that they provide the most vivid representations of both the colonial and anti-colonial mentalities of Palestinian women. These texts are also chosen because they clearly reveal a distinction between 'under occupation literature' and 'exile literature'(Harlow, 1987).

### **DIFFERENCES IN REPRESENTATIONS OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN BETWEEN AMIRY AND KANAFANI**

To understand the differences in the portrayal of Palestinian women between Amiry and Kanafani, it is crucial, above all, to analyse the positions of these writers from a gendered perspective. As Ania Loomba points out, colonialism has a diverse impact on female and male identities (Loomba, 1998). Furthermore, a European education and obsession with European women's independence led Amiry to focus on "women's integration into nationalist projects... [and] "the emergence of women as citizens"( Kandiyoti,1994) in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*. For Amiry, "the state itself is a direct expression of men's interests" (Kandiyoti, 1994); and the occupation in Palestine reinforces this expression, significantly aggravating the subordinate position of Palestine women. Amiry openly expresses her opposition to this female subordination and, through her narration, she attempts to stress at the necessity of gender equality.

Contrary to Amiry, Kanafani who supports a highly masculine perspective on the position of Palestine females, considering that struggle is the prerogative of men; as such, it is necessary to "return women to domesticity or to subordinate roles in the public sphere" ((Kandiyoti, 1994). In *Umm Saad*, Kanafani clearly demonstrates that the major role for women in Palestinian society is to "bear the burden of being 'mothers' of the nation" ((Kandiyoti, 1994). Kanafani maintains the view that women are a national emblem of Palestine; and through his major female protagonist, he creates anti-colonial or nationalist movement using an "image of the Nation-as-Mother"(Loomba, 1998). Sexual desires or the desire to engage in the struggle together with men are, for Kanafani inappropriate for Palestinian women. They should behave in the interests of the nation rather than in their own interests; their role is to give birth to sons who are destined to fight and if necessary, die, for the motherland. Kanafani asserts the survival of the nation depends on the interplay between the dominated and the dominant. While Palestinian men act within the socio-political and economic realm, Palestinian women are thought to belong to "a spiritual, inner domain of culture"(Loomba, 1998). Which he believes should not be affected by Westernisation because Westernisation it would undermine the very essence of this cultural domain in general and relations between Palestinian men and women in particular. According to Loomba, a colonised social group should be able to define "its difference from Western notions of liberty, freedom and human dignity" (Loomba, 1998).

Amiry, on the other hand, disagrees with Kanafani's notions that the emancipation of Palestinian women will destroy their cultural identity, as emancipation "does not signify loss of cultural identity but the forging of a new nationalist self" (Loomba, 1998). In her view, emancipation provides Palestinian women with an opportunity to achieve inner integrity and form a new distinct identity, Based on equality with men and the status of citizenship. According to Loomba, women in all colonised societies either lack citizenship status or have citizenship status yet are significantly

subordinated (Loomba, 1998 ). The female in Amiry's narration does not belong to any of these categories, while Loomba and Kanafani insist on divide of societies on private and public patriarchal models. The Private patriarchy which Kanafani describes in *Umm Saad* revolves around the gradual exclusion of females from the social realm and women's full participation in the domestic sphere. Public patriarchy integrates women into the social realm, but subjugates them within this sphere.

For Amiry, any form of women's subjugation is inappropriate. She thus endows Palestinian women with power; while Kanafani's model "evoke[s] both female power and female helplessness" (Loomba, 1998 ). Palestinian women are powerful because they give birth and bring up children for the nation; however, they are powerless because they are not able to overcome gender boundaries and determine their own destinies. They are forced to live within the strict confines of Palestinian society and perform the role imposed on them by this 'masculine' society. In this regard, Kanafani reaffirms the control of Palestinian men over women and the reluctance of men to change the traditional norms of their society. Amiry, on the other hand, regards the traditional norms and the subordinated position of Palestinian women as inappropriate in the modern world which has significantly changed since the formation of Palestinian cultural values and norms. Through her narration, this female writer questions "women's position and the prevailing religious doctrines which legitimise their subordination" (Kandiyoti,1994).

