

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY IN SAHAR KHALIFEH'S NOVEL THE INHERITANCE

¹IMAN NEAMAH JASIM, ²LAJIMAN BIN JAANOORI

^{1,2}University of Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia
E-mail: ¹flamingo_e@yahoo.com

Abstract - The Palestinian literature describes as an arena of struggle. It rises from occupation, diaspora, exile, and struggle to liberate the land. Palestinian literature provides a voice to the Palestinian issues of suffering and hardship. This study discuss the concept of identity in Sahar Khalifeh's novel *The Inheritance* (2005) and apply it in the light of Postcolonial theorists. the Palestinians will be analyzed as the colonized people who try to maintain their identity. The research is guided by one objective; To examine the change of Palestinian identity caused by the conflict between the Palestinians and the Jews. This research tries to study the Palestinian identity from a postcolonial perspective. And analyze this novel in order to explore the Palestinian identity, because the identity is related with many aspects of Palestinian's life and reinforce the sense of their belonging to their land.

Keywords - Palestinian identity, postcolonial, Sahar Khalifeh.

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Palestinian looks for a new identity that gives them power as most of Arab. Israel occupation has been changed everything in their life. Social expectation, male and female relations are changed. They try to be more modern society with new identities with keeping their customs roots and culture. Their behaviors show them that they are a cruel, primitive, and splendidly prosperous individual. In the same time, Palestinian woman like Arab women are considered as "subaltern". They are seen as a veiled submissive of luxuries harem. They are not permitted to have a voice, stay as speechless oppressed character with unclear identity (Boullata, 1990).

Sahar Khalifeh (1941-present) is a prominent Palestinian author. She is an authentic practitioner of the Palestinian political catastrophe since its emancipation in the 1940s. Khalifeh's works are Palestinian-stereotype oriented. All of them are concerned with the exiled and oppressed conditions of the Palestinians. They reflect ethnic concepts. In regard to dialectical colonialism, her novels are exquisitely evolutionary; they are interconnected; they reflect drastic changes, some even unique leaps in the writer's national awareness; and they transfer contradictions and within and among them. Her fictional canon documents her developing understanding of the role of the Palestinian-Israeli historical materialism in exploring the source of the solution to the Palestinian's oppression. For with each succeeding novel, she demonstrates her growing fictional lucidity of the need for the Palestinians to know their political status-quo as it has developed and it is now, before they could forge better future (Hesse, 2017). Khalifeh's novels unravel her accurate understanding that while the Palestinians undergo equally to colonial oppression and racial segregation, the second is born from the former. Such work,

furthermore, illustrates her deep understanding that colonial oppression is the result of the Israel occupation of the Palestinian lands; and she carries out this through a sense of cute "aesthetic realism" (Abu-Manneh, 2016). Therefore, as Wild Thorns and Of Nobel Origins obviously indicate, it is the ethnic system of occupation, characterized by the subjection of group of people by another, that allows birth to and continues to reinforce oppression and racism. As an appropriate prerequisite for appreciating Khalifeh's increasing class awareness, one must understand the intervention of the Israel occupation in the Palestinians' national affairs because she herself first understood the nature of that occupation. It is Khalifeh's growing consciousness of these fundamental characteristics of the Israel oppressive occupation. Being so, there are ample pieces of evidence, for Khalifeh, to show the substantial influence of the Israel occupation upon her homeland. This is due to the fact that she seeks to find an end to the "national oppression" created by the Israel hegemonic practices ((Abu-Manneh, 2016).

The increasing national identity collectivism is another significant feature of Khalifeh's works. This is due to the fact that she depends on national discourse; and she improves these discourses with distinctive literary modes so as to expose the latent impetus of the Palestinian dilemma in the mid-twentieth century. She could successfully transfer this via clear narrative delineations (Abu-Manneh, 2016). There an implied nuance of the Palestinian ordeal in the meticulous details of her plots. In a striking way, she strives for reflecting the real sufferings of the Palestinians through accurate details. In the main, her fiction suggests the collective fictional documentation of the entirety of Palestinian mandatory victories, diaspora, failures and survival that comprise the Palestinian-Israeli racial dichotomy. It also draws upon the Palestinian displacement trope of the forced people who lost their home and lived in scattering

host lands. Khalifeh's distinctive use of personification to interpret the Palestinian identity demonstrates her consolidation of the vitality of writing about the Palestinians as a living entity on their legitimate lands. Such lands incarnate "her vision of emancipation and her aesthetic practice (Abu-Manneh, 2016, p.119).

