

## **To Go, or Not to Go: The Palestinian Realities of Exile in the Works of Sahar Khalifeh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Palestinian exile under the Israeli occupation is one of the core themes in Palestinian narratives. Exiles encounter multiple issues like dislocation, fragmentation of identity, separation from the family and psychological anguish in their day-to-day life. Palestinian writers have been engaged in writing extensively on the harrowing experiences of exile. Simultaneously, they have written on the emerging challenges faced by the Palestinians on return to their homeland. This article explores the theme of exile in the narratives of Sahar Khalifeh through an interpretive lens of settler colonial theory. Exile, however is experienced differently by both men and women. Indeed, women's experience of exile and impact of male exile on women has been marginalised in male narratives. The paper brings out how the Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh broaches the impact of Palestinian exile on both men and women as a negative and demoralising experience. The paper specifically focuses on women who are the victims of exile and their suffering – from subtle to the more conspicuous.

*Keywords:* Exile, Israeli occupation, identity, settler colonialism, space, time

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sahar Khalifeh, a Palestinian author from the occupied territories of the West Bank,

has written many novels in Arabic. In the narratives of Khalifeh exile is a central and recurring motif. Her writings explore a number of significant issues associated with exile such as the hardships of dislocation, homelessness, alienation, and waiting for a day of return. Apart from this, both male and female characters of Khalifeh suffer from the isolation and the pain of displacement,

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expressing the agonising uncertainty of living as a stateless citizen and the continual fear of losing hope altogether. This paper focuses upon two of Khalifeh's Arabic novels translated into English, namely *The Inheritance* (2005) and *The Image, the Icon and the Covenant*<sup>1</sup> (2008), where the representation of Palestinian female experience of exile and sufferings in the works of Khalifeh is underlined. This article addresses a number of questions - what is the impact of exile on personal life; what is the difference between male and female experiences of exile; what is the impact of male exile on female. Accordingly, the structure of the paper begins with key historical moments in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict linking to the notion of Palestinian exodus of 1948 and 1967 enforced by Israeli settlers. Then it attempts to answer the above questions through discussions on the above mentioned novels.

### **SETTLER COLONIALISM AND DISPLACEMENT**

Lorenzo Veracini, the author of the monumental work, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, discusses four themes – population, sovereignty, consciousness and narrative associated with settler colonialism. He considers colonialism and settler colonialism as separate formations that often intertwine. Veracini gives a strict warning that it is wrong to consider all colonialism as settler colonialism (Veracini, 2010, p. 3). In the case of colonialism, the colonial rulers would go out to the

colonies; occupy the land, exploit their resources and eventually return home. On the contrary, the settler colonialists come to the colonies to stay permanently in the occupied territories without any intention of returning home. “. . . settlers move across space and often end up permanently residing in a new locale” (Veracini, 2010, p. 3). Another theorist, Patrick Wolfe regards settler colonialism not merely as an event but as a structure (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). The settlers eliminate the natives to own more and more land to expand their settlements. The occupied land is utilised for development and to accommodate the settlers with the intention to stay and not to leave. This is a continual process of settlers. Veracini and Wolfe present their arguments citing primary examples of settler colonial societies like Australia, the United States, Canada, South Africa and Israel. Settler colonial theory is appropriate in this case to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It helps in assessing the overarching power of the settler colonial state in its exercises such as land appropriation, displacement of the natives, and the elimination of indigenous population. Israel engages itself in building numerous settlements and checkpoints on the occupied land. It imposes restrictions on the free movement of the Palestinians in order to curb the displaced Palestinians returning to their native land from exile. In this way, Israeli colonial rule not only marginalises the native population but also tries to maintain and normalise the occupation on a day-to-day basis.

The systematic transfer of population is one of the strategies used by the settlers in order to settle on the occupied land (Veracini, 2010, p. 33). This act reduces population of the natives in a particular locale; the settlers utilise the land, resources and properties of the indigenous people on the conquered land. The process continues in the contiguous stretches. The settlers consider the presence of natives on the lands as superfluous.