#### **REPRESENTATION OF A PALESTINIAN WOMAN BY THE MALE WRITER GHASSAN KANAFANI**

The major focus in *Umm Saad* by Kanafani is on the identity of a woman as a mother, or, as Carol Bardenstein puts it, as the "producer" of sons who take an active part in Palestinian resistance ( Bardenstein,1997). The mother of Saad, the protagonist of the novella, is portrayed as a strong and passionate female who, despite her passive role in the struggle, occupies the central position within the narration because of "her ability to bear children and the specific accomplishment of having given birth to Saad and his brother" (Bardenstein,.1997) . As Loomba points out 'Anti -colonial or nationalist movements have used the image of the Nation-as-Mother to create their own lineage, and also to limit and control the activity of women within the imagined community '( Looma,1998).

Living in a patriarchal society and belonging to the working class, the mother of Saad has one major responsibility – to give birth to and raise children who will defend Palestine and contribute to the survival of new generations. . As Loomba states' " Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement makes this point rather blatantly: 'In the resistance, the role of the Muslim woman is equal to the man's. She is a factory to produce men, and she has a great role in raising and educating the generations'" (Jad,1990). These children do not really belong to her; they belong to Palestine. This is especially obvious from the words of *Umm Saad* who claims, "Every morning I say ' O'Lord 'twenty years have passed now, and if Saad doesn't go, who will ?" (Kanafani,1999). In a more symbolic way, this female protagonist is a mother of the whole Palestine. She strongly believes that her sons belong to Palestine; and when she is asked whether she feels sadness because of her son's participation in the resistance, she claims, "No, I said to my neighbour this morning, I wish I had ten more like him" (Kanafani,1999):

But although acting within the domestic sphere, the mother of Saad significantly shapes socio-political ideas of her sons and endows them with certain cultural values. Although she is afraid that her sons may be killed in the resistance, she nevertheless is able to endure inner turmoil and live for her children. As Halim Barakat puts it, "*Umm Saad* is very proud that her son joins the resistance movement"(Barakat, 1993): Despite her concern for Saad, the female character supports her son's



desire to become a guerrilla soldier. Thus, although implicitly, it is through the female that the resistance struggle is portrayed in Kanafani's work; to put it differently, it is due to the female and the way she raises her children that the resistance struggle emerges. This is further reflected in "the literature of resistance", a term coined by Kanafani and "applied to Palestinian writing in the West Bank and Gaza" (Bouskila, 1999). Despite her quite passive role throughout the narration, the mother of Saad expresses many martial words to encourage her son to act. This stimulation and implicit support from a woman seems to save the whole nation; without this invisible yet crucial support Palestinians "are destined to be both physically and existentially banished outside the borders of their homeland and world attention" (Abdel-Malek, 1999).

In this regard, Kanafani praises a woman as a mother and a creator of participants in the rescue of the nation; despite her lack of good education, this woman is quite intelligent and is capable of providing good upbringing to her sons (Zalman, 2006). Yet women in Kanafani's *Umm Saad* are significantly "immobilised by forces greater than themselves" (Abdel-Malek, 2005). Due to the patriarchal social structure, the mother of Saad and other Palestinian in the refugee camp are only associated with motherhood and with the idea that a woman is not an independent individual, but a person who belongs to her husband and her children.

She has no right to think of herself, and her female desires her family, especially of the male members of her family comes above all. Living in a refugee camp, the mother of Saad is not able to escape from this secluded environment and acquire freedom. In such an environment, it is impossible to develop a distinct identity. She is, on the one hand, trapped within the refugee camp and, on the other hand, trapped within the family realm. As Edward Said points out, "Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in exile" (Said, 1999). The identity of the mother of Saad is lost within the exile, within her family; the very title of Kanafani's novella underscores the lack of female identity: the heroine does not even have a name. The lack of a distinct identity deprives the mother of Saad of the opportunity to EXPLORE THE POSSIBLE MULTIPLICITY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY.