Khalifeh is famous for her support of the customs and cultural of the Palestinians. She conveys the very sense of the Palestinian traditional life in the bulk of her novels. She precisely portrays the development and change of the Palestinian cultural disposition which had been distorted by the Israeli occupation after 1948. In *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians*, Samih Farsoun (2010) argues that Khalifeh's writing specifically attends to "the anguish of disposition, destitution, and exile" in the context of the Palestinian metaphorical discourses (p.92).

In doing so, she embodies the core conceptual connotation of the Palestinian suppressed voices shortly after the occupation. Farsoun (2010) also discusses some novels that reflect Khalifeh's profound concern with the development and the metamorphosis of the Palestinian tradition; chief among them: *The Sunflower*, *Wild Thorns*, *Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman*, *The Door of the Courtyard*, and *The Inheritance*.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Palestinian identity has been a subject of critical discussions. In fact, researchers began to shed light on the significance of the Palestinian identity in the second decade of the twentieth century, especially after the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. This agreement put Palestine under the British mandate. The British dominance over the Palestinian lands exerted oppressive practices against the natives. It resulted in the Balfour Promise, commonly known as Balfour Declaration, 1917. This promise stipulated on giving the Palestinian lands to the Jews. Therefore, the Jews could establish their country in the Promised Land mentioned the Old Testament. The importance of this declaration is that is enabled the Jews to settle down in Palestine, and they could fulfill their religious wish. Another important factor of this declaration is the Palestinian identity. the settlement of the Jews in Palestine left a profound influence on the Palestinian identity. This is because the Palestinians suffered a lot under the Jewish occupation (Litvak, 2009).

The Palestinians interacted with the Jews. Consequently, they recognized some of the Jews' anthropological characteristics. They became accustomed to the ways by which the Jews live and treat the other people. However, the most importance result of the Jewish settlement on the Palestinian lands is displacement. By the advent of the Jews from different parts of the world, they forced the Palestinians to leaves their homes. The Palestinians,

therefore, scattered on the nearby countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon. This migratory movement participated in changing the Palestinian identity. They were influenced by the social and cultural attributes of these countries. The Palestinian identity, accordingly, became different from its original status. The Jewish occupation is considered the main cause of this identity change (Litvak, 2009).

The colonial confrontation between the Jews and the Palestinians is the essence of the shape of the Palestinian identity after the settlement of the Jews on the Palestinian lands. In this regard, the Jews used oppressive power to force the Palestinians to leave their territories. Moreover, critics argue that the use of excessive power against the Palestinians resulted in massive migratory movements that affected the Palestinian identity. As such, the Jews' occupation and their settlements on the Palestinian lands are unlawful. It resulted in a real change in the Palestinian identity. The Palestinians started to adopt new social and cultural features under that oppressive occupation. This change has been depicted in the Palestinian literature (Sayigh, 1997). This research, therefore, will study the Palestinian identity in Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance*. The Palestinian identity will be analyzed in the light of the struggle depicted in these novel.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

In *The Inheritance*, Sahar Khalifeh tries to explain the Palestinians' lives after Oslo in their homeland and in others countries. She describes their suffering to discover their roots. They live in one country and belong to another one. In this novel Sahar Khalifeh states, the situation when the first Gulf war has taken place. Many Palestinians who used to work in Gulf countries or Iraq for long time have returned to their homeland. Khalifeh also discusses Palestinian's life who lived in western world like the main character Zayna. Sahar Khalifeh success to give voice to different Palestinian characters of various circumstances in this novel and her others novels.