### ISRAELI OCCUPATION AND EXILE

Historically, Palestinians have experienced painful displacement in the wake of two wars they fought with Israel. The war of 1948 – *Al-Nakba*, or ‘catastrophe’, culminated in the establishment of the state of Israel as a new Jewish state. Further, the Israeli Occupation of 1967 has often been described as second stage colonisation known as *Al-Naksa* when Israeli military occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Consequently, majority of the Palestinians turned homeless and took shelter in refugee camps. Palestinians were left with two choices: to scatter around the globe or to stay inside the occupied territories compromising with the situation where they were subjected to humiliation, oppression, and to a life of daily violence or at least, the risk of violence through military orders. They work in Israeli settlements and factories as labourers and pay taxes. The inequitable distribution of local resources has a huge impact on Palestinian community and on the lives of individuals. Israeli occupation not only aggravated the exodus of Palestinians but

also put restrictions on the possibility of their return. The displacements led to the division of the Palestinian community between those who left and those who stayed within the green line<sup>2</sup>. The best-known and most eloquent Palestinian spokesperson Edward Said has spoken on his own experience of exile in his autobiography *Out of Place*. He acknowledges the Palestinians’ collective experience of exile in his narratives. He explains in *After the Last Sky*, that the *Nakba* was an outrageous event in the modern history of the Palestinians. He states that exile has caused fragmentation, dispersal and destruction of the Palestinian society. It has had a deep impact in transforming Palestinian identity as an exilic one. Said states that the Palestinians’ exile has been the most extraordinary one: “. . . to have been exiled by exiles, to relive the actual process of uprooting at the hands of exiles” (Said, 2000, p. 178). Indeed, Sahar Khalifeh stays inside the occupied territories of Palestine, being an eye witness to Palestinian exile. In one of her interviews she says, “[t]he first thing they did after Occupation is they kicked the people out of the villages and pushed them towards the bridge – they wanted them to leave the West Bank and all Palestinian altogether” (Nazareth, 1980, p. 71). Since then, they have not found a permanent abode and are migrating continually suffering from displacement, loss and agony.

The largest part of Khalifeh’s corpus consists of a thematic compass on the nightmares of exile and about the exiles living outside Palestine, yearning to return

to their motherland. Indeed, both men and women in Palestinian society share various kinds of exilic experiences unceasingly. Other Palestinian writers and film makers too have articulated their painful experience of exile. Muhammad Siddiq, a notable Palestinian male writer, describes Palestine itself as a “refugee nation” (Siddiq, 1995, p. 87). Darwish, Adonis, & Al-Qasim, (1984/2005, p. 30-31) say, “[w]e travel like other people, but we return to nowhere” As Said (2000, p. 173) rightly remarks, “[e]xile is not . . . a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you.” Apart from these writers Raja Shehadeh, Mourid Barghouti, and Fawaz Turki, also have written extensively on their personal experiences of exile and return. However, the women’s experience of exile has been largely marginalised in these narratives by the Palestinian male writers. Exile, in terms of travel, displacement, physical and mental agony, usually gets associated with men’s experience of exile. There are studies on these writers who have highlighted the pain of exile in terms of socio-political, economic ramifications of exile and in terms of return to homeland (Habib, 2013; Nasser, 2014; Mir, 2015). Notwithstanding the importance of the above issues, they have also created a vacuum in depicting the women’s experience of exile. The common tendency among the mainstream writers is to consign female experiences of exile mostly to the realm of the metaphorical. Khalifeh, on the other hand, represents women’s experiences of exile extensively, which remains unprecedented. Nevertheless, she

also discusses the males’ experiences of the same even as she presents a unique scenario of the impact of male exile on female. Scholars who have earlier worked on the narratives of Khalifeh have not identified and focused on this issue adequately (Alhawamdeh, 2015; Angierski, 2014; Mahmoud, 2014).

### **MALE AND FEMALE EXPERIENCE OF EXILE**

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines exile as “the state of being barred from one’s native country” (Pearsall, 1999, p. 499). Exile is entangled with various historical, political, and socio-economic issues. It comprises multiple binaries such as physical/psychological, liberated/confined, spiritual/material, individual/collective and personal/political. Each experience of exile is distinct and varies from person to person. Khalifeh presents the male experience of exile that differs from female experience of the same. More often the exile is voluntary and sometimes, non-voluntary. However, in Khalifeh’s novels, majority of the male characters, irrespective of political reasons, take the voluntary decision to migrate. Khalifeh describes vividly the multiple challenges experienced by the migrating Palestinian community.