Seen from this viewpoint, Kanafani portrays a female who gives but never takes. Taking is never an option. The main dilemma faced by mother of Saad is when she is torn between the necessity to stay at home and provide nurturing to her two young children and the desire to follow her son Saad in order to take care of him. As she acknowledges, "Do you know something, children are slavery! If I didn't have these two children, I would have followed him [Saad]. I would have lived there with him... I would have lived with them [Fedayeen], cooked for them, done all I could for them. But children are slavery" (Kanafani, 1999). The protagonist's transition from her son Saad to other fighters in the resistance struggle suggests a desire to shift into a more active role in the intifada, but this role is still more passive, supporting the fighters, rather than direct, and as a good Palestinian woman, the mother of Saad is not able to ignore her domestic duties and leave her young

Bardenstein points out "this desire to nurture the guerrilla fighters illustrates the shifting boundaries of motherhood and 'motherly' energies in the context of struggle and resistance" (Bardenstein, 1997). Women's possession of motherly energy is especially obvious when Umm Saad states "Light of his mother's eyes! I wish he were nearby, so I could take him food every day that I had cooked myself. He will eat the same as his companions. God bless them all" (Kanafani, 1999). This situation is specifically devised by Kanafani to depict that "in the context of national struggle, all mothers become the mothers of all sons" (Bardenstein, 1997).

In this regard, women do not have personal identities, but rather collective identities; they do not simply take care of their own sons, but provide support to all sons who take part in the struggle. This is especially obvious at the beginning of the talk between the narrator and the mother of Saad. When the narrator asserts “she looks at me as a son, pouring into my ear the tales of her misery, her joy and her troubles”(Kanafani,1999). The female character has worked for the narrator’s family for years and she treats the narrator as her own son. Even living in the camp, the mother of Saad continues to come to the narrator’s family every week and speak to the narrator about her own life and problems which shows the strong relationship between the narrator and Umm Saad .As a result the narrator states “She [Umm Saad] represents something in my life that I cannot do without”(Kanafani,1999). Like the unknown female described by Saad, the mother of Saad has much motherly energy to direct towards the sons of other women; however, she is persuaded by the narrator that Saad does not need her care, while her younger children do. As the narrator specifies, “A man who joins the *Fedayeen* does not need his mother to look after him anymore”(Kanafani,1999). These words clearly reveal the patriarchal attitude to a woman in Palestinian society. Although a mother gives birth to and raise a child, she does not have any impact on his life from the moment he engages in the struggle and becomes a *fedayee*.

In Kanafani’s work, Saad no longer belongs to his mother, but to the whole nation; as such, his mother can no longer make demands of Saad, while the nation can. In the case of a son’s death, a Palestinian mother's status is raised as the mother of a martyr and is thus put in the position of everyone’s worship. A woman in Kanafani’s work passively accepts this state of affairs, making no attempts to change the attitude towards motherhood in Palestine. Within the patriarchal society, women continue to give birth and raise children, “even though the national struggle requires the sacrifice and loss of the children they produce” (Bardenstein,1997). Living in seclusion in a refugee camp, the mother of Saad and other Palestinian women do not have any possibilities for growth; their whole world is within the domestic sphere,which deprives them of the opportunity to shape their own personal femininity.

As a member of the working class, Umm Saad is also forced to work support her family; ; and her lack of education means, she has to take low-paid jobs, for instance, “as a cleaning lady in a large Lebanese-owned Beirut apartment building for LL5 a day” and perform other duties, such as planting a vineyard, cooking, and tidying up rooms (Harlow, 1987). In other words, an ordinary Palestinian woman living in a camp has to do a routine daily work, while her sons engage in the resistance movement, trying to save Palestine. Umm Saad waits passively for changes; in her patriarchal society, the resistance struggle is initiated only by men. Women are not allowed to engage in the fight; as Kanafani reveals, women’s role is to preserve patience and perform their duties during the Palestinian Resistance Movement. Encouraging their sons to engage in the struggle, Palestinian women are left without support; they make an effort to survive within the realm of poverty and constant oppression. Negating themselves for the sake of their sons is the prevalent concept within such patriarchal countries as Palestine and this is reinforced by many male writers such as Kanafani (Bardenstein,1997).

These writers insist that the meaning of women’s life is reduced to giving birth to males;any other goal is inappropriate for females. These notions are strongly opposed by the female author Amiry in her work *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*.