"...here I am a grown up, coming to gather the details of his life like someone collecting grains of sand." (Khalifeh, 1997, p. 44)

Zayna born to a Palestinian father and an American mother. She leaves Palestine when she was at fifteen years old. Zanya goes to live with her grandmother in America. Zayna lives her life divided between two cultures. she fulfilled life does not forget her homeland especially her favorite place Wadi Alrihan which is occupied by Israel settlement. In her forties, she decides to go back to Palestine to discover her roots. She backs to her homeland to find her herself, her Palestinian identity. Hence Zayna needs to emphasize an authentic cultural identity.

"I didn't say I was Arab because I wasn't. Who am I then? Despite my mother's citizenship, my birth certificate, my school certificate, my books, my

accent, my clothes, and everything about my life, I was not truly American. The depths of my mind were inhabited by visions and pictures, love songs, those Arabic mawals moving like the passage of a breeze, the scent of violets, the fragrance of memories, all leaving behind a honey-sweet solution in the heart". (Khalifeh, 1997, p. 17)

When Zayna comes back to Palestine she meets her uncle Abu Jabeer who acts the old Palestinian generation that lives in Palestine before Israel occupation and witnessed Alnakbah. He stills embrace the values and culture that are lost to the time. She tried to learn her native language to understand her family's numbers and other Palestinian people. She realizes that language is the tool to improve her root in this land. She wants to learn colloquial language to express personal feelings and worries.

"I was neither Christian nor Moslem. Concerned, my grandmother repeated constantly, 'You need an ideology, you need faith.'" (Khalifeh, 1997, p. 20)

Zayna enforces the American sides in her character and tries to be American woman. She adopts the western values and culture in her life, but she does not forget her past in the Wahdi Alrihan and the Arabic side in her character. She was divided between two worlds and she cannot understand herself, but in Wadi Alrihan she finds the similarity between her and other women who victim to the same situations. Zayna reveals herself slowly events occur and intertwine. Israel occupation tries to erase the indigenous culture and cut their roots from their land. So, Zayna's feelings of alienation never ends. She remains restless and confused throughout the whole novel. Khalifeh tries to give her characters the voice to express on their feelings of loss and deepest ideas about their circumstances. She feels there is no hope under this occupation and in this fragmentation society. Khalifeh aware of the Israel occupation role in the crumbling of her society. She tries to help her people hold out their responsibilities toward their homeland, and resist the occupation who tries to erase their culture and steal their land. "I no longer knew what information to collect or what I had come looking for in my country of origin. In the midst of this overwhelming welter of

people's problems and worries, I lost track of my objectives, which scattered in many directions". (Khalifeh, 1997, p. 52)

Zayna and Mazen arise the culture center in Wadi Alrihan to stand against the Israel occupation who tries to erase their culture. Because of near distance between Wahdi Alrihan and the Jewish settlement Kitat Rahil, the Israeli occupation closed the area and prevent Palestinian people enter to it to avoid troubles and to destroy any project tries to revive Palestinian culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Khalifeh's novel outlines several issues toward Palestinians' dilemma. It emerged that identity, culture, and Palestinians sufferings under Israel occupation. Khalifeh discusses those issues and describes the quest of identity by her characters under these colonized situations is more difficult and it is to the characters frustrated. It is prohibited and so is doomed to failure. The paper also explored occupation attempts to erase Palestinian's culture and tries to expel them out of their lands. It can be concluded that Khalifeh's Palestinian characters reflect the sufferings under the Israel occupation. Throughout their challenge, it can be concluded that Palestinians are able to resist occupation and try to liberate their land.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abu-Manneh, B. (2016). *The Palestinian novel: From 1948 to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Boullata, I. (1990), *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.
- [3] Farsoun, S. (2010). *Palestine and the Palestinians: A social and political history*. New York: Westview Press.
- [4] Hesse, I. (2017). *The politics of Jewishness in contemporary world literature: The Holocaust, Zionism and colonialism*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- [5] Khalifeh, S. (2005). *The Inheritance*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.
- [6] Litvak, M. (2009). *Palestinian collective memory and national identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [7] Sayigh, Y. (1997). *Armed struggle and the search for state: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