In the novel “*The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*”, Ibrahim is the narrator who constantly shares his experience of exile. He works as a teacher at the convent in Jerusalem and aspires to become a political writer. He falls in love with Mariam, yet abandons her when she becomes

pregnant. His decision of exile from his homeland is voluntary in order to escape the personal responsibilities. Ibrahim is the best illustration for an expatriate who lives voluntarily in an alien country for personal or social reasons. Expatriates feel lonely and estranged as exiles but they do not suffer from being barred. Ibrahim is neither banished nor threatened by a specific political agenda, yet he chooses to live away from homeland. He has been transferred to many places as per his job requirements. He marries several times, but does not have children. His voluntary exile is loaded with melancholy. He is utterly lost in his tenuous atmosphere in which physical movement from one place to the other is beyond his control. Exile is a hypersensitive issue as it has a deeper physical, emotional, and psychological impact on a person. "Exile is dislocation, both physical and psychic. The exile is a stranger, not seen, misperceived. The departure into absence of exile contains and will foster a will to return to presence" (Kaminsky, 1992, p. 32).

Displacement leads to alienation which in turn, makes exiles suffer. Certainly, the condition of exile has had a direct impact on the family and emotions of the individual who is in exile. Exile shatters the personal dreams and desires of a person. It restricts the person's willingness to exercise his free will. Ibrahim wants to become a renowned writer. More of his life is spent in exile than in his homeland. He feels abandoned in the politics of his country and exiled life that would not allow him to become an acclaimed writer and alienates him from

writing. He says, "... the world of politics, exile, and worldly matters took me away from it. If I hadn't lost myself in politics and wandered the world, I would have been the greatest writer in the world" (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 244). As Ibrahim recounts, his decision to go into exile is especially painful because he has to be away from his family members. Barghouthi aptly remarks "[i]t is enough for a person to go through the first experience of uprooting, to become uprooted forever" (Barghouthi, 1997/2000, p. 11). Exile drains the natural sentiments and inclination of the self that are deprived of expressing itself which cause deep sorrow and alienation. Looking back at his exile, Ibrahim says, "I had lost my capacity to feel and interact, my heart was rusty, my feelings had died" (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 172).

Mariam had fallen in love with an Italian priest. This was before meeting Ibrahim, when she was in Brazil, where she was raised with many of her brothers. Apparently, someone had noticed Mariam and the priest kissing each other inside the church's premise. The priest then got transferred to another convent as a punishment for his sinful act. After this incident, Mariam was expelled from the church and was put on house arrest for some time. Later she resettled in Jerusalem with her blind mother. As Mariam develops a relation with Ibrahim in Jerusalem, she tells him the story of her exile. Being exiled, she misses her brothers, the nuns, and the family home. Ibrahim describes her as "a stranger in her homeland, a stranger in the other land, an only girl among seven

brothers, lonely amid strangers” (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 42). It is apparent that for both Mariam and the priest, exile acts as a severe punishment and social stigma. For Mariam, exile becomes a cage and she feels a deep sense of separation, solitude, and boredom. Indeed, Mariam is not only the victim of her own exile, but that of Ibrahim’s too, as we shall see later.

In the novel, *The Inheritance*, Nahleh and Kamal are the siblings who share their miserable experience of exile. Nahleh, a single woman, unveils her experience of exile. She leaves her home at the age of 18 to work as a teacher in Kuwait. The period of her exilic journey is for 30 years. She exiles in order to support her family and her brothers’ education. She gets habituated to the life in Kuwait which offers an opportunity for her livelihood. She becomes financially independent, but her brothers communicate with her projecting pseudo affection whenever they need money and exploit her financially. She sacrifices her own personal life, and clears the family debts that had piled up. She anticipates that in future her brothers would support her and take care of her. She spends her youthful days working in Kuwait. Consequently, she wonders how her exilic years slipped one after another without her realisation. Nahleh regrets not being married. She feels vulnerable being alone in her life without marriage and children. She expresses her desire for a conjugal bond. Nahleh says, “I woke up and found myself old, without a husband, without a house, and no one to call me Mama. This is how it ended” (Khalifeh,

1997/2005, p. 52). She envies the prosperous marital lives of her brothers. “. . . I spent my youth for – living in exile! . . . Each one of them has a large family, one or two wives . . .” (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 50-51). Nahleh’s struggles to get married to fulfill her desire inflict psychological anguish. The marginalisation and the discrimination she suffers inside the family after her return from exile, leads to psychological ailment. She loses control over her emotions and becomes shopaholic: wears strange clothes, spends a lot of time applying cosmetics and utters strange words. Nahleh stands as a metaphor for the psychological impact of exile. Van Leeuwen (1999, p. 268) says, “[e]xile is a consciousness which is imposed by external forces, but which has been internalized and transformed into an emotional and intellectual disposition which affects every experience and every thought.” Nahleh’s brother, Kamal, gets a scholarship to study in Germany. He decides to flee into exile. After the completion of his education, he starts his career as a civil engineer in Germany and works there for many years. The country provides him all material comforts and medical benefits. However, he never feels he is one among them. He feels a vacuum inside his being, as he is away from his home and homeland. He prioritises his work over other things and spends his lifetime in the laboratory with machines. Yet, he is not happy with his life in the exiled country. His life in Germany becomes tediously constant and eternally bland; he defines it as “superficial” and “rootless” (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 188). Therefore,

Kamal tries to forget the awful experience of exile and attempts to overcome the fear of being outside his land. Like other exiles, he too feels he has been cut off from his roots. Exile makes the individuals lose their voice and identity. Kamal in the novel repeatedly narrates his awful memories of exile and homelessness.

In the same novel Zayna, the narrator, is born in New York to a Palestinian father and an American mother. She grows up listening to the attractive stories narrated by her father, Hajj Muhammad Hamdan about the Palestinian community and home. "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal" (Said, 2000, p. 186). Zayna says, "[a]s Zayna I was caught between two languages and two cultures – my father's Brooklyn and the West Bank on one side and my maternal grandmother's American culture on the other. I was later left without any culture and lived in a vacuum" (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 9). She too experiences a sort of exile in America with her dual identities; she encounters cultural, linguistic, and religious alienation. Zayna, the Americanised version of Zaynab, feels stark lack of belonging to any place. She says, "[m]y language was lost before I was lost and so was my identity. My name and address followed suit. My original name was Zaynab Hamdan, and with time it became Zayna" (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 8).

## IMPACT OF MALE EXILE ON WOMEN

The male exile has tremendous emotional and psychological impact on women – mother, wife, daughter, beloved or sister. Even though exile is a political rhetoric, it has deeper impact on personal lives. In the novel, *The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*, Mariam's mother suffers for much of her life because of the exile of her husband. She grows old waiting for her husband's return. She brings up her children singlehandedly, in the absence of their father. Her children grow up, only to get into exile overseas, except a son and a daughter. She narrates her sorrowful life to Ibrahim and says, "I put up with the absence of the father, but the children too! Their father lived for forty years in exile, maybe more, while I stayed home. He would be gone for two years and return for two months to visit. Every year he would say it was the last year until he died" (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 65). Thus, exile also stands for repudiation of one's own responsibilities from the males. This utter carelessness meted out is suffered by the female counterparts, who try to make up for the ignored responsibilities.

In the absence of Ibrahim, Mariam gives birth to Michael. Mariam learns Arabic and writes a novel to express and deal with her experience of exile and motherhood in a more creative way. She brings her son up without the support of Ibrahim. She is unable to celebrate her motherhood or the birth of her son Michael and is sad about it. She perceives her motherhood as a burden

and leads a reclusive life. She writes “[t]hey say that motherhood is miraculous, pure love, pure affection, sacrifice, devotion, and gratefulness, but I only feel oppression and revolt, I want to run away from my heart. Why should I be the only one tied down? . . . The pressure on my head is increasing, I am oppressed, I am lonely” (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 179). Thus, Mariam remains a victim of dual exiles – her own and that of Ibrahim’s, at different points in her life. But she has to bear the burden of both these exiles, when the man in exile might actually be freed to carve out his own destiny even as he is in exile.

#### **FUZZY DICHOTOMY BETWEEN AN INSIDER AND AN OUTSIDER**

Exiles isolate themselves from a particular historical period and geographical space, and are lost in space between their homeland and the migrated land. Khalifeh’s novels are complicated by a peculiar fuzzy demarcation between the insider and the outsider. Khalifeh’s project is rather to highlight both the experiences of Palestinians living under the occupation and those in exile. In Khalifeh’s narratives Palestinians are neither contented in their homeland nor in exile. They have to struggle for their survival, both inside the occupied territories and outside the borders. Speaking about own experience of exile, the well-known Palestinian historian, Barakat (2013, p. 143) says, “[t]o be honest, the cynicism I confronted in myself and others under Occupation in Palestine should have provided a kind of immunity for the cynicism of exile outside Palestine. But

what I learned is that exile within is as brutal as exile outside.” Therefore, the life within the occupied territories could be likened to a kind of ‘internal exile’ that Palestinians might experience in their own land. Both ways, the fate of a Palestinian is sealed – to be an exile.

Within occupied territories, outsiders are treated with respect in comparison to the insiders. Ambitious parents aspire for the departure of their children in search of ‘greener pastures’ for the safety of their life, for livelihood and their wellbeing. In the novel *The Inheritance*, Abu Jaber Hamdan expresses his happiness over the fact that his sons and a daughter are in foreign countries. He is disappointed about his younger son, Mazen, who was the one without any education and a formal degree and who is still in the occupied territory. He is a revolutionary, a victim of a mine explosion during the time of *Intifada*<sup>3</sup>, Mazen does not exile to another country to earn his livelihood. The father calls Mazen, “the real problem” (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 32). He feels his sons who are living outside have a better life when compared to the son who is the victim of Israeli violence. Jaber discourages another of his sons, Kamal, who wishes to return from Germany. Kamal writes in a letter, “[f]ather, their world is merciless” (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 155). He receives an earnest reply from the father saying, “[d]on’t make the mistake of coming back. I have enough dealing with Mazen and his problems. Here, we have unemployment and war worries. Please, please, for my sake, be wise and do not make rash decisions”



(Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 155). Khalifeh's novel emphasises contradictory ideas of the insider and the outsider. Mazen is an insider, a revolutionary and a staunch follower of Guevara<sup>4</sup>. Kamal often narrates his dreadful days of exile to Mazen. He calls his brothers in exile as "merchants, slaves, opportunists, upstarts, and bourgeois" (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 217). Mazen feels that living as an insider, he has balanced his life in his homeland enduring pain and suffering under Israeli Occupation.

Mazen's beloved Violet was born and raised in Palestine, and wishes to leave the country. She had already worked with Nahleh in Kuwait. After her return, she feels unhappy staying in her homeland. She dreams of migrating to America. She imagines that her life in America would be extremely prosperous and peaceful in comparison to the life in her country. She feels Westerners have more freedom and liberty to enjoy their life. On the other hand, she views her own people, especially men as conservative and patriarchal in their attitude, who try to fulfill their male fantasies through the institution of marriage. Mazen discourages her idea of migration and tries to convince her that those who are in exile yearn for their return to their homeland. According to Mazen, leaving one's country is an offence and amounts to deserting one's duty.

However, Mazen is forced to change his perspective in the course of time. His uncle's wife Futna, who delivers a baby, struggles between life and death at the checkpoint. She bleeds heavily and is in

need of immediate medical care. At this critical situation, the Israeli soldiers at Kiryat Rahil checkpoint refuse to allow the ambulance which carries Futna. Mazen is helpless because his efforts to convince the Israeli soldier go in vain. After a prolonged wait, Futna dies at the checkpoint. This is a moment of remorse for Mazen as he feels guilty, pessimistic and regrets not achieving anything staying in the homeland. He says "[s]ometimes I feel as if I were suffocating and I wish I could get out of my skin and run away to Frankfurt or Berlin like Kamal, who ran off to save his skin. But I stayed inside my skin and my own skin is too tight for me" (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 242). Khalifeh's characters express their anxieties and existential dilemmas regarding their decision to be either an insider or an outsider. They encounter a series of oppositions, antinomies and contradictions regarding their decision to exile. An insider wants to be an outsider and vice-versa. They are perplexed by their own decisions.