### **Construction of the female identity by the female writer Suad Amiry**

The construction of the female identity in the work of Amiry *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* revolves around an educated Palestinian woman who belongs to a middle class

society and behaves as an independent female. This representation of women significantly differs from Kanafani's, and this may be due to the fact that not only is she a woman, but because Amiry "was born outside Palestine, as a consequence of her family's expulsion from Jaffa during the 1948 ethnic cleansing" (Moore-Gilbert 2009). She also received her education in the West.

Moreover, Amiry took an active part in the reconstruction of Palestinian society, giving lectures at Birzeit University and working for RIWAQ Centre for Architectural Conservation. She has participated in the Washington peace negotiations as a Palestinian delegate and was further appointed to the position of Deputy Minister of Culture. Due to such active roles, Amiry has managed to "offer a vividly material account of everyday life in the West Bank" in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, bringing to light a woman who collides with humiliation and injustice within the illegally occupied environment and has to constantly defend her rights (Moore-Gilbert 2009). Placing her narrative within the female perspective, Amiry "opens up a Palestinian women's sphere of experience" during one of the most serious military occupations in modern times (Moore-Gilbert 2009). Women in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* perceive the occupation quite differently from men; presenting Occupation as largely patriarchal, the female writer notes how the occupation contributes to the subjugation of women. As Amiry acknowledges, "being a woman helped me not to be taken seriously" (Suad 1,2005).

It is because of this subjugation that Amiry, her mother-in-law, and other women in Amiry's work build numerous psychological barriers to survive within the illegally occupied environment. Throughout the narration Amiry attempts to destroy "the mental and psychological barriers, checkpoints and separation walls I had personally built in and around myself and my life, in besieged Ramallah" (Amiry, 2005). At the beginning of her story, Amiry describes the lie she has to tell in the airport; she has to devise a tale instead of telling "the innocent truth that she was visiting friends" (Moore-Gilbert 2009). But even this story puts her under the threat of being arrested by security officers; what saves her is the woman's ability to resist the threat by promising to make a scene before other tourists who have arrived to "enjoy the sun and beautiful, relaxing shores of Israel" (Amiry, 2005). Acting as a strong and independent female, Amiry provides protection to those women who are unable to oppose the existing regime, like her mother-in-law Um Salim who has always lived as a refugee and has occupied the position of a second-class citizen. When Amiry overcomes numerous difficulties and comes to save her, Um Salim behaves like a bewildered child. Thanks to her patience and strength, Amiry eventually manages to take Um Salim away from to a dangerous place. Amiry has inherited this inner strength and independence from her mother who "owned a publishing and printing firm" and thus was quite independent (Amiry, 2005). Through her recollections, she depicts a woman who, unlike the women in Kanafani's work, is not reduced to the role of a mother. Although Amiry's mother has four children, she manages to juxtapose the roles of a mother and a businesswoman.

Whenever she needs to solve some business matters, Amiry's mother sends her children to her relatives; as Amiry specifies, her mother "would look forward to getting rid of her four children every summer" (Amiry, 2005). Unquestionably, such a maternal attitude is transferred to Amiry and helps her make independent decisions in her own life. During the siege, Amiry attempts to live normally, although it takes great effort even to go to the street to buy food for herself and her mother-in-law. Living without a residency card, she cannot move outside of Ramallah; for seven years, she has to struggle for survival. But due to her strong character, she is never defeated; she goes to an Israeli civil administrator without any preliminary arrangement and demands a residency card. This action reveals a woman who is able to struggle for her rights and who is not afraid of opposing a man. She even

shows men in power some attitude: to Captain Yossi, she says “You treat us all like terrorists, so we might as well behave like them” (Amiry, 2005) . These words both criticise the siege and patriarchy at once, and, unlike Kanafani’s mother of Saad, simultaneously demonstrate her refusal to endure her obscure position any longer.

Amiry is also defiant of her second-class position within her homeland; she writes letters to everyone she knows, describing the unbearable conditions of women during the Israeli occupation and her own sense of “alienation and bitterness, even destructive rage” (Abdel-Malek,1999) . The female in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* is not able to simply sit and wait for something to occur. Throughout the narration, she opposes the existing regime, either through words or actions. Amiry destroys the traditional perception of Palestinian women; she smokes cigarettes and drinks alcohol. When she comes to speak to Captain Yossi she says, “‘Get me a cup of coffee and a cigarette’, I ordered Captain Yossi as I sat down cross-legged on the chair next to his desk”( Amiry, 2005): Such strategies of liberation used by the female protagonist reveal Amiry’s desire to achieve equality with men. This desire appears in a sharp contrast to the desire of the female protagonist in Kanafani’s *Umm Saad* who accepts her subordination to men. To a certain extent, this difference is explained by the fact that the mother of Saad and Amiry live in different environments: in the refugee camp and in the occupied territory respectively. As the territory in Amiry’s story no longer belongs to Palestinians, but to “the other side, to the enemy”, she no longer feels herself at home and is thus not able to withstand the subjugation from the side of the Israeli soldiers (Abdel-Malek,1999). Opposing the occupants, Amiry gradually shapes her identity because, as Bardenstein puts it, she engages in “national resistance in a variety of ways that are not extensions of ‘mothering’ roles”( Bardenstein,1997) .

For Amiry, the role of a mother is not appropriate under such complex living conditions. She has to adjust to new life and change her vision, if necessary; with a strong identity, she manages to adjust to new conditions, despite the fact that she does not want to accept them. In this regard, the female character here differs from many Palestinian women who live under the occupation. As Ibrahim Taha points out, the acquisition of female identity is “highly problematic and even sounds paradoxical in the setting of endless struggles between the Palestinian people and the state of Israel”( Taha,2002) . Yet living in the realm of constant humiliation and injustice, Amiry is not psychologically destroyed because of her strong and free will. Amiry often even risks her life, for instance “when approaching Nablus to assess the damage done to the town’s architecture during an Izraeli blitz” (Moore-Gilbert 2009) . Likewise, she overcomes many difficulties, taking her mother-in-law Um Salim to her own house; she simply cannot leave an old woman without support. It seems that difficulties empower her instead of destroying her; every time she collides with injustice . she is incapable of regarding it with indifference. To illustrate, when she is threatened with arrest in the airport, she also turns to threats, realising that there is no other way out of resolving the conflict. Living without her husband Salim, Amiry has to rely only on herself, overcome her fear of being imprisoned by the Israeli soldiers, and “express a resistant agency” (Moore-Gilbert 2009) .

As the female writer shows in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, it is this resistance that saves women’s lives in the occupied territory and helps Amiry preserve her sanity, survive the occupation, and preserve her integrity. But Amiry is not only a strong female who fights for her rights and independence; she is also a Palestinian woman who decides to stay in her homeland, even though she has to sign the document that deprives her of the opportunity to take part in the activity of Palestine Liberation Organisation. As a result, she acquires a possibility to stay in Palestine with her husband and engage in the protection of architectural buildings. She does not want to leave her



homeland, like other Palestinians; Amiry wants to make her own contribution to the social and cultural changes of Palestine. Despite the complex conditions of living in Palestine under the occupation, Amiry finds the true meaning of her life there; with an acquired personal identity, the female in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* is able to achieve an inner balance and find her place and, experience an “emotional involvement with her surroundings” (Parmenter,1994). It is as if the place shapes Amiry’s feminine identity; to put it differently, her emotional ties with Palestine which are established during the occupation help her find herself and become a more balanced individual who knows perfectly well what she wants and needs in her life. In turn, this acquired feminine identity provides Amiry with a possibility to experience a sense of freedom even within the occupied environment.

Amiry represents a woman who not only survives in this oppressive realm, but also shapes her own identity and finds ways to oppose patriarchy. Being a female who portrays a female, Amiry masterfully conveys the tiniest details of women’s suffering; she rarely mentions men, at all unless they are contextualised as being intrinsic to women’s experience of occupation. She describes her dreams as if these are dreams of all Palestinian women; in one sequence she imagines that her husband meets her in the airport and they go home together. Yet what is normal for ordinary women is not allowed to Palestinian women; as Amiry acknowledges in her work, I “needed many types of permits to move about: a permit to enter Jerusalem, another to go out to Jordan, a third to enter Israel, a fourth to work in Israel, an impossible one to enter Gaza, and a four-hour permit to use the airport” (Amiry,2005) But despite all of these ways to subjugate Palestinian females, Amiry preserves her femininity, her distinct sense of self, her dignity, and her desire to engage in further struggle against any patriarchal oppression.

## CONCLUSION

As the essay has clearly demonstrated, Palestinian women are represented differently by male and female writers because of their different visions, viewpoints, locations, historical moments and perceptions of female identity. In *Umm Saad* the male writer Kanafani observes a woman from the perspective of motherhood; presenting women as a strong and passionate yet quite passive, Kanafani expresses his understanding of the role of the Palestinian woman within a patriarchal context and thus “reinscribe[s] the most traditional aspects of motherhood” (Bardenstein,1997). In Kanafani’s novella, a woman in the role of a mother not only gives birth to a child, but she also provides her sons with appropriate political knowledge and encourages them to engage in the resistance struggle. This is consistent with the viewpoint of Bardenstein who specifies that “the ‘willing sacrifice’ of one’s son to the cause has been conspicuously articulated as a substantial contribution by women to the Palestinian resistance”( Bardenstein,1997). Drawing on a quite patriarchal vision, Kanafani expresses his feminine ideal through the mother of Saad ,who is highlighted and elevated within the discourse of Palestinian resistance (Bardenstein,1997). As a representative of resistance literature, (Harlow, 1987) this male writer assigns a crucial role to women in the resistance struggle, although this role is usually quite invisible. Kanafani’s female lacks a distinct identity; she exemplifies an “‘every-mother’ providing for an ‘every-son’” (Bardenstein,1997). In this regard, Kanafani’s work *Umm Saad* reinforces the patriarchal social structure which reduces woman to an object and deprives her of an individual a feminine identity.

Contrasting to Kanafani, the female writer Amiry’s work *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* represents women from a feminist perspective, portraying a well-educated Palestinian female who has to take different roles and create numerous psychological barriers to survive within the

illegally occupied realm. This woman masterfully balances diverse roles, at times quite male-like, such as conducting business (as is the case with regard to Amiry's mother) or protecting weaker females (as is the case with Amiry). Being a representative of "literature which has been written 'under occupation'" (Harlow, 1987) Amiry describes the struggle of the female against this occupation, showing that the major role of women within this particular historical period is not the that of mother, but rather fighter, who struggles for women's rights and freedom. While Kanafani's mother of Saad performs the fully traditional feminine role throughout the narration (that is the role of giving birth and bringing up children), Amiry demonstrates a juxtaposition of male and female roles. As the female writer explicitly shows, this is a necessity within the new environment because Palestine has become a "different homeland for a different people. It is unrecognisable and it can not recognise them" ( Abdel-Malek,2005). In light of this, it is wrong to follow the traditional division of gender roles and conventional stereotypes with regard to women's ways of life. Unlike the mother of Saad, the female protagonist in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* has a distinct identity, which is shaped by both her upbringing outside Palestine and complex socio-political conditions during the occupation. Due to this acquired personal identity, Amiry manages to affirm both her individuality and femininity and is even able to experience "a happy reunion with the land or the people" (Abdel-Malek,2005); however, this is not the case with Kanafani's mother of Saad. This female protagonist fails to juxtapose femininity with personal identity, and to "channel some of [her] energies away from the home"( Bardenstein,1997)

In this regard, the image of a woman as a mother in Kanafani's work is contrasted with the image of a woman as an active fighter who attempts to "achieve national self-determination" (Zalman ,2006) and acquire a personal, rather than collective identity in Amiry's work. The different identities of Palestinian women in these two analysed works are explained by their different living conditions, and by their diverse upbringings, life-experiences, locations, historical periods, social classes and more importantly by different genders of writers. All of these differences affect the representation of women in *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* and *Umm Saad* and reveal the reasons behind the multiplicity of female identities in both Palestinian society and literature.

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