

# Visions of Transition

: BETWEEN TWO WOMEN WRITERS

A Comparative Study of the ~~Works of Sahar Khalifah~~

and ~~Nadine Gordimer~~ : SAHAN KHALIFAH AND  
NADINE GORDIMER

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## Abstract

This comparative study is between two female novelists, the Palestinian, Saḥar Khalīfah and the South African, Nadine Gordimer. Both writers share a feeling of marginality for reasons of sex, race and politics. They also envision through their fiction the future in both Palestine and South Africa. The thesis starts by highlighting the political, social and literary backgrounds of both novelists. Then it sets out the theoretical framework of this study which focuses on the literary tradition of women, and the way women have been defined, represented, and repressed in the symbolic system of language.

The thesis examines Saḥar Khalīfah's sequel novel *al-Ṣabbār* (*Wild Thorns*, 1976) and *ʿAbbād al-Shams* (*The Sunflower*, 1980), as well as *Bāb al-Sāḥah* (*The Courtyard Gate*, 1990). The analysis focuses on the social and political issues, from the 'us' perspective, shedding light on the female protagonist's psychology and her struggle to counter the marginalising and homosocial rules. It examines various issues such as marginality and women texts, ambiguity in the novel, the female imagination, subjectivity and the new images of women, mother-daughter relationship and sisterhood.

Similarly, in Nadine Gordimer's novels *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *July's People* (1981) the analysis focuses on the social, political and psychological issues from a colonial perspective, highlighting at the same time the white female protagonist's feeling of alienation in South Africa.

The thesis ends with a concluding chapter giving a comparative analysis of the two writers and their works elaborating the common literary themes, aspects, similarities and differences. Moreover, it analyses the visions of transition they both foresaw in their relative countries in these novels.

## Acknowledgment

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## **Dedication**

*To my parents and family for their considerable concern and patience.*

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## Introduction

### *The Structure of Women Novels/ Changing Political Consciousness*

“I shall speak about women’s writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement.”

Hélène Cixous<sup>1</sup>

Much of this work has been influenced by the divergent Anglo-American and French feminist criticism exemplified in Rogers, Showalter, Woolf, Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray and others. It focuses on the definition of the feminine, its representation and repression in the symbolic system of language. The thesis attempts to investigate the literary tradition of both writers through the lines of enquiry suggested by, firstly, Rogers’ *Aspects of the Female Novel*, which is its main departure point. Secondly, it attempts to define the writer’s position within the women’s literary tradition through Showalter’s notion of the three phases of development in women’s writing, which is an illuminating one as it assesses the exploration of the writers’ historical and literary terrain. Showalter identifies three phases – of imitation, of protest and of self-discovery, a turning inward to search for an identity freed to some extent from the dependency of opposition.<sup>2</sup> This approach will examine the works of both writers in the light of the following determinants to establish a ground for their visions of their historical, political and social realities. It will not be limited to an analysis of the literary subordination of women, but will focus instead on the ‘literary tradition of women’ and on the symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (London: Harvester Press, 1981) p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978) p. 13.

structure of gender and sexuality within its discourse. All the novels in this study have a political and nationalistic resonance; their themes embrace the resistance movements, which later develop into the *intifāḍāh* in Palestine and anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. In the case of the Palestinian novels, this nationalistic voice is intertwined with the feminist call for woman's emancipation, whereas in Gordimer, it is intertwined with a perpetual engagement with the daughters of colonialism, their alienation and contradictions. Their works recall Terry Eagleton's remarks on nationalism in literature:

“what we might call the ‘subjunctive mood’ of ‘bad’ or premature utopianism grabs instantly for a future, projecting itself by an act of will or imagination beyond the compromised political structures of the present. By failing to attend to those forces of fault lines *within* the present that, developed or prised open in particular ways, might induce that condition to surpass itself into future.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Marginality and Women's Texts**

Kristeva developed the concept of the literary text in relation to *knowledge*, observing the outcome of this interrelationship or the desire to write as indicative of the ‘literary’ person and the ‘scientific’ specialist, thus marking the position of the subject in relation to his language through his experience of body and history. She stresses the accumulation of this knowledge as indicative of the different sciences such as linguistics, psychoanalysis, sociology, and history.<sup>4</sup> This concept sheds light on the ‘marginality’ of women and her position as regards the patriarchal order, and lumps together the different determinants of a woman's text in relation to society that define the way the woman writes herself and conveys her ideas about the world around her. Rogers, in her book *Aspects of the Female Novel*, examines certain pattern of female novelistic discourse. She observes that the most prominent feature in women's fiction is the devotion to describing the heroine's inner, rather than outer, world. Her idea is based on the hypothesis that the female novel focuses on the inner drama of a story, whereas the male novel focuses on the external action of a story.<sup>5</sup> She states:

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Terry eagleton, Fredric Jamson, Edward W.Said (eds) (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> J. M. Rogers. *Aspects OfThe Female Novel* (New Hampshire: Longwood, 1991) p. 114.

“Experience in women’s fiction, by contrast, is typically without event to the extent that what is said, done or seen is insignificant compared to what is thought, felt or sensed.”<sup>6</sup> This feature has been further explained by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as a literal and figurative imprisonment which marks the ‘literary tradition of women’ because they were literally confined to either their husband’s or their father’s houses; figuratively speaking, therefore, women were locked into male texts. They further point out, “It’s not surprising, then, that spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterises much of their writing.”<sup>7</sup> The figurative imprisonment of women in literary texts developed during the nineteenth century when writing became an accepted feminine pursuit through which Victorian women who dwelled on domesticity gave expression to their ideas. This enforces the concept of marginality as a construct in women’s expression of her reality, which underlines the point that woman’s space is gendered. Mernissi recognises this as an expression of power relations, that “any transgression of the boundaries is a danger to the social order...the symbolism of sexual patterns certainly seems to reflect society’s hierarchy and power allocation in the Muslim order. Strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe of men...and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family.”<sup>8</sup> This point will be argued on the basis that both writers attempt to explore the outer world through their insights and involvement with reality. This, however, will not diminish the sediments of a long history of domesticity marked in the writers’ interest in the psychology of the female protagonists, a feature apparent in both Khalīfah and Gordimer to varying degrees.

Silence is particularly integral to woman’s psyche. Therefore, when she writes, she reverts to inner monologues, diaries and memories to express self-realisation and to inform the reader indirectly about the protagonist’s inner thoughts and feelings. Kate Millet’s biological theory of patriarchy in *Sexual Politics* reduces silence to the difference between the sexes as a social construct. Men and women represent two

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-18.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Fātemah Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge, Mass: Shenkman, 1975) pp. -137-8.

different cultures with very different experiences. This affects children through their socialisation (parents, society and the social codes in general), which defines the traits of each gender accordingly. She adds that there is a pre-conditioning (of both sexes) in early childhood. She suggests that “to conform to the expectations of the male in society, [the boy] develops aggressive impulses, whereas the female gets either frustrated or silent.”<sup>9</sup> The monologue is therefore the discourse of silence and isolation. It is a notable feature in Khalīfah’s protagonists, who are presented as marginalised by society, or alienated for reasons of class and race in Gordimer’s case. However, it can be argued that this feature is not specific to women’s writing but a general characteristic of realist narrative fiction.<sup>10</sup> It is abundant in Arabic literature; for example, the story *Distant View of a Minaret* by Alīfah Rifʿat depicts the relationship of the male-female protagonists in an indirect way through the monologues of Bahiah who laments her destiny in life and her unhappiness in a marriage into which she is forced through the arranged marriage system:

“I’m not crying now because I’m fed up or regret that the lord created me a woman. No, it’s not that. It’s just that I’m sad about my life and my youth that have come and gone without my knowing how to live them really and truly as a woman.”<sup>11</sup>

Related to this is the intersection of public and private in Khalīfah and Gordimer’s novels, revealing the political, social and emotional aspects of their protagonists (with the exception of *al-Ṣabbār*). This point raises many critical questions about the female novelist’s immersion at the intersection of the personal and domestic, thereby failing to see the fierce war that was imminent in South Africa or the situation erupting in Palestine. Nkosi comments on *July’s People*: “Too often the novel hints at or merely dwindles into the cosiness of a small domestic drama. It simply cannot bring itself to imagine the murderous and tumultuous confusion that is likely to occur [...] no white liberal South African writer wants to imagine such a complete disruption of personal

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<sup>9</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago Press, 1977) p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> There are writers like Graham Greene whose male characters tend to vent their disappointment in life through monologues.

<sup>11</sup> Alīfah Rifʿat, *Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories* (London: Quartet, 1983) p. 11.

relationships.”<sup>12</sup> This corresponds to Rogers’ argument that women writers avoid action and dwell instead on the domestic and internal world of the protagonist, in preference to the external world around her. As she puts it “Typically, the outer world is given minimal narrative treatment in contrast to the space devoted to the heroine’s inner world, even to the extent that tangible reality could be said to disappear from these novels [...] a related device is to shift to the heroine’s suppositions about what others think and feel.”<sup>13</sup> This distinction between inner and outer world is countered by Virginia Woolf’s view, in *Three Guineas*, that “the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected...the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other.”<sup>14</sup>

Rogers also argues that “real-life women writers seldom display either [their] fascination with external events or [their] flair for suspense and the sure time-sense needed for its evocation; instead they tend to write in a non-eventful, non-sequential, non-suspenseful manner, to the extent that *story* connotes a careful selection and organisation of events.”<sup>15</sup> She cites Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and indicates that the sequence or order of events is broken. She attributes this characteristic to the female subconscious which puts things in their natural order and goes on to explain that the female novel opts for the single inevitable ending. This notion is reductive, as it emphasises Cixous’ ‘hierarchical’ and ‘patriarchal’ ‘binary thought’. This, however, is countered by the fact that novelists in general (male or female) revert to the strategy of selecting the events of the story in a non-sequential manner when drawing from a life experience or an autobiography. Therefore it is not a generic feature, in the sense that it is usually associated with analepsis and prolepsis in the novel, a common feature in all genres. At other times, this feature is so dense that it reflects the writer’s psychological confusion as a child, adolescent or adult. For example, in Lyānah Badr’s *Būṣlah min ajl ‘Abbād al-Shams (A Compass for the Sunflower, 1979)*, this aspect is recurrent, and is linked to the writer’s psychological state and unstable childhood, when her family were repeatedly forced to flee their home:

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis Nkosi, “Two Reviews,” in *Home and Exile* (London: Longman, 1983) p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-5.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Harcourt, 1952) p. 258.

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.13.

“I waited to hear that resounding cry blending in with the harsh, grating sounds of stupefying pain, vocal chords torn in throats constricted by anguish and horror, and the thump of American howitzers, as the stale air grew ranker and thicker in the first aid centre of the Jabal Al-Hussain camp in Amman.

I waited but no cry came and there were only the familiar everyday noises of Beirut awakening from sleep and the sounds of the service taxi rattling round a bend in the road or grumbling on the steep slopes.”<sup>16</sup>

The aspect of fragmentation or non-sequential writing is clear in this novel, and quite common in autobiographical or semi-autobiographical writing where the story does not follow the classical chronological novelistic formula, whether the author is male or female. Here, the story takes place in Beirut, and follows the thoughts of the main character Jinān. The reader is taken back to her childhood in the camps of ‘Ammān. Non-sequentiality is therefore not an indicator of default in women’s writing as much as of its reliability. However, in relation to autobiography, Dinah Manisty states:

“Autobiography is the most obvious genre associated with writing ‘the self’ and gives rise to certain expectations from the reader: he or she anticipates the account of a life recalled against a socio-political backdrop of the time and a degree of ‘engagement’ with the subject of the work ...a good autobiography not only focuses on its author but also reveals his connectedness to the rest of society...this criterion is adequately supported by the many male autobiographies, both in the Arab world and the West, which concentrate on chronicling the progress of their authors...a commonly held view is that women’s autobiographies rarely mirror their times.”<sup>17</sup>

Manisty defends the ‘incoherence’ in women’s writing by saying that “the very coherence of such conventional autobiography is a sign of its falseness and alienation; it challenges the concept of a coherent self.”<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, this can be reduced to the fact that women exist at the intersection of the biological, psychological and social fields of discourse and practice. This defines their

<sup>16</sup> Līyānah Badr, *Būṣṣāh min ajl ‘Abbad al-Shams*, trans. C. Cobham ( London: The Woman’s Press, 1979) p.2.