### TIME AND EXILE

Exile has an intricate and hostile relationship with time. The exiles struggle against the temporal conflicts of the past, present and future. As Ilie (1980, p. 62) contends, "time functions as a stifling force." Exiles focus more on the past which dwells in nostalgic melancholy. On the other hand, the exiled person has been eventually absent from the present time of his or her country. Rather, they live in the present of their host country. "The time of the exile is different. Or rather, the exile lives in two different

times simultaneously, in the present and in the past” (McClennen, 2004, p. 32). Time and space have become a problem for Khalifeh’s characters who return from exile. The Palestinians try to forget the frustrating experiences of exile once they return to their homeland. Unfortunately, they suffer from nostalgia and are unable to engage with the present. In *The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*, Ibrahim plans to return in search of his beloved Mariam and his son, Michael whom he had left in the course of his exilic life. He regrets his decision of voluntary exile. He remembers his beloved and scribbles about his life without her. After 20 years of exile, he recalls his past and his beloved Mariam. “It was my memory, my first love, and a part of history. Today I am a man without a present, without Mariam and without history” (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 1). Ibrahim is aware that his past life does not fetch happiness, so he tries to forget his exilic past. However, he is optimistic about his future and dreams to be with them for the rest of his life. He says, “I began looking for the past and here I am looking for the future. Mariam was the thread of the past, and her son will be that of the future” (Khalifeh, 2002/2008, p. 157). Ibrahim’s character is an illustration of an exile who struggles between different time zones – that of the past, present and future.

Exiles have often been obsessed with recording their past life spent in exile. One of the prominent Palestinian women writers, Liyana Badr, writes “[e]xile. Nothing is as painful as an exile; it stretches ahead into

the future, and back into the past, and bursts through on every side at the place we’ve dammed up with the dry straw of memories” (Badr, 1979/1989, p. 74). Both Kamal and Nahleh remember their exilic past and they are unable to engage themselves with the present in any manner. Their past is understood in the light of the present and vice versa. The present is uncertain and they struggle hard to cope with the existing situation of their country. For Nahleh, who leaves her home as a teenager, time moves in an expeditious manner without her realisation. As an exile, she is unable to have control over the cyclical movement of time and consequently, on her own life. She is not aware of the valuable time she has spent working in the exiled country. Her feelings of loneliness and her efforts to combat the signs of aging make her life miserable. She feels that her youth was stolen from her by the years she spent in exile. She experiences timelessness which makes her lonely, loveless, and miserable. Zaynab notes that Nahleh “had once been beautiful, fresh, young, and full of love and feelings, then she had been hit with the realisation that she was fifty, homeless, aimless, and unsatisfied” (Khalifeh, 1997/2005, p. 72). The journey of exile never ends at a certain point. As Said rightly remarks, “Palestinian life is scattered, discontinuous, marked by the artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space, by the dislocation and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time” (Said, 1986, p. 20).

## CONCLUSION

As a writer, Sahar Khalifeh not only represents Palestinian suffering and displacement but also the Palestinian lives under momentous consequences of Israeli occupation. Every case of exile is unique. Khalifeh's depiction of female and male characters reflects different contexts that provoked them to be in exile and the challenges they faced. They recall their sorrowful exilic days spontaneously from the captivation of memory. Mariam's mother, Mariam and Nahleh, all suffer from loneliness their entire life, longing to attain the unattainable. Both Mariam and her mother suffer throughout their life because of the absence of their male counterparts. For Nahleh, both exile and return leave a deep psychological scar. Ibrahim and Kamal express a strong sense of helplessness, self-pity, cultural isolation and detachment from homeland. Mazen catches the dilemma as to where to be an exile – at home or abroad. Thus, Khalifeh's representation of the realities of Palestinian exile produces characters that try to make up for the absence of the males at home, long to fulfill their desires that have been deferred, suffer in exile as they try to reconcile inside their homeland, attempt to reconnect with time, to stitch the temporal fragmentation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Khalifeh's novel "al-Mirath", written in 1997 has been translated into English as "*The Inheritance*". Her award-

winning novel "Surawaayqunawa 'ahdunqadim", written in 2002 has been translated into English as "*The Image, the Icon and the Covenant*." This novel is the winner of The Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2006. These two novels have been translated by Aida Bamia. She is a professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

- <sup>2</sup> The green line refers to the border separating pre-1967 Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories. It is an internationally recognised border.
- <sup>3</sup> Literally means shaking off or awakening; refers to the Palestinian uprising that began in December 1987.
- <sup>4</sup> The well-known Argentinean born Cuban revolutionary leader, Che Guevara.

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