<sup>17</sup> Dinah Manisty, “Negotiating the Space between Private and Public: Women’s Autobiographical Writing in Egypt”, in Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor & Stefan Wild (eds) *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1998) p.272.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

thought, their use of, or exile from, language and their own discursive practices in the institutional field of artistic production. All of this designates them as occupying a space of difference and oppression. Many would see biological difference as reductive; nevertheless, it locates and differentiates male and female. It affects their choices of language and narrative techniques; for example, in *Burger's Daughter*, the dialectic form of interrogation reveals the conflicts in the colonial character of Rosa, disclosing at the same time her ambivalence to the South African reality of racism and oppression. Belsey defines the interrogative novel:

“The world represented includes in the interrogative text what Althusser calls ‘an internal distance’ from the ideology in which it is held, which permits the reader to construct from within the text a critique of this ideology [...] the interrogative text refuses a single point of view, however complex and comprehensive, but brings points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction. It therefore refuses the hierarchy of discourses of classic realism.”<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the dialectics in Khalifah's novels highlight the oppressions and marginalities of the female protagonists through the structure of Bakhtin's dialogism, which help to reveal the protagonist's problems in the patriarchal family, as in *Abbād al-Shams* and *Bāb al-Sāḥah*. The consciousness of the heroine is cogently revealed, giving space for contradictions and confusions to be resolved through the multiplicity of voices that interact in the novelistic world. Bakhtin observes this concept in relation to ‘heteroglossia’ in the novel:

“The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas as depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorecie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of the narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980) p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

## Ambiguity in the Novel

Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, argues that the political interpretation of literary texts is preconditioned by its mode of production or structure and the interactive system between the writer and the interpretation through the different ideologies – social, cultural, political, psychoanalytical and economic. Interpretation therefore depends on the sediments of previous readings or interpretive tradition.<sup>21</sup> This point of view illuminates the gaps and ellipses embedded in the text which, according to Jameson, are dependant on interpretation. Therefore, contradictions are solvable by the ‘political unconscious’ and on the reader’s conceptual accumulations. Such a perspective enables us to read the various implications of the text. This interpretive mood gives us an understanding of the significance of ellipsis and overshadowing of events as it draws our attention to the ideological, humane and existential issues raised in the novel.

History enters the text as an ideology, determined and garbled by its measurable absences. The text makes use of certain significations that are elisions. Eagleton explains, “Within the text itself, then, ideology becomes a dominant structure, determining the character and disposition of certain ‘pseudo-real’ constituents.”<sup>22</sup> He remarks that, “ideology in the text determines the historical real and not vice versa, this ideology is itself naturally determined in the last instance by history itself.”<sup>23</sup> Ambiguities in the text, or significations, raise interpretive temptations in the readers mind; they induce the exploration of the preconscious, a mechanism of reconstructing semantics outside the narrative and in the objective logic of the content, to fill in a particular empty slot,<sup>24</sup> a kind of Althusserian ‘over determination’. This is the most appropriate historical discourse, because it pays special attention to the present and foresees revolutions to come and future historical changes. Ideological contradictions of the realities in both countries can be solved in literature through their representation; for example, the ideological conflicts and confusion within characters

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<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 9-36.

<sup>22</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Terry Eagleton & Drew Milne (eds) ( Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

like Maureen in *July's People*, Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*, or Sa'diyyah in *'Abbād al-Shams*. Jameson observes:

“The inner dynamism of such oppositions springs from their incommensurability [...] as a weighing of two incomparable phenomena: on the one hand, genuine degraded but existent inner-worldly experience, and on the other, sheer ideal, nostalgia, an imagined wholeness that is part of the existent real world insofar as it is dreamed there and projected by this particular real world.”<sup>25</sup>

Evasion from plots or leaving the novel open-ended is another pattern in women's fiction. Kristeva argues that women writers are induced by their socio-cultural marginality to produce writing that is specific to women. She claims that: “female writings even at their most optimistic, seem to be underpinned by a lack of belief in any project, goal or meaning... which gives it a content that is always psychological and often dissenting, disillusioned or apocalyptic.”<sup>26</sup> Evelyne Accad observes the Arab woman, saying: “she goes through life without ever having known a fullness of freedom and choice, mental or physical self-fulfilment, or the satisfaction of choosing and achieving her own goals.”<sup>27</sup> Western feminist critics, however, emphasise the fluidity of women's texts and the avoidance of narrative climax, a point reinforced by Woolf's notion of ‘eschewing the plots’.<sup>28</sup> This feature can be argued as constructive in women's writing because it permits us to reflect on the themes of oppression, racism and sexism in the novels. This aspect can take many forms – madness, nervous breakdown, escape, sickness or death – which the female protagonist resorts to in an attempt to escape the trauma of her unhappiness and the stress of the patriarchal world. Shoshana Felman explains this:

“ Depressed and terrified women are not about to seize the means of production and reproduction: quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-

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<sup>25</sup> Fredric Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Talking about Polylogue”, in Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) p. 302.

<sup>27</sup> E. Accad, *Veil Of Shame: The Role of Women in the Contemporary Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World* (Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1978) p. 159.

<sup>28</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) p. 85.

affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, 'mental illness' is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration."<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the psychoanalytic insight that was used to explain incidences of mental illness, such as hysteria, in women at the turn of the century stems from the perception that madness is a result of the suppression encoded in the Freudian castration complex, thereby defining a link between a woman's self and culture, language and the symbolic order. This point will be further explored through the notion of the author's 'double' present in many of Khalīfah's novels and the eruption of the unconscious through which the writer passes the return of the repressed to the reader. Gordimer, through her characters' hallucinations and flights from reality, as in the case of Maureen, and through her mobilisation of the metaphoric in her novels, delivers a similar vision. The pattern of madness is employed in the Arabic novel, such as in Ḥanān al-Shaykh's *Ḥikāyat Zahrah*, in which the heroine resorts to nervous breakdowns and compulsive self-destruction by turning her anger towards herself and aggravating her acne with her hands, or by locking herself in the bathroom. Zahrah is a victim of the civil war in Lebanon; she falls in love with a sniper and gets accidentally pregnant by him, has an abortion and is married off to someone she does not know. She is trapped in a world of her own miseries; scarring her face is expressive of a body in suppression:

"I wish to remain for ever in this bathroom despite all the knocks on the door that still throb in my ears and the voice of the stranger who has entered my life because I was once spread out on the old doctor's table as his nurse combed her hair and casually put on lipstick. Because of that I am here, in this stranger's bathroom."<sup>30</sup>

Madness is therefore an expression of women's rejection of their reality, one which involves a subservient role and place and veils them with an image of submissiveness.

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<sup>29</sup> Shoshana Felman, 'Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy.' In *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Catherine Belsey & Jane Moore (eds) (London: The Macmillan Press, 1989) p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> Ḥanān al-Shaykh, *Ḥikāyat Zahrah (The Story of Zahrah)* (London; Quarter, 1986) p. 83.

Furthermore, it is an expression of rejection of the role assigned to them by the family and the patriarchal order.

One can argue at this point that Rogers' intuition, which she claims is accompanied by a sense of danger in women's fiction, is of a piece with Woolf's idea of 'eschewing the plot'. She suggests that women writers adopt the strategy of fainting to postpone the development of conflict within the narrative, while fainting excuses the heroine from taking decisive action: "At the same time, this performance of a 'non-action' often serves to resolve conflicts within the narrative, since others are forced to act responsibly on her behalf."<sup>31</sup> This point holds only in so far as it draws attention to the issue that women writers intend to highlight for the reader as problematic. For example, events are paused to give the reader time to contemplate the consequences of an action rather than to plunge into a climax that may well over-ride the reader's natural response. The idea of the non-action in relation to the themes of racism, class and gender will be pursued in the following chapters.

### **Female Imagination**

Showalter emphasises the importance of the female imagination in defying male 'colonisation'. She explains that women are brought up to think like men; they learn, in fact, how to think like men, by being exposed from an early age to the great works of literature and science written by male writers. So a woman tends to identify with male, she argues, rather than female experience, which causes her to hate and doubt herself as a result of the hegemony of the male world. Showalter explains that "women are expected to identify with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one."<sup>32</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, in *The Female Imagination*, argues that:

"for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns. The differences between traditional

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<sup>31</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Elaine Showalter, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

female preoccupations and roles, and male ones make a difference in female writing.”<sup>33</sup>

At this juncture, one should point out that although the notion of female ‘colonisation’ is very strong, it does not follow that women approve of all that belongs to the masculine. In other words, women writers tend to link warfare, oppression, violence and aggression to the male as an innate psychological tendency. Violence and repulsive imagery are associated with male characters in both Khalīfah and Gordimer’s novels. Moreover, there is always a profound sense of resentment against war, discrimination, racism and violence. This resentment is underlined by Miriam Cooke’s identification in her introduction to *War’s Other Voices* of the war myth as a male creation:

“It is men who have traditionally created the war myth. Men called themselves generals, leaders, warriors, ideologues, and then they assigned supporting roles to women, naming their experience in such a way that they fleshed out a background tapestry against which heroes could be the more clearly distinguished.”<sup>34</sup>

Rogers points out that twentieth century women novelists, when depicting a violent scene, tend to link it to the masculine. She gives an example from Margaret Atwood’s *Bodily Harm* (1981), saying, “This scene and the majority of Rennie’s experience, is narrated from a limited third person perspective, which is a technique allowing Atwood to underline how the heroine feels disembodied from the violent activity surrounding her.”<sup>35</sup> This point brings to mind Khalīfah’s technique of depicting the war scenes as an omniscient narrator, portraying the bloody scene involving Usāmah and Zuhdī at the end of *al-Ṣabbār* from a third person perspective; moreover, she links all violence to male characters. Similarly, Gordimer’s female protagonists are in denial of the Apartheid system and the racism and violence that it fosters. This takes us back to George Henry Lewes’s perceptive comment on male and female writing in ‘The Lady Novelist’ (1852), where he asserts that:

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<sup>33</sup> P. Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1975) p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> M. Cooke, *War’s Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.21.

“The advent of female literature promises woman’s view of life, a woman’s experience: in other words, a new element. Make what distinctions you please in the social world, it still remains true that men and women have different organizations, consequently different experiences...but hitherto...the literature of women has fallen short of its functions owing to a very natural and very explicable weakness — it has been too much a literature of imitation. To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform.”<sup>36</sup>

The women writer’s contribution to the ‘war genre’ is remarkable and many great war novels have been written by women, such as Iris Murdoch’s *The Red and the Green* (1956) and, in the Arab world, Ḥanān al-Shaykh’s *Ḥikāyat Zahrah (The Story of Zahrah, 1980)* and Ghadah al-Sammān *Kawābīs Bayrūt (Beirut Nightmares, 1976)*. Both Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer document their female protagonists’ emotional and human response to war. The conventional view was that a woman’s experience was too limited for her to engage with ‘big themes’. As Rosalind Miles argues in *The Female Form*, “women did not handle the big themes of war, politics, madness and crime, the argument ran; they concentrated instead on the literary equivalent of flower arranging or petit point.”<sup>37</sup> It is perhaps historically true that women did not go to war fronts. Nevertheless, this does not justify the notion that they cannot write about war, since war penetrates into the home and women lose a loved one or have to nurse the wounded and reconcile the families of the dead.

## The Chronotope

The struggle genre requires a novelistic structure that reveals the historicity of a period. Both novelists cover specific historical moments in their particular countries. These periods are chaotic, contradictory and poignant. In *July’s People* Gordimer uses Gramsci’s words: “The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”<sup>38</sup> This statement sums up the situation in

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Rosalind Miles, *The Female Form. Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From The Prison Notebooks Of Antonio Gramsci*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds) (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) p. 276.

both countries, and I have used this term analogously with what is taking place in Palestine. The fluctuation between hope and despair in Palestine is an example of this Gramscian maxim, as the stalemate continues despite the ‘morbid symptoms’ of genocide, bombings and danger. This narrative requires a structure of discourse embedded in binary oppositions, drawing attention to the binaries of old / new world, backward / advanced, white / black, and Israeli / Palestinian, through which new hierarchies of race and gender are born. In Khalīfah’s work, however, binary opposition is employed to foreground political and gender issues or woman / homeland. Faiṣal Darrāj observes that:

“The binary opposition of woman/ homeland in Khalīfah’s novel is prominent, it observes liberation of homeland as congruent to the liberation of man who should acknowledge the unconditional individuality of woman. Woman therefore, in most of her novels is a metaphor of a paralysed country in struggle, because it is crippled with its own ties.”<sup>39</sup>

In Gordimer’s novels, this binary opposition revolves around race and class. Her protagonists are in a constant state of confusion concerning their ‘place’, and the binary opposition of black versus white is a psychological construct within them. It emphasises white identity as ‘self’ against the ‘other’. Val Plumwood builds on this concept of ‘self’ and ‘other’ by using the theme of ‘master’ and ‘slave’. He identifies certain aspects of dualism such as the denial of the existence of the ‘other’, the rejection of any similarities between ‘self’ and ‘other’, and the magnification of the differences. The mechanism of binary opposition involves “west/orient, male/female, white/black, modern/traditional, west/east, active/passive, civilised/primitive, secular/religious, universal/local, culture/nature, intellect/instinct.”<sup>40</sup> This concept is formative in the works of both writers, as it splits the narrative world into two oppositional camps. This dialectic is partially deconstructive in the case of Gordimer, because it suggests a hierarchy of race, despite her liberalism, which prevails in her flexibility in imagining the reversal of roles in *July’s people*, as I will explore below.

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<sup>39</sup> Faiṣal Darrāj in the introduction to S. Khalīfah’s novel, *Ṣūrah wa Ayyūnah wa ‘Ahdyn Qadīm* (my translation) (Beirut: Dār al-Adāb, 2002) p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women’s Diversity In A Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 44-5.

Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque in relation to the chronotope is internalised in the following chapters to decode the changing institutional, political and social hierarchies in the contexts of both countries. This Bakhtinian model, which is highly dialogised, allows us to observe the different conflicting ideologies revolving in the narrative, as it examines the truthfulness of an ideology or a political system like that of the Apartheid in South Africa or the *intifāḍah* in Palestine. It forms another internal dialogue that probes themes and ideologies that govern the interrelationship and cross-cultural ideologies in the novelistic world:

“Rabelais' task is to purge the spatial and temporal world of those remnants of a transcendent world view still present in it, to clean away symbolic and hierarchal interpretations still clinging to this vertical world, to purge it of 'antiphysis' that had infected it [...] to provide a new chronotope for a new, whole and harmonious man, and for new forms of human communication.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope fleshes out reality in the text, giving it another dimension of place, time and human experience, thus serving as another discourse in the novel. This dialogised language examines themes and ideologies that the writer wishes to highlight, like the issue of sexism in Palestine in *'Abbād al-Shams*. Here, the writer sets the protagonist in the 'road' chronotope, a fruitful critical category for feminist theory, and a significant one too, as it is symbolic of a life journey. Vice observes the importance of the female 'road' chronotope in shedding the dull and passive old image of domesticity:

“A chronotope of the feminine would take account of gender as a third element of the fleshing-out process: not only would time become spatial, and space historicized, but the emptiness of these terms would be filled with an account of how different open space, and domestic spaces, are for women and men.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>42</sup>Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 218.

## The Intersection of Gender and Language

Freudian psychoanalysis is at the heart of French feminist criticism, whereas the American feminists in the 1960s denounced it. The French feminist believed that it would assist in the exploration of the unconscious of the oppressed women in the patriarchal society.<sup>43</sup> Gordimer dwells on both the conscious and unconscious of her protagonists, forming another embedded discourse based on the interpretation of sexuality and sensuality. Freudianism therefore has a constructive role in the examination of the unconscious through discourse in Gordimer's writing, which is highly symbolic and figurative in its representation of political and social life. It is a point which also sheds light on Rosa's subjectivity in relation to her father, based as it is on a playing out of the Freudian theory of the Oedipal complex.

Simone De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, explores this further in relation to the existential conflicts of women, linking it with narcissism, which she defines as rooted in the ego's search for satisfaction for the 'other'. If not met, the subject is lost and becomes hostage to a narcissistic search for satisfaction within the self. She states, "All love requires the duality of a subject and an object. Woman is led into narcissism along two converging roads. As subject she feels frustrated; when very young she lacks that alter ego [...] later on, her aggressive sexuality remains unsatisfied."<sup>44</sup> Her theory can be applied to Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* and her constant search for the 'other'. This point is underpinned by Kristeva, who suggests that narcissism coexists with the child's need for the loving father, the emptiness she / he tries to fill with the imaginary father. This hypothesis allows the child to imagine the mother as desiring an 'other' and not 'I', and this space therefore is filled with the symbolic. In *Tales of Love* Kristeva explains that "it is for want of paternal love that Narcissi, burdened with emptiness, are suffering; eager to be others, or women, they want to be loved."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Toril Moi, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> Simon De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 'The Narcissist'. Translated and edited by H. M. Parshley. (London: Picador, 1988) p. 641.

<sup>45</sup> Oliver, Kelly. "Kristeva's Imaginary Father And the Crisis In The Paternal Function." *Diacritics* (Summer-Fall 1991): 55.

It is crucial at this point to question the female subjectivity to the male or 'other' in women's texts, a point which is reduced to childhood. Louis Althusser explains that the sexed child in the Oedipal phase examines the imaginary fantasies against the symbolic, and he defines him/herself accordingly. The child in the pre-Oedipal phase finds that "the language is formed around the signifier of the phallus: the emblem of the father, the emblem of right, of the Law."<sup>46</sup> This results in the boy becoming aggressive and powerful as a man, in an attempt to imitate the father, and the girl becoming like the mother, silent and subjective to the 'other'. This is the order that women want to question with their special outlook and discourse. This particular concept is of great concern to many female critics, like Jane Miller, who, in *Women Writing about Men*, argues that women should invade the literary world with their discourses.<sup>47</sup> Virginia Woolf remarks that, "Women's inheritance, what they are given, is the difference of view, the difference of standards."<sup>48</sup> This feminist concept is strongly adopted by Khalifah, who criticises her sexist society and the patriarchal authority in most of her novels. Her representations of women in Palestine reveal their burden of double oppression. She attempts to undermine the issue of women's honour in relation to man's dignity, calling for equality and a collective sense of national freedom. This point is evident in her choice of morally transgressive characters who challenge the gender-power relationship in patriarchal society. Khalifah's courage in giving these characters primacy over other submissive characters in the novels underpins her feminist tendency which does not follow the ready discourses of the male.

Feminist critics in general warn against the misogynistic theoretical structures which profit from subverting the feminine. Cixous suggests that, by writing her self in the discourse of *l'écriture féminine*, woman will retrieve her body from age-old patriarchy and will also contribute to a discernible future language that will be free from the Phallic authoritative order. This is significant, as it highlights the importance of a

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<sup>46</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin And Philosophy, and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971) pp. 212-4. Althusser explains that the 'castration' phase follows when the boy discovers that he has no right to the mother, and similarly the little girl assumes that she does not have the same right (phallus). In their transition from the imaginary phase, they try to absorb the structure of that order which is symbolised by the phallus.

<sup>47</sup> Jane Miller, *Women Writing About Men: Women's Men* (London: Virago Press, 1986) pp.259-60.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Culler, "Reading as Woman", in Mary Eagleton (ed.) *Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 307.

woman's discourse that incorporates sexual, as well as textual, politics – central to the novels in this study. Khalīfah, for example, often attempts to deconstruct certain homosocial rules through her female characters as well as choosing a mad double to vent her modernist ideologies. Likewise, Gordimer uses the same technique when, for example, she alienates her white protagonists in South Africa and imposes on them a certain reflective characteristic, in denial of their reality. This can be further investigated through Kristeva's argument that while there is no specific mode that can be defined as female writing, women writers do make use of certain signifiers and metaphors in language to express their desires. Gordimer, for example, uses metaphor to elucidate the impasse of the white ruling system in South Africa: that of the 'spayed kittens,' or 'the white pariah dogs' in reference to the whites' false existence there. Kristeva states:

“If it is true that the unconscious ignores negation and time, and is woven instead from displacement and condensation (hinted at by the metaphors of ‘language’ or ‘matheme’), I should say that writing ignores sex or gender and displaces its differences in the discreet working of language and signification (which are necessarily ideological and historical).”<sup>49</sup>

Signification and creative works, as Accad puts it, “give the ‘total’ picture because they not only include fields of activity – social, political, anthropological, religious and cultural – but they also allow us to enter into the imaginary and unconscious world of the author. In expressing his or her own individual vision, an author also suggests links to the collective imaginary.”<sup>50</sup>

Ellen Moers, in *Literary Women*, argues that women tend to use particular images and metaphors which are associated with their social and historical position as women writers or as female characters.<sup>51</sup> The signs' production and deciphering breaks up the connection between literature and social concord, signifying at the same time a deeper message indicative of instinctual drives and its social vision, introducing 'an interplay within the structure of meaning as well as a questioning process of subject and

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<sup>49</sup> Shirley Ardner (ed.), *Defining Females, The Nature of Women in Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> E. Accad, *Sexuality And War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: University Press, 1990) p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ellen Moers “Literary Women” in Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 293.

history.’<sup>52</sup> Anita Loomba underlines this point: “Language and ‘signs’ are the sites where different ideologies intersect and clash with one another, then literary texts, being complex clusters of languages and signs, can be identified as extremely fecund sites for such ideological interactions. Moreover, they also show the complex articulation between a single individual, social contexts and the play of language.”<sup>53</sup>

This is a valid point in Arabic literature, as, for example, in Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt’s novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, the protagonist Laylā begins her ordeal when she starts her first menstruation. The writer depicts the distress of the father and his fierce reaction which is one of oppression and patriarchy, while Laylā is prohibited from going out without a family member and is consequently married off without her prior knowledge. Menstruation in this context is a metaphor of shame; it signifies a whole set of values and social rules. Cixous suggests that women writers make use of metaphors to draw an analogy between the female body and the political situation; for example, when a black woman is mentioned she brings with her many geographical, racial and historical connotations.<sup>54</sup> This is a reality which cannot be sidestepped; it exists along with an accumulation of social, historical and political constraints. For example, the images of women in Palestine are of a piece with the political and social dilemmas of the region. Likewise, the alienation of Gordimer’s white female protagonists is a metaphor for the whites’ false existence in South Africa, while the subjugated woman is a metaphor of the subjugated land in Arabic literature – Zahrah, for instance, in Ḥanān al-Shaykh’s *Ḥikāyat Zahrah*.

Annette Kolodny observes that biology and culture are central to the discussion of women’s writing: society has its accepted rules which define its discursive structure and the parameters of the spoken and the unspoken. She states:

“Whatever the biological potentials, then, they are always mediated by and given expression through cultural overlay, with the two (biology and culture) acting as mutually interdependent systems, each affecting the other. Moreover, as every society and social group has its commonly accepted rules of discourse - rules which

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<sup>52</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 137.

<sup>53</sup> Anita Loomba, *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Hélène Cixous, *New French Feminisms*, p. 251.

frequently vary for men and women – these, too, will influence the parameters of what may or may not be spoken or revealed.”<sup>55</sup>

This hypothesis holds with regard to the Arabic world, a region of conventions and customs, and origin of the Islamic religion and its strict codes. These factors interact powerfully and authoritatively, particularly in relation to women, who tend to be brought up in a strictly patriarchal environment. It is this which provides the catalyst for the resort to metaphorical language and imagery. Faṭimah Mernissi, in her book *Beyond the Veil*, describes the plight of women in Morocco, which sums up the situation of women in the Arab world:

“What was and still is an issue in Morocco is not an ideology of female inferiority, but rather a set of laws and customs which ensure that women’s status is one of subjugation. Prime among these is the family laws based on male authority. Although many institutions were withdrawn from the control of religious law (business contracts for example), the family never was ...the sexual *ummah* is based on sexual segregation and the subordination of one sex to the other. Women, women members of the domestic universe, are subject to the authority of men, members of the Ummah universe. Separation and subordination are embodied in institutions which enforce non-communication and non-interaction between the members of each universe.”<sup>56</sup>

This point echoes Woolf’s observation of the figurative ‘ghosts’ in her book *The Pargiters*: “Now men are shocked if a woman says what she feels... yet literature which is always pulling blinds is not literature. All that ought to be expressed [...] a process of incredible difficulty and danger. [...] Women’s literature is still haunted by the ghosts of repressed language, and until we have exorcised those ghosts, it ought not to be in language that we base our theory of difference.”<sup>57</sup> The ‘ghosts’ to whom Woolf refers represent the fear of expressing the self, imposed by masculine society, which limits a woman’s talent and imagination. They vary in degree between East and

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<sup>55</sup> Annette Kolodny, “Some Notes on Defining a Feminist Literary Criticism”, *Critical Inquiry* 2:1 (Autumn, 1975) p.77.

<sup>56</sup> F. Mernissi, *op. cit.*, p.82.

<sup>57</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Speech, Manuscript Notes”, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of the Years 1882-1941*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (New York: New York Public Library, 1977) p.164.

West, leaving a 'mark' accordingly on the language woman adopts. This idea holds true, with some variation, across categories – East and West, male and female.

However, another liberal and feminist writer, Ghādah al-Sammān, comments on the absence of free speech and writing in the Arab world, condemning old and backward social values, as does some of the feminist rhetoric of Khalīfah's characters:

“The Arab woman suffers from economic, intellectual and sexual deprivation. But who can say that the Arab man is free? Tradition is as insurmountable an obstacle to his emancipation of mind and spirit as it is to women. If we are to achieve anything worthwhile in the present posture of affairs, it must be at the expense of tradition. It is impossible for any woman or man to be free in a society which does not theoretically value the idea of liberty.”<sup>58</sup>

This thesis therefore will attempt to explore the relationship between a woman's stifled and silenced existence in society, and the writer's expression of it through the politicised female's body.

### **Subjectivity and the New Images of Women**

The 'images' created by women writers can be analysed on three levels: first, her representation of modern women; second, the male literary images of women in general and her attempt to rectify it; third, her representation of modern man. Rogers argues that there is a pattern of development experienced by female protagonists in contemporary women's fiction whereby they are depicted as independent individuals who seek to fulfil their dual needs for selfhood and relationships. The heroine undergoes an inner conflict between her desire to be united with her lover on the one hand, and to be free and independent on the other. Rogers observes:

“This heroine commonly discovers not only that she loves, much as Psyche does when she brings light to the figure of Eros,<sup>59</sup> but also

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<sup>58</sup> E. McKee, “The Political Agendas and Textual Strategies of Levantine Women Writers”, in Mai Yamānī (ed.), *Feminism and Islam: Legal and literary perspectives* (London: Garnet Publishing Limited, 1996) p.124.

<sup>59</sup>The ancient tale of Eros and Psyche is cited here by Rogers because Psyche, the central figure in this tale, first abandons love and sensual pleasure in an act of self-assertion. She then seeks a reunion with her lover in a series of acts that also lead her to develop strength and self-sufficiency. During this process she grows more conscious of her motives, guided most of the time

that conscious pursuit of freedom frustrates her deeper desire to form relationship[s]. Awakening to what she really wants, she discovers her authentic goal is not wholly new since it has always been within her awaiting conscious recognition.”<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the romantic closure in modern female novels ends with the heroine’s intentional pursuit of independence and her recognition of selfhood, which ultimately leads to her existence as an individual, but nevertheless still in need of a relationship and love.

Women have stereotypically been depicted in nineteenth century and contemporary fiction as passive, helpless or shallow. In *The Madwoman In The Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar comment, “it is just because women are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power (like Cyphers) that they become numinous to male artists. For in the metaphysical emptiness their purity signifies they are, of course, *self-less*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests.”<sup>61</sup> Women have been imprisoned by these ‘unreal’ images produced by patriarchal institutions. Cixous argues that male images of women either obscure them or reproduce the classic stereotype of them as sensitive, intuitive, dreamy and helpless.<sup>62</sup> Gilbert and Gubar present the dominant patriarchal literary images of the nineteenth century as either “eternally feminine,” of angelic “beauty and sweetness,” a “selfless, passive and docile creature,” or an active monster.<sup>63</sup> Such images occur in early Arabic male novels, in the writings of Muḥammad Ḥussain Haykel, for example. In *Zainab* (1912) the female protagonist Zainab, a farm worker, falls in love with Ibrāhīm but is married to Ḥasan in an arranged marriage; she finally dies of consumption after Ibrāhīm is sent away for military service. She is portrayed as a beautiful but passive creature who cannot make her own decisions. On the day Ḥasan proposes to her, she is depicted as a passive person who has no control over her life:

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by her intuition. In reaching her goals, she develops both selfhood and is reunited with her lover.

<sup>60</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.57.

<sup>61</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> Cixous, *New French Feminisms*, p. 245.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, cited in Toril Moi, *op. cit.*, pp.57-8.

“Zainab was nearly out of her mind, thinking about Ibrāhīm whom she had been with so recently. What would become of her now? Would the events of this night really put an end to her happiness and bring instead the never ending misery that she had been dreading? Did all those present, without one of them realizing their crime, really wish to seal her fate and fill the rest of her days with pain and suffering?”<sup>64</sup>

Women writers like Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt highlight the hypocrisy of society and the old conventions that grant women a silent and submissive role. The heroine of *al-Shaykhūkhah*, for example, spends her days trying to cover up her unhappiness and failure in marriage. Bouthainah Sha‘bān states that women “spend the best part of their lives trying to live up to the social image created and glorified of them as faithful lovers, caring wives and loving selfless mothers, forgetting completely about the self.”<sup>65</sup> These images will set the parameters for the consideration of the female protagonists of the novels under discussion in the following chapters.

Both writers attempt to give a voice to the repressed female character by highlighting her perpetual attempt to construct an individuality and subjectivity of her own. They have a tendency to abandon feminist discursive strategies which focus on the subordination of the female to the male other. This thesis calls into question the way the woman is presented through the prism of political, gender and social issues in both countries, particularly in the case of Palestine and Khalīfah, whose writing manifests a quest to transcend patriarchal definitions of femininity while also touching on other collective issues such as women’s role as effective citizens and part of the nation.

However, the most prominent feature of the heroine’s character in modern women’s fiction is her realisation that although the masculine is honoured in the patriarchal culture, he remains vulnerable, weak and imperfect. This is demonstrated abundantly in Khalīfah’s representation of male characters like ‘Adil as ‘defeated’ and ‘oppressed’. In addition, the heroine finds sufficiency within herself; although she belongs to the supposedly subservient culture, she is strong and competent. The

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<sup>64</sup> M. Haikal, *Zainab*, trans. J. Grinstead (London: Darf Publishers, 1989) pp. 81-2.

<sup>65</sup> Bouthainah Sha‘bān, “Arab Woman Literature”, in *Arab Affairs*, Vol. 9 (London: League of Arab States, 1989) p. 114.

heroine no longer worships the hero. On the contrary, she learns to value herself as well as the other, by exercising the power of reason. Rogers states:

“This heroine is depicted as ascending. In contrast, the hero — initially adored not only because of patriarchal conditioning but also because of feminine infatuation — is ‘reduced’ in the sense that he is no longer worshipped but loved, humanised rather than all powerful and godlike.”<sup>66</sup>

Rogers also mentions that this idea is exaggerated in some novels, in which the heroine is represented in a way which may be a wish-fulfilment fantasy of female power and not conform to reality: women are represented as close to perfection and men as weak, imperfect and sinful creatures. However, the modern heroine represents real women, she argues, who are not compelled to find sufficiency in love alone, but aspire to fulfil their ambitions by pursuing a profession, achieving a balance between selfhood and relationships, work and love. The romantic reunion is not a principle in the modern female novel and marriage is not pictured as a ‘happy ending’ for the heroine; she is well aware that there is a life to be had, a self to be satisfied and a destiny to be chosen. The issue of selfhood and individuality is further emphasised through the presentation of marriage as ending in separation, or in the death of either the lover or husband, with the heroine facing life alone. Rogers’ pattern focuses on the “heroine’s growth from unconsciousness toward consciousness. Refusing to remain in a state of unconsciousness, the heroine begins the dual process of exploring her individuality and of valuing otherness.”<sup>67</sup>

In modern English literature, however, the heroine tends to choose spiritual development over angelic beauty, and she is therefore in control of her destiny and her passions. She no longer needs the masculine to be competent and complete, but finds competence within herself in being independent and free.<sup>68</sup> This particular point marks the difference in the women’s literary tradition, varying as it does between East and

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<sup>66</sup> J. M. Rogers, p.66.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>68</sup> Such images can be found in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), in which the heroine, Lucy, experiences tremendous self development and personal growth even though she is haunted by a constant need to love Paul, who she may never marry; their moment of union is very brief and she accepts the suffering of this unfulfilled love. There is a constant struggle on the part of the heroine to come to terms with reality, rather than romance. However the essence of *Villette* lies in Lucy’s developing her own personality and strength. Moreover it suggests that while a correlation between moral goodness and worldly happiness may exist for some people, for the majority it may not.

West through the overlap of the different phases of *feminine*, *feminist* and *female* present in Khalifah and Gordimer.

### **The Mother-Daughter Relationship and Sisterhood**

Showalter refers to this relationship as 'matrophobia,' or the fear of becoming one's mother. She believes that hating the mother is a metaphor for self-hatred:

"Hating one's mother was the feminist enlightenment of the fifties and sixties; but it is only a metaphor for hating oneself...as the death of the father has always been an archetypal rite of passage for the Western hero, now the death of the mother as witnessed and transcended by the daughter has become one of the most profound occasions of female literature."<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, the death of the heroine's mother is a typical motif in twentieth-century fiction, which aims to develop the heroine's personality, strength and identity. Judith Gardiner, in her essay, "The Heroine as her Author's Daughter", asserts that, "The nineteenth-century fictional mother often died in childbirth to insure her child an unencumbered ascent as a self-made person. The twentieth-century heroine's mother also dies — in the birth of the heroine's identity."<sup>70</sup> Rogers, in *Aspects of the Female Novel*, explains that the mother-daughter bond is intentionally cut off in the twentieth-century novel to give the daughter, or the female, a better chance to develop a sense of identity and individuality. Nevertheless, she points out:

"Even though early novels typically feature a heroine who is freed at birth from the mother-daughter bond, this heroine nonetheless acts on an impulse to define herself relationally, which is evident in her initial perception of her self as either dependent on or possessive of the father. It is by encountering a variety of masculine figures that she ultimately separates herself from the role of daughter or mother to evolve a sense of her self as an individual who is able to love another."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Poetics", in *The New Feminist Criticism*, p. 135.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference* (ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982) pp. 244-53.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

This applies to some extent to Arabic fiction, such as in Khalīfah's novel *'Abbād al-Shams*, in which Raffif, a modern character with liberal ideas, keeps comparing and rejecting old conventions modelled on the figure of the mother to the new norms of life, echoing Woolf's famous statement, "we think back through our mothers if we are women."<sup>72</sup> In such cases, the woman writer has recourse to inner monologues, diaries and memoirs to express the heroine's emotional and intellectual ambivalence towards the mother, the representative of patriarchy.

Irigaray claims that the mother-daughter relationship is a danger zone in society and that to think about it or change it would threaten the patriarchal order. She encourages the assigning of a new identity to the mother-daughter relationship in the symbolic order that is different from the maternal function. She says that:

"The culture, the language, the imaginary and the mythology in which we live at present...let us look at what foundations this edifice is built on...this underpinning of woman as reproducer of the social order, acting as the infrastructure of that order; all of western culture rests upon the murder of the mother. [...] And if we make the foundation of this social order shift, then everything shifts."<sup>73</sup>

She argues that the projections made onto the mother must be transformed from being mere reproducer of children to a decision maker in society. She suggests establishing woman-to-woman relationship to replace the old (omnipotent) maternal role that stifles the mother-daughter relationship. She also thinks that this relationship can be liberated from the patriarchal roles that deny mothers the right to desire, arguing that women are "imprisoned in the reality of need? And asks where is desire?"<sup>74</sup> This 'murder of the mother,' which Rogers also suggests is common in twentieth century female novels, can be recouped as Oedipal in girls, whereby they are impelled to hate the mother and substitute for her the father or the 'other', which Rogers defines as the 'masculine energy'. It can also be linked to the idea of 'lack', to which the girl awakens in the mother, causing her to turn from the mother to the father or the 'other'.

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<sup>72</sup> Virginia Woolf. *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>73</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Philosophy of the Feminine*, (ed.) M. Whitford (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> Luce Irigaray, "Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order", in *The Irigaray Reader*. (ed.) Margaret Whitford. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991) pp. 50-2.

Nevertheless, it is important to question the applicability of Western feminist discussions on the Palestinian reality. Mohanty expresses the same doubts in relation to the family in South Africa: “Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of ‘third world feminisms’ must address itself to two [...] projects: the internal critique of hegemonic ‘western’ feminisms, and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. The first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second, one of building and constructing.”<sup>75</sup> Chodorow, however, sees the Western feminist perception of mother-daughter relationship as valid, arguing the “reproduction of mothering as a central and constituting element in the social organization and reproduction of gender.”<sup>76</sup> This point is underpinned by Mohanty, who observes that Third World feminism conceives a familial role for the mother as “a producer of men... and a mother of the nation.”<sup>77</sup> Darrāj argues that woman is defined in relation to the patriarchal authority, which names the woman as the ‘sister of men’ or the ‘mother of a martyr’, denying her individuality in the absence of a man.<sup>78</sup> These observations, based as they are on cultural and biological difference, restrict women to certain social roles.

At this point, it is pertinent to compare the status of mothers in the two countries. In South Africa, the colonial mother is a strong figure in the family. Sakamoto states:

“Gordimer’s work focuses on maternal rather than paternal authority and that authority represents the patriarchal values of the authoritarian state. Colonial mothers internalise patriarchal values because they are nurturers and the ones who reproduce the values and perpetuate the continuity of the family.”<sup>79</sup>

This point, which highlights the particularity of the family during the Apartheid system, will be incorporated in this thesis and analysed in conjunction with postcolonial feminism, as well as the Jungian theory of the ‘shadow’, which explains some of Khalīfah’s characters and especially the false connection to the patriarch and

<sup>75</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. In *Power, Representation, and Feminist Critique*. Chandra Mohanty, A. Rosso and L. Torres (eds.) (Usa: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp. 51-2.

<sup>76</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*. (London: University of California Press, 1999) p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> Ania Loomba, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>78</sup> Faisal Darrāj. *Bou’s al-Thaqāfah fi al-Mu’assasah al-Filisṭīniyyah*. (Beirut: Dār al-Adāb, 1996) p. 185.

<sup>79</sup> Sakamoto Toshiko, *The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Gordimer’s fiction: Context and Issues*, PhD. d.ess (London University, 2001) p. 17.

the bourgeoisie. The mothers' status, however, is problematic in the Third World. In Palestine, for example, the mother is at times a doubly oppressed figure who is weak and obedient to the patriarch of the family, resulting in the daughter's rejection of her as a mere preserver of patriarchal culture. Chodorow, in the *Reproduction of Mothering*, sums up the Third World mother-daughter relationship: "In the process of separation, boys learned individuality and self-sufficiency, but also contempt for women [...] Girls remained more connected to their primary care object, another woman, but also learned self-denigration, because being a woman is devalued in patriarchal society."<sup>80</sup> Thus, authority is given to the male rather than the female, who assumes a position of inferiority. This mirrors the situation represented by Khalifah in her fiction, highlighting issues of power and gender in Palestine.

Related to this is the concept of sisterhood, which is a contradictory and premature feminist notion. Showalter reduces the notion of sisterhood to the secretive physical experience of women, their familial roles as daughters, mothers and sisters, and their belonging to the subculture,<sup>81</sup> thus emphasising her marginality and her alienation from the dominant culture. Other feminist critics see the collective identity of women as built on pain and struggle. This is reinforced by Anja Meulenbelt, who emphasises that women's collective identity arises (as does men's) from collective oppression and shared experience. As well as the truth of experience, the unity of women comes from the intergenerational solidarity through which knowledge is transmitted unmediated from mother to daughter.<sup>82</sup>

This is true of Palestine, where people in general share the collective desire of freeing their country; misery, struggle and oppression bring people together. Women developed a stronger bond during the *intifāḍah*, nursing the wounded and befriending the families of the dead *fidā'iyyīn*. This specific feminist concept of 'sisterhood' is shattered in South Africa because of race, sex and class differences. There, the white woman is looked upon as a settler who collaborates with the oppressors, and therefore the feeling of collective identity or sisterhood is lost. Robin Visel claims that the white woman is half-colonised:

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in *Re-Orienting Western Feminism*, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory*, pp. 15-7.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in *Feminist Literary Theory*, pp. 247-8.

“The white woman is not allowed to claim innocence; nevertheless, she is increasingly prevented by the social and political conditions of apartheid from acting upon her responsibility. Furthermore, she is increasingly cut off from blackness, both by government decree and the rising hostility of her black brothers and sisters...the ambiguous, self-divided figure of the white girl or woman is the site of the hesitant, fraught rapprochement of white and black. She is the site of the connection, while she is made to realise the impossibility of connection.”<sup>83</sup>

However, postcolonial feminism claims that black women share a collective feeling of sisterhood that does not exist between black and white women. This point is reinforced by Maria Lugones, who argues that “‘sisterhood’ [is] an inappropriate metaphor to link white women and women of colour [...] Thus, the term ‘sisterhood’ demands an equality and intimacy that do not necessarily exist between women of other cultures or between them and other women.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Women’s Novels & National Consciousness**

“Nationalism asked of women a participation that they were quick to give, they fought and were caught in the trap. For nationalism is frequently conservative, even though it appears to be an inevitable moment of political liberation and economic progress which women need to advance along the path to their own liberation ... what does it mean for women to be active in political organizations? The example of Algerian women is there to remind all women that participation does not win them rights. From the point of view of those women contributors who have grown up after a war of liberation, everything is still to be done.”

Monique Gadant<sup>85</sup>

Women in the Arab world, especially Palestine, have been confronted with the dual challenge of colonialism and inequality. They are obliged to express themselves, since silence means surrender to the occupier and submission to patriarchy. The political struggle has provided the appropriate context in which to debate women’s need for emancipation and liberation. Palestinian women believe that social and political

<sup>83</sup> Robin Visel, ‘A Half-Colonisation: The Problem of the White Colonial Woman Writer’, *Kunapipi*, 10 (1988) p. 39.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in *Re-Orienting Western Feminism*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>85</sup> Monique Gadant (ed.), *Women of the Mediterranean*. trans. A.M. Berrett (London: Zed, 1986) p. 2.

revolutions were inseparable. Mai Sayeh stresses that women are asking for their liberation as a way of “a revolutionary transformation of society [...] we are living at a time of revolutionary struggle and we are determined to assert the need for the presence of women.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, women have asserted their personality through commitment to the cause and by being politically active in the various political parties. Palestinian women writers have taken on the task of representing new images of women; they have expressed their needs and their own specific outlook because they have become dissatisfied with the traditional role of women represented by male writers. Cooke comments:

“Palestinian women like Sahar Khalifah are determined not to vanish, not to become the object of a masculine metanarrative because they already know that if they do why then it will be, as always, as heroines, martyrs, or some other idealized category that will erase what they have done by turning them into national symbols. She is saying ‘I’ as a woman and refusing to get lost in male institutions, federations, churches, parties, and states.”<sup>87</sup>

Khalifah is a strong advocate of women’s rights. In 1988 with Giacaman she established a feminist association and socio-political institution called ‘Women’s Affairs’ to defend women’s political roles during the *intifāḍah*. Palestinian activists believed that women’s emancipation and empowerment could only be achieved within the context of a socialist society. This point of view explains the didactic Marxist discourse adopted by Khalifah in her novels.

On the other hand, Gordimer expresses a female perspective on the injustices inflicted on the natives of South Africa. Caught between being a white colonial and writing about colonialism and Apartheid, she represents her socio-political reality in order to show the flaws and falseness of Apartheid. Despite the social and political limitations of her colonial position, she draws the reader’s attention to the contradictions of the system. Her writings depict a highly tangible reality, expressing the ‘political unconscious’ which foretells the end of Apartheid. Therefore, the liberal female protagonist’s political and moral growth in the midst of this contradictory system is

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<sup>86</sup> Mai Sayeh, ‘Choosing the Revolution.’ In *Women of the Mediterranean*, p. 88.

<sup>87</sup> Miriam Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

the predominant theme in her fiction. The recurrence of plots which involve a conflict between the heroine and her reality is central to Gordimer's novels. They provide a cultural nationalist context, and a resistance to Apartheid. Her colonial literature provides the reader with a European experience of Africa through the exploration of the liberal consciousness which is trapped between its humanistic values and the antagonistic Manicheanism of Apartheid. Lewis Nkosi comments that "history itself is the hero."<sup>88</sup> Clingman observes Gordimer's realism and her acute observations of her social environment — her detailed account of racialism and historical events thus provide 'history from the inside.'<sup>89</sup>

Gordimer identifies her realism with the Lukacsian critical realism, she observes:

"He contrasts with these two systems of artistic dogmatism the trend of critical realism—work in which the social changes that characterize our era most truly reflected, character is not sacrificed to artistic pattern, the human condition is understood dynamically, in a historical context, and the pathological aspects of modern life are placed in a critical perspective. George Lukacs sees the critical realist as the true heir [...] and critical realism as not only the link with the great literature of the past, but also the literature that points to the future."<sup>90</sup>

## **The Writers & Their Backgrounds**

This introduction aims to provide a framework for reading Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer. My reading of both writers in relation to the various feminist theories has given me a better understanding of the difference between the two writers and their literary artistry. The maturity of Gordimer's writing and the experimental approach of Khalīfah define them in relation to Showalter's three phases. The overlap between the two writers is an example of the literary traditions to which they belong, European and Arabic respectively. The Arabic novel form, and women's authorship thereof, started only in mid-nineteenth century Egypt, while the female emancipation movement started at the end of that era. The emancipation movement of which Khalīfah is a

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<sup>88</sup> Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (London and Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1986). p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Nadine Gordimer, "Themes and Attitudes in Modern African Writing." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 9.4 (Autumn 1970) p. 229.

strong advocate in Palestine also started around that period. In fact, this explains the artistic forms and strategies that she adopts, and the feminist literary techniques that counter the authority of patriarchal order, as well as her deployment of a didactic discourse that reveals her influence by Marxism as a solution to the Palestinians' tragic reality.

This reading explores the implications residing within their works and their outlooks on the issues of women's equality and human, political and social justice. Khalīfah's work, particularly, provides an intricate documentation of the situation of women in her country; the overlap in all aspects of life is realistic and comprehensible. Their works also resonate on a political level; for example, Gordimer's relationship to the Liberal party is questioned in *Burger's Daughter* in relation to the Black Liberation Movement. This political context in Gordimer's work is quite dense but nevertheless engaging at the same time. Similarly, the political and social context in Khalīfah's work is informative of the situation in the West Bank: it gives voice to the oppressions inflicted on people there as well as portraying their unity around the monolithic ideology of the *intifāḍah*.

How do both writers contribute to the political issues in their countries? This was a question that guided me to bridge the gap between them and see their differences as contributing to a whole body of ideology that comprises settlers and natives. The contradictions and ambiguities that arise from this point are explored through the context of the novels. In addition, reading the novels as ideological discourses helped me to see the similarity between colonialism and occupation – Apartheid and Zionism as two sides of one coin – based as they are on the ideology of difference, racism and inequality.

How do these writers contribute to history? How does their literature reflect nationalism? These questions arose out of my interpretations to Gordimer's work during and after Apartheid. Her vision of the future of South Africa as ruled by its people was informative, as it gave me an understanding of Khalīfah's work as also

foreseeing the end of occupation. Each and every novel depicts a period of change marking a stage of history that foresees the near future. Both writers attempt to question their realities with a discernible dialectic form. Gordimer, being a coloniser, adopts the theme of interrogation to particularly solve the alienation of the white woman in South Africa, whereas Khalīfah tends to use the dialectic of multiple voices to express the distress of a nation. This further highlights their political and ideological stances in reality.

### **Saḥar Khalīfah**

Saḥar Khalīfah was born in the town of Nablus in Palestine in 1941 to a large but conservative family. She was one of nine children, of whom eight were girls. Two of her sisters died when they were children, and she can still recall the resonance of their deaths which brought more relief than sorrow to her family, as girls were more of a burden than a joy. Khalīfah went to public schools and later to a convent school which gave her a spiritual and poetic outlook on life. The Palestinian artist, Isma‘īl Shamṭo, taught her a lot about his own experience of life and art when she was young, while also embracing her artistic talent and encouraging her. She was married at an early age to someone who was both psychologically and emotionally distant from her, and whose gambling problem made life with him impossible. Having tried for almost thirteen years to make her marriage work, she was divorced at the age of thirty-one. While bringing up her two daughters alone, she continued her studies in English literature at the University of Bir Zeit in Palestine, later becoming a well-known novelist and a lecturer at Iowa University. Some of her novels have been translated into English and French. Her feminism and her experience of life under the Israeli occupation are their dominant preoccupation. As a Palestinian divorced woman, she has had to fight for her personal rights on the one hand, and confront the oppression of the occupier and of men on the other.

Khalīfah’s fiction echoes her reality, especially in her choice of female characters, who represent Palestinian women from all walks of life under the social conventions and traditions which impede their emancipation. ‘Āidah A. Bāmiah states:

“Palestinian women became involved in their country’s struggle at an early stage, in their opposition to the British mandate and the Zionist movement. Their participation and impact then, were limited to specific social and intellectual circles. It is with the *intifāḍah* that the masses became involved, ‘Pre-*intifāḍah*, you rarely saw a woman being part of a demonstration,’ explains a woman activist, ‘Post-*intifāḍah* you would see demonstrations created solely for women to take part in them[...]Women did other things that used to be roles of males only, like going out and writing slogans or passing leaflets at night’<sup>91</sup>

In her novels Khalīfah depicts characters drawn from real life. For example, Raffī in ‘*Abbād al-Shams* (1980) represents the highly educated women who participated in the *Intifāḍah* but received no promises of equality. Similarly, Sa‘diyyah in *al-Ṣabbār* (1976) and its sequel, ‘*Abbād al-Shams*, represent those women who lose their husbands and have to face life and support their children on their own. Khalīfah also breaks the taboos surrounding ‘loose’ women with a bad reputation through her portrayal of characters like Khaḍrah in ‘*Abbād al-Shams*.

Khalīfah’s novels and their female characters reflect her development as a political and feminist writer, and her maturity in this respect comes across in her last two novels, *Mudhakkirāt Imra’a Ghāyir Waqi’iyya* (1986) and *Bāb al-Sāḥah* (1990). These contrast greatly with, for example, *Lam Na’ud Jawārī Lakum* (1974) where Ivette, the main character, is immature and foolish in her reactions, yet enables the author to highlight the issue of sexual equality. In these two novels, Khalīfah criticises traditions and customs as obstacles to the emancipation of women in Palestine. Moreover, she scorns society for being more concerned with the honour of single women – always a subject of suspicion – than the honour of an occupied country. However, the message in all Khalīfah’s works is clear: women should have a goal in life, they should seek self-fulfilment and financial independence and not rely on a father, a brother, a husband or even a son.

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Aidah A. Bamiah, “Feminism in Revolution: The Case Of Saḥar Khalīfah”, in Kamal ‘Abdul-Malek & Wae’i Ḥallaq (eds), *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity In Arabic Literature: Essays in Honour of Professor Īssa J. Boullata* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000) pp. 174 -75.

## Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer is a white South African writer, born in the town of Springs, near Johannesburg, on 20 November 1923 to a Lithuanian father and an English mother. She has lived in South Africa throughout her life. She attended a convent school and, for a short time, the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. She has been married twice. A writer of international acclaim and the Nobel Prize laureate of 1991, to her many readers Gordimer represents the consciousness of her country, and her novels, short stories and essays have been translated into twenty-five languages. She was politically and socially active on behalf of the black liberation movement against the Apartheid system and her work can be read against the history of her country, and vice versa. Her early writings were influenced by English and European writers such as E.M. Forster, Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. By the mid 1990s, Gordimer had published eleven novels and fourteen collections of short stories. Although some of her books were banned, she was never imprisoned or silenced.

According to M. Trump, most of Gordimer's works are based on fictional reality<sup>92</sup> because firstly, she has enjoyed the privileged life of the whites and has therefore been distanced from the dilemmas of the black people, and secondly, white people were rejected by the blacks as they embodied the oppressive system. Yet the ideological agenda of Gordimer's works is the liberation of the blacks from the tyranny of the Apartheid system in South Africa, the mentality of which is dominated by the "Manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilisation and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object."<sup>93</sup>

Gordimer's fiction revolves around political, racial, aesthetic and personal issues. One recurrent theme is the white South African heroine who travels to Europe to seek her identity and a reason for existence, as in her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953) and *Burger's Daughter* (1979). Another theme is the relationship between blacks and

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<sup>92</sup> M. Trump, Nadine Gordimer, What Time is This for a Woman?: an Analysis of Nadine Gordimer's Short Fiction", in C. Clayton (ed.), *Women and Writing in South Africa: a Critical Anthology* (Marshalltown: Heinemann, 1989) pp. 185-86.

<sup>93</sup> 'Abdul R. JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature and Colonial Africa* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) p. 4.

whites, as depicted in *A World of Strangers* (1958), *July's People* (1981) and *My Son's Story* (1990), where she combines the political and sexual. The complicated life of South Africa is also portrayed in *A Guest of Honour* (1970) and *The Conservationist* (1974). A further aspect of Gordimer's work is its focus on the emotional and sexual relationship between a young white woman and black men against a background of political developments in Africa, Europe and the United States. Afrikaans, the official language of South Africa, developed from seventeenth-century Dutch, and though dying out now, is used by Gordimer for narrative effect. Early immigrants to South Africa, like Gordimer's parents, were followed by many other European refugees in search of this modern country with its beautiful landscape. A reflection of these groups can be found in *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), which revolves around a politically important family of mixed French, Belgian and Afrikaner heritage. A similar reflection can be found in *A World of Strangers, Occasion for Loving* (1963) and *A Guest of Honour*. More recently, in *None to Accompany Me* (1994), Gordimer depicts the new world after Apartheid.

Although Gordimer has been influenced by European writers, she still feels a particular affinity with Afrikaners and fellow black and white African writers. She has shared with them a turbulent life in South Africa and a concern for the country's future. She does not identify with feminism as a political movement because she believes that "the life of almost any woman despite the rigid patriarchy of Afrikaner culture, must be counted a privileged one compared with the indignities that all black women have suffered simply because of their colour. Feminism in a country that has prevented the overwhelming majority of its people from finding even minimal self realisation because of their colour is almost a distraction."<sup>94</sup> However, her novels do give priority to the inner voice and feelings of the female towards the turbulent situation in South Africa and its effect on them. Rowland Smith confirms that Gordimer's fiction, "has relentlessly chronicled the life of the society in which she

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<sup>94</sup> *African Writer*, "Nadine Gordimer", Sonya Rudikoff (ed.), vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997) p. 282.

still lives, South Africa, and in particular the intellectual, political, and spiritual condition of its white ruling class.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Literary Themes and Political Context in Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer’s Works**

Both Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer use fiction to provide their readers with humane observations of the situations in their countries. In addition, both writers yearn for peace and freedom and, in some of their novels, one can see the writer’s anticipation of the future. As with Khalīfah and the *intifāḍah* movement in Palestine, the Apartheid system has provided literary material for Gordimer as she explores the dehumanising effect of this system on black people, and the cruel image attached to whites as a result of it. Saḥar Khalīfah, likewise, criticises the Israeli government for its cruelty and oppression of the Palestinian people on the one hand, while also scrutinising the Palestinian authority and the *intifāḍah* movement and its attacks on the Israelis on the other, recording the Palestinians’ ambivalent feelings of sympathy and hatred towards the Israelis.

As illustrated by both Palestinian and South African literature, there is a correlation between the historical development of a country and its literary production. The loss of Palestine in 1948 made a huge impact on the whole Arab nation and continues to inspire serious works which echo the tragedy and its consequences. The most outstanding male writers who left their mark on the history of the Palestinian novel are Ghassān Kanafānī (1936-72),<sup>96</sup> Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā (1919-94)<sup>97</sup> and Emīl Habībī (1921-96).<sup>98</sup> Important female writers include Mayy Ziyādah (1886-1941), a prominent intellectual who moved to Egypt and was highly recognised for her prose

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<sup>95</sup>Rowland Smith (ed.), *Critical essays on Nadine Gordimer* (United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1990) p. 1.

<sup>96</sup>Ghassān Kanafānī wrote many novels amongst which are *Rijāl fī al-Shams* (1963), *Ma Tabaqqā Lakum* (1966) and *‘Ā’id ilā Hayfā* (1969).

<sup>97</sup>Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā wrote *al-Ghuraf al-Ukhra* (1986), having also co-written a novel with Abdul Raḥmān Munif, *‘Ālam bi-Lā Kharā’if* (1982).

<sup>98</sup>Emīl Habībī wrote a number of highly acclaimed fictional works such as *Sudāsiyyat al-Ayyām al-Sitta* (1968) which is a collection of six stories, and novels such as *al-Waqā’i al-Gharībah fī Ikhtifā’ Sa’ id Abī al-Nahs al-Mutashā’I* (1977), *Saraya bint al-Ghūl* (1992) and *Ikhtayyi* (1986) which celebrates the memories of Palestinian social life before it was destroyed by Israel.

and poetic writings, Samīrah ‘Azzām (1925-67)<sup>99</sup> and Liyānah Badr (b.1950),<sup>100</sup> as well as the subject of this study, Saḥar Khalīfah (b.1941). As for the South African novel, one can note remarkable male writers such as Alexander La Guma (1925-85)<sup>101</sup> and John M. Coetzee (b.1940)<sup>102</sup> and outstanding female writers such as Pauline Smith (1882-1959),<sup>103</sup> Doris Lessing (b.1919)<sup>104</sup> and Bessie Head (1937-86)<sup>105</sup>, as well as Nadine Gordimer.

Oppression, violence, war and human suffering constitute the leitmotifs of the novels under discussion. Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer come from different social and historical backgrounds; their political positions also differ with respect to the political and racial struggles in their countries. Therefore, we see that Khalīfah’s writing represents the constant conflicts, repression and abuse inflicted upon her people on the one hand, and the class divisions among the Palestinians on the other. By comparison, Gordimer writes about the corruption and the injustice inflicted on the blacks, for whom she has sympathy, during the tyranny of Apartheid. Her writings echo the poignant reality of South Africa and mark the sharp cleavage between white and black women socially, economically, intellectually and politically.

However, light should also be shed on the common elements in their reflection of their politically critical situations. First, they depict racial and political discrimination; secondly, they portray the way in which men and the patriarchal society on the one hand, and the oppressor’s economic and political dominance on the other, doubly oppress black and Palestinian women; thirdly, both these writers have faced censorship and restrictions on their freedom in their respective countries, and this has led either to their imprisonment or forced exile. In sum, their fiction delineates the

<sup>99</sup> Samīrah ‘Azzām wrote short stories and her collections include, *Ashyā’ Saghīra* (1954), *al-Zill al-Kabīr* (1956) and *al-‘Id min al-Nāfidha al-Gharbiyya* (1971).

<sup>100</sup> One of Liyānah Badr’s most famous novels is *Būṣlah min ajl ‘Abbad al-Shams*, (1979).

<sup>101</sup> Alex La Guma’s writings include *A Walk in the Night* (1962), *The Stone Country* (1967) and *In the Fog of the Season’s End* (1972).

<sup>102</sup> John M. Coetzee has written, among other works, *Dusklands* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1976), *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999).

<sup>103</sup> Pauline Smith wrote short stories such as ‘The Little Karoo’ (1925) and her novels include *The Beadle* (1926).

<sup>104</sup> Doris Lessing wrote a series of semi-autobiographical novels entitled *Children of Violence*; her first novels were *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *This was the Old Chief’s Country* (1951).

<sup>105</sup> Bessie Head’s novels are *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), *A Question of Power* (1973), *A Collector of Treasures* (1977).

predicament and oppression of women in the Arab world and in South Africa, while also illustrating the hardships of oppressed people and social inequality more generally. Khalifah and Gordimer thus share a sense of marginality for reasons of sex, race and politics, and this is reflected in their novels.

## Chapter One

### *Al-Ṣabbār (Wild Thorns) 1976*

Saḥar Khalīfah's great achievement in *al-Ṣabbār* is her efficiency in articulating both the political dilemma of Palestinians under Israeli occupation and the socio-political divisions within the Palestinian community itself. In depicting their struggle she maintains an objective point of view and a humanitarian sympathy for both Palestinians and Israelis. However, the representation of ideologically opposed characters weaves a structure for the novel which expresses the dynamic existence of the male characters, while being slightly subverted by its persistent female sub-texts. In other words, female characters have no significant space in the structure of the novel.

Characters, place and time are all structured according to binary opposition. 'Ādil and Usāmah are two such opposing characters, prison and the outer world represent two opposing localities – as do Tel Aviv and Nablus – while Palestine pre- and during occupation forms a temporal polarity. In terms of characterisation, *al-Ṣabbār* gives priority to the male over the female and tackles many problematic issues, such as the Palestinian's identity crises and their political, social and economic problems, through the characters of 'Ādil, Usāmah, Bāsīl, Abū Ṣābir and Shiḥādah. Moreover, irony and sarcasm are techniques that Saḥar Khalīfah (in common with other Palestinian writers such as Emīl Ḥabībī and Ghassān Kanafanī) employs to excellent effect throughout the text.

In *al-Ṣabbār*, Khalīfah is writing about the Palestinians' existential predicament, the armed struggle against their occupiers and their daily struggle against starvation. At the same time she criticises the PLO for failing to understand the real problems of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories and neglecting them financially. The novel paints a striking portrait of life in Nablus and the day-to-day sufferings of the its inhabitants. Nevertheless, the reader is struck by the Palestinians' willpower and endurance of their situation. Khalīfah also draws attention to the class divisions within

Palestinian society: the Karmī family belong to the fading feudal sector, while the working class is represented by Zuhdī, Abū Šābir, and ‘Ādil al-Karmī, who join the working class for economic reasons. Shiḥādah and Ḥajj, meanwhile, are examples of crooked traders.

In an article about the political aspects of *al-Šabbār*, Ghālib Halasā<sup>1</sup> praises the novel for giving the reader detailed information about the political and social situation in the Occupied Territories. He argues that it allows the reader to understand the social divisions between Palestinians, especially between the bourgeoisie and the working class. The bourgeoisie and the Palestinian feudal class are in decline because of the competition from highly developed Israeli industry. But the most distinguishing feature of the novel is Khalīfah’s portrayal of reality. Her characterisation does not follow the usual heroic model, but rather depicts characters as engaged with the world in a rational way, in contrast to the idealistic models of the past. Faisāl Darrāj observes that “Khalīfah, as in all her other novels, bases her novelistic world on documents, differentiating between the fictive characters and ‘nationalistic desires’, deriving the near future from the knowledgeable present.”<sup>2</sup> For example, she portrays both the contrast between those living under occupation and those living abroad, as well as that between the demands of the Arab countries and those of the PLO and the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories. Khalīfah’s portrait of daily life is striking: starvation, the constant search for work, and the continuous shift between work places, whether abroad or in the Occupied Territories. More importantly, Halasā observes that *al-Šabbār*’s characterisation follows the binary structure of the novel: Usāmah suffers from a split desire between his true, sensitive nature (displayed in his outburst at the slaughter of the lamb), and the vengeful desire he exhibits on his return to Nablus (the brutal murder of the Israeli officer in front of his wife and daughter). ‘Ādil wants to support his large family but his bourgeois nature dictates that he should manage his ancestors’ (Karmī family’s) land; Zuhdī is also confused, as he is caught between his sympathy for the Israeli co-workers and his natural loyalty to the Palestinian struggle against the occupiers. Similarly, Umm Šābir, who rejoices at the

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<sup>1</sup> Ghālib Halasā, “*al-Šabbār*”, *Riwāyat al Wāqi’ al-Filistīnī*, *Mawāqif* 72 (Summer 1993) pp.72-83

sight of the officer's killing, still sympathises with the officer's daughter. Thus Khalīfah illustrates both the reality of the Palestinians and their ambivalent feelings, torn between their instinctive human reactions towards the Israelis and their loyalty to the Palestinian cause.

### **The Characters' Ideological Shifts**

In *Aspects of the Female Novel* Rogers' argues that the "female novel is typically without event to the extent that what is said, done or seen is insignificant to what is thought, felt or sensed."<sup>3</sup> Women writers are notorious for being largely involved in psychology and experience. This argument holds, despite the absolute subversion of the female, in *al-Ṣabbār*. Khalīfah dwells on psychological and social aspects, and on the interrelationships of male characters in the context of life in Palestine, focusing on the poverty, class divisions and the transformations that affect the young generation's perception of life. In doing so, she uses highly polyphonous dialogues, monologues and carnivalised images to dialogise the different voices in the novel, and to portray the bitter reality of the oppressed and the vengeful simultaneously. The novel opens with Usāmah contemplating the view and the people around him. The narrator engages with him in a nostalgic, polemical internal monologue on the changes that have taken place during his absence abroad. He wonders:

“ ‘Why do these sad songs hurt us so much? Is it because we are a romantic people?’ He'd never been romantic himself. At least he wasn't any longer. How had he come to this conclusion? Training, bullets.”<sup>4</sup>

This monologue highlights the possibility that Usāmah may once have been a romantic type, but not any more. The story unfolds to reveal that as a child he was so touched by the slaughter of the lamb that he wrote a poem about it. This incident can be juxtaposed with his becoming a fighter suspected of stabbing an Israeli officer. Through such incidents, Khalīfah underlines the fact that these men are shaped by

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<sup>2</sup> Faisal Darrāj, in the introduction of S. Khalīfah's novel, *Ṣūrah wa Ayqūnah wa 'Ahdyn Qadīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Adāb, 1996) p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, *Aspects of the Female Novel* (New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1991) p.14.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 5.

harsh experience to become what they are. Focusing analogously on the idea of the 'interregnum', Khalīfah creates two opposing ideological camps exemplified in the characters of 'Ādil versus Usāmah, Šāliḥ, versus Bāsil, and Nuwwār versus Līnah. This literary plan enables the author to express the characters' conflicting viewpoints, as well as to encode her binary symbols. For example, 'Ādil's feeling of shame about his work in Tel Aviv is reduced to the fact that he belongs to the al-Karmī family, and was obliged to accept the job because of the deteriorating economic conditions and the huge responsibility of making a living for his big family, as well as running his father's "dialysis machine". However, his shame and vulnerability is tangible when Usāmah pursues him for an explanation. A confrontation follows, through which a dialectic dialogue takes place: Usāmah blames 'Ādil for his passivity and fails to recognise the latter's daily struggle to make a living. The conflict between the two revolves around the opposing philosophical ideas of pragmatism and idealism, a technique used by Dostoevesky. In *Dostoevesky's Path*, Bakhtin states that "The form of a conversation or quarrel [...] where various points of view can dominate in turn and reflect the diverse nuances of contradictory creeds, is especially appropriate for embodying this philosophy, forever being shaped and yet never congealing [...] this particular form of philosophical conceptualisation, in which every opinion becomes a living creature and is expounded by an impassioned human voice."<sup>5</sup>

Khalīfah excels at describing the psychological trap in which 'Ādil finds himself and the continual struggles between his sense of duty to his family and to his country. He is put to the test many times throughout the novel. For example, when he comes to the aid of an Israeli officer who has been stabbed by an unknown militant, only to discover later on that he is in fact the Israeli officer in charge of the demolition order on their house. It is at that point that he unconsciously decides not to save the "dialysis machine", because it symbolises slavery to his father and the deceptive glories of the al-Karmī family, the slavery that drove him to compromise with the enemy:

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<sup>5</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 8 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) p. 16.

“But what about the machine? His father’s kidney machine! Should I tell the officer? He’d probably put off the demolition for a few minutes so we could get it out. But if I wanted to take so much why didn’t I move it out in the beginning? ‘Ādil for God’s sake, be decisive for once in your life! Emotions won’t help you. Would you kill a man then? Kill your own father? But men are always being killed. And if my father goes on living, we’ll all die [...] me, Nuwwar, the children. Haven’t we lost enough already? Usāmah, Basil, the family estate. And all in self-defence. In defence of a dignified, honourable life.”<sup>6</sup>

The significance of this situation is his realisation that, paradoxically, by saving the machine and his father’s life, he is *losing* his own humanity, becoming a slave to this typically bourgeois and hypocritical figure who is in denial of this situation where the lives of so many young men and women are lost. He realises that he must switch his focus from the defence of life’s minor pleasures towards the goal of a free Palestine. ‘Ādil’s repressed personality can be traced back to his bourgeois upbringing. He develops a persona, a mask, which represents him as he wishes to be seen, by concealing emotions and thoughts that do not suit his intentions or his desires. This explains his tendency to repress these thoughts and emotions by compulsive drinking. In other words, he presents himself to the world through a persona which represents the public aspect of the ego, while at the same time he suppresses its opposite, its shadow: fear of the father figure. This fear is overcome by the demolition of the house, which symbolises the mask he had been wearing all his life, and which inhibited his connection to the outer world.<sup>7</sup> ‘Ādil’s walking away from the house and the dialysis machine at the end of the novel marks his transcendence of the limitations that were imposed on him by the presence of his father and his patriarchal, inherited, bourgeois values.

The novel is also amenable to the development of Rogers’ theory that women writers “use senses other than the sense of sight, and therefore events may disappear for lack of physical description.”<sup>8</sup> This is true of *al-Ṣabbār* in the sense that the description of the Occupied Territories, through Usāmah’s eyes, marks the agony provoked by

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph L. Henderson, “Persona Triumphant”, in *Shadow And Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology*. (Illinois: Chiron Publication, 1990) p. 274.

recent changes, focusing on sensual and visual experience rather than on the events of the story. The dialectic in the following paragraph is one of interrogation; Usāmah's stream of consciousness cogently reveals his contradiction and confusion with reality, of how life used to be in the West Bank and what it had become. Sight, smell, touch and taste are evoked, all conspicuous in Khalīfah's description of the living conditions there:

“And yet. The people no longer seemed so poverty stricken. They dressed fashionably now. And their pace was quicker. They bought things without haggling. There seemed to be a lot of money about. There were more sources of employment and wages had gone up. Prices had risen, but people were eating meat, vegetables and fruit voraciously, as though they were starved, stuffing their children. Those who once had not owned so much as a sweater now swaggered about in leather jackets. Those who had not even possessed a scarf now muffled their ears in fur collars.”<sup>9</sup>

Khalīfah draws a vivid picture of life at that time, before the beginning of the uprising, with people enjoying the Israeli goods that filled the markets, even the advertisements for pornographic movies which filled the streets of the West Bank. The filthy streets are conjured up in the following passage: “As they turned off into a narrow street leading to the old part of town, a stench of damp and rot, garbage and decay, assaulted Usāmah's nostrils. Rotting fruit [...] rusty barrels of fish stood in the middle of the pavement.”<sup>10</sup> This scene leaves room for the imagination, provokes feelings of disgust at the smell by using expressive words (decay, rot) related to the language of pathos, and creates an image of the deteriorating social situation and the people's indulgence in sensuality. Khalīfah also intentionally repeats certain passages that mark Usāmah's contagious feeling of disgust at, and rejection of, West Bank society. This is reiterated by 'Ādil to express his denial of the 'decomposed' situation in the West Bank the way in which the occupiers exploit its resources. The newspapers and the songs heard in the streets towards the end of the novel register the stagnant situation in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the despair of moderate Palestinians who were initially hopeful but

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<sup>8</sup> Rogers', *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

were now beginning to absorb the reasoned anger of those, like Usāmah, who were calling for action:

“The street peddlers were crying out their wares: ‘fish from Gaza!’ ‘Oranges from Jaffa!’ ‘Bananas from Jericho!’ [...] A newspaper boy passed by, crying: ‘*Al-Quds! Al-Shāb! Al-Fajr!* Kissinger announces solutions to Middle East crisis!’ Farid al-Atrash continued to lament the unhappy day of his birth. People went about their business, buying vegetables, fruit and bread.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Ambiguities in the Novel**

Future events are speculated through interpretation of the text – especially if the story is socio-political – but they cannot be predicted straightforwardly, but rather hinted at, through carnival images and symbolic texts, or certain reiterated sentences. When Usāmah meets the friendly and uneducated Abū Muḥammad, he talks to him about his children who are all successful in life except for Khālid, an activist, who will one day bring about the destruction of their house. This was a premonition of the destruction of the house of al-Karmī, through the rise of Usāmah’s and Bāsil’s militant activity:

“Yes, Khālid’s the last of the line. And of the six he’s the only one who’s been a problem. He got out of prison on bail. They’d tortured him in every part of his body, even down there. They released a dog on him that went for his genitals. He may be infertile.’ ‘You mean impotent.’ ‘OK, impotent. Don’t make fun of me. I’m not a university graduate as you can see.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the binary symbols of the patriarchal father figure versus the Israeli State, the kidney as opposed to the dialysis machine, the father’s blood and urine, all have symbolic meaning. The father’s rhetorical speeches and reception of the foreign journalists oppose both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. The kidney and the kidney machine can be interpreted as representing the stagnant condition of Palestine,

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

where the father cannot have a transplant nor live without dependence on the machine, a stagnation which resembles the country's overall condition.

The symbolic value of the blood and the urine can be interpreted through Kristeva's elaboration of Bakhtin's reference to body fluids. She defines the excremental fluids, which include 'decay, infection, disease, ... etc associated with death and disease, the reference to blood and urine represents an external threat.'<sup>13</sup> Therefore, 'Ādil's abandonment of the dialysis machine at the end of the novel is significant as it is a premonition of an immanent change within Palestinian society and their readiness to confront the external threat of the occupiers and their aggressive strategy. This point is further reinforced by 'Ādil's comments to Abū Ṣābir who consoles him for the demolition of his house:

“‘Ādil smiled bitterly. We're one in our grief. You've suffered a loss, and so have I, both of us. But we can still hope that our children will succeed where we've failed.[...] Look at your son, Abū Ṣābir. He's grown like a palm tree – tall, deep-chested, broad shouldered. And his eyes! Just look at those eyes of his! there are new horizons there, the unlimited horizons of tomorrow.' [...] A thirst for revenge, for rebellion, stirred deep within him.”<sup>14</sup>

Reiterated sentences have a deep interpretative meaning, for example when 'Ādil is blamed by Usāmah for not making any effort for the sake of Palestine: “The picture's perfectly clear, can't you see that”. 'Ādil replies: “there's more than one dimension to the picture”.<sup>15</sup> 'Ādil's statement can be interpreted on two levels: first, that some have obligations that prevent them from joining the militant resistance; second, that a time will come when both the Palestinians and the Israelis will think of a way to solve this crisis – it is a multi-dimensional problem. Humanity and justice both count in this critical case and therefore this problem should be analysed with care to avoid committing any more historical mistakes. Here Khalīfah foresees a resolution that considers political, social and religious rights for both Palestinians and Israelis. She

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) pp. 163-68.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

registers the agony of people who anticipate war almost as a chance to express themselves, like Usāmah when he is asked by Abū Ṣābir:

“ ‘What’s new outside? Will there be a war or not? Set my mind at rest.’ Usāmah drew a deep breath, preparing himself for a difficult campaign of consciousness-raising. ‘It all depends on the people inside.’”<sup>16</sup>

Usāmah’s answer articulates a generally felt inner chaos, their confusion and premonition that something will soon erupt – a point that marks ‘an interregnum’ or a transitional period. At that time it was merely simmering in people’s minds, but the *intifāḍah* soon came, waged even by young children whose only weapons were stones. However, the strategy of delaying the culmination of the plot allows a space to dwell on the characters’ reflections, in which the idea that the present is only a repetition of the past can be emphasised.

Rogers aspect of the female novelists’ anticipation of danger corresponds to what Virginia Woolf calls “eschewing the plot” — their adopting a certain strategy to avoid narrative climax and slow down the development of conflict in the narrative. This can take the form of the heroine’s fainting, death, escape, or any other compulsive behaviour. In *al-Ṣabbār* this device is apparent when the Israeli officer is stabbed by a masked guerrilla fighter in front of his daughter, who collapses after hitting her head against the wall. Her reaction can be explained as expressing physical distress, one for which no words are adequate. It is as if Khalīfah wants to prevent the culmination of this scene, which is very chaotic, in order to record Umm Ṣābir’s ambivalent feelings both of jealousy towards their ability to buy things, but also sympathy towards the girl and her mother:

“The officer still lay across the box of fruit, barely breathing, while people nearby stared in grim silence. Then suddenly they began to run, jostling one another in their panic. The street was soon filled with people running while the officer’s wife screamed and pointed at the muffled young man who was disappearing into the crowd. ‘Get

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

him! Stop him!' but no one did. The little girl now took her hands from her eyes and saw her father lying there, crumpled up over the box of fruit, the dagger still buried in his neck. Too shocked to speak, she stretched out a hand towards him. Then she began banging her head wildly against the metal support of the shop awning, and finally collapsed on the ground."<sup>17</sup>

Later on in the novel, 'Ādil avoids Usāmah and the confrontation is delayed many times before it finally takes place in the street, where Usāmah accuses him of compromising with the enemy and drunkenness. The chapter ends with the two still at loggerheads, and a fight between the comrades breaks out near by. 'Ādil retorts mumbling:

“ ‘So you’re working inside, then’  
‘I want a woman, I need a woman, a woman someone who’ll open the door for me and express my passion and my bitterness.’  
‘You’ve had too much to drink, ‘Ādil.’  
‘No, I haven’t. Just a couple of glasses. Maybe three or four, I don’t know.’  
‘For days, maybe weeks, even generations. I don’t know.’”<sup>18</sup>

Psychologically, 'Ādil's evasive behaviour, noticeable throughout the novel, stems from his shame and self-consciousness at working inside Tel Aviv, and at others knowing about it. It is a product of his alienation from the self. Sartre's observations on the 'other' confirms that "Shame is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging [...] I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me."<sup>19</sup> This theory is supported by 'Ādil's reaction of loathing and abjection, which will be examined later in this chapter. Khalīfah also avoids narrative climax on another occasion, when Abū Šābir has injured his hand and cannot get help because he lacks a work permit. During his journey he tells 'Ādil the contents of his will in the belief that he will die of the wound, before succumbing to delirium and recounting the folktales he used to read. The mention of folktales introduces and recognises the possibility of another kind of narrative structure, while temporarily denying that which structures this text. Halting

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.



the development of a conflict in the narrative, in the sense that the action does not escalate, gives the reader a chance to recognise the oppressed people's pain and suffering:

“ ‘A story?’

‘Yes, one about our Arab folk heroes like Abū Zayd al-Hilālī or

‘Antar Ibn Shadād’

‘Ādil racked his brains, but couldn't remember any heroic tales. Abū

Şābir continued, dreamily, ‘The first book I ever read was one I

borrowed from Shaikh Raḍī. He was a man of such eloquence that

you could listen to him talk for ever.[...] Stories of Abū Zayd and

Sayf Ibn dhi Yazīn, or tales from *The Arabian Nights*. [...] So I read

Ṭāha Ḥūsain's *Days*, and the biography of the prophet Muḥammad,

and *In the Shade of the Linden Tree*. I read a translation of *Les*

*Misérables* too.”<sup>20</sup>

The significance of his elision into the past and of the references to the books that he has read, is that they transfer him into an imaginary life and give him the patience to endure the present and foresee a better future. Narrative, by its nature, proposes a resolution within a stable textual world. This point is echoed in J. U. Jacobs, who comments on Gordimer's novels that people in South Africa “like to read Dostoevsky [and] to glory in another misery.”<sup>21</sup> Abū Şābir therefore can be seen as glorying in this literature for its reflection of his miseries. The reason for their identification with such miseries can be explained through recourse to Sartre: “Reflection is knowledge [...] knowledge is a totality; it is a lightening intuition without relief, without point of departure, and without point of arrival. [...] Reflection is a recognition rather than knowledge. But the reflection which delivers the reflected-on to us, not as a given, but as the being which we have to be, in indistinction without a point of view, is a knowledge overflowing itself and without explanation. [...] (Therefore) Reflection is a recognition rather than knowledge. It implies as the original motivation of the recovery, a pre-reflective comprehension of what it wishes to recover.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the journey from Tel Aviv to Nablus gives Abū Şābir an insight into, and recognition of,

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<sup>19</sup> J.P Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Şabbār*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> J. U. Jacobs, “Nadine Gordimer's Intertextuality: Authority and Authorship in *My Son's Story*”, in *English in South Africa*, Vol. 20-21 (South Africa: Rhodes University, 1993) p. 33.

his present situation and its resemblance to the great literary works that chronicle suffering and revolution.

### **Living in the Interregnum**

Gramsci's concept of "Living in the interregnum" is vital to this study, in the sense that the conflicts, chaos and disruption of the natural flow of life which define the interregnum also represent the reality constructed by Khalīfah in this novel. Elizabeth McKee highlights this point further: "*al-Ṣabbār* is an unusually structured novel due to the complexities of the issues with which it deals. The novelistic universe is split down the middle in order to incorporate the contradictory 'realities' of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the non-sequential aspect which Rogers claims to be a pattern in female writing contributes to the overall plot of *al-Ṣabbār*: the contradictions and shifts between the past and present tenses are essential to the circulation of meaning in the novel. Moreover, the temporal shifts are noticeable in the inclusion of the characters' countless memories, and in the stream of consciousness that belongs to either the prisoners or the oppressed. The novel begins with Usāmah's arrival in his homeland and his observation of the changes that have occurred during his absence; for example, the social conflict among Palestinians, and their apparent abandonment of the great cause of a 'free Palestine'. These observations are recorded through characters who serve as a heteroglotic feedback in the novel. Usāmah is involved in a secret mission, merely implied at the beginning but made explicit towards the middle and end of the novel, when he starts to make plans. The work therefore follows Hegel's dialectic movement of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The call for an uprising – even if it is disorganised – is the thesis adopted by Usāmah, whereas 'Ādil's subjugation to a decaying system is the antithesis, the combination of the two providing the novel's synthesis.

Rogers claims that women's writing lacks events, and that characters do not simply change but rather undergo a process of growth in which the pattern of underlying

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<sup>22</sup> J. P Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp.155-6.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth McKee, *Triangular Desire and Narrative Structure in the Novels of Levantine Women*

development makes the reader aware that the narrative pulls toward inevitability rather than building upon possibility.<sup>24</sup> This point is relevant despite the absence of female characters in the textual world, since one can argue that the writer's female experience is portrayed through the male character 'Ādil', who acquires depth and insight through his tough experiences in life. On the other hand, the idea of the novel diminishes the real elements of suspense in relation to its major plot, in the sense that the reader is constructed as anticipating the inevitability of 'bloodshed' rather than the possibility of a peaceful settlement. Nevertheless, there are a few ambiguities related to sub-plots in the novel; for example, that generated by Usāmah's involvement in a secret mission to bomb the buses taking workers like 'Ādil, Zuhdī and Abū Šābir to Tel Aviv, and the way in which it is intimated in the novel's many sub-texts. The slaughter of the Israeli officer by an unknown killer is equally vague. At first, speculations revolve around Usāmah due to the preceding subtext to the killing that suggested his involvement in a secret mission:

"The weeks passed and Usāmah accomplished none of his objectives. There was no way he could get through to 'Ādil, nor could he carry out any secret missions. Two mutually antagonistic factors were at work within him. Although he believed unequivocally that all the Egged buses had to be blown up and that the workers had to abandoned their treacherous role."<sup>25</sup>

Later on, the reader is almost certain that he is the killer when Umm Usāmah cannot find the *kūfiyyah*<sup>26</sup> of her dead husband that Usāmah used as a mask. These minor moments of suspense contribute to the gathering momentum of subtexts in the novel that generate speculation in the reader's mind rather than a sense of heightened expectation through an action narrative. This is a distinguishing feature of women's novels.

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*Writers*, PhD thesis (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994) p. 153.

<sup>24</sup> Rogers', *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Al-Šabbār*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> A head cover used by Arab men, differs in colour and model according to the country.

## The Idyllic Chronotope

*Al-Ṣabbār* tackles the issues of the oppressed male who suffers imprisonment, suppression and economic hardship. Dealing with the Palestinian predicament on the political as well as the 'human' level, Khalīfah reverts to the realism of the committed literature which was popular at that time. She develops this by using the literary tools of Rabelaisian images, carnivalisue scenes, polyphonous and polemic dialogues, social heteroglossia and folkloric songs to define the Palestinian identity. The ideological infrastructure of *al-Ṣabbār* is contradictory, swinging between that of Islam, aversion to it, and Marxism, noticeable in the utopianism applied to the socialist prison life of Zuhdī and abū al-'Izz. Moreover, the novel's underlying structure incorporates a binary opposition of characters, places and ideologies. This strategy of shifting ideology and opposition enables Khalīfah to convey the chaotic state of Palestine, analogical as it is to Gramsci's 'interregnum' on human, social and political levels.

The settings of *al-Ṣabbār* are binary opposites, split into two worlds: the old and the new; the poor, backward West Bank and the rich, advanced state of Israel; the factory in Tel Aviv and the barren al-Karmī estate. The prison, the house of the al-Karmī, Abū Ṣābir's home, the taxi and the buses, all contribute to render time spatially in the novel. Time and space intersect, giving life and shape to events through the chronotopes of the 'road', the 'threshold', the 'square' and the 'hall'. The chronotope of the narrative is nevertheless constrained to certain spatial boundaries: the bridge into the West Bank, the checkpoints to Tel Aviv and the barren lands.

The novel opens with the setting of the barracks processing entry into the West Bank. The chronotopic space of the barracks is a metaphor for the Israeli atrocities and aggression on the one hand, and the spatial boundary to the Palestinians' freedom on the other. During the process of inspection by the Israelis, Usāmah hears the screams of an Arab girl:

“Suddenly, as he made his way along the walkway, a girl screamed. Passing beneath a small window, he heard the short, sharp slaps of a hand on flesh. His hair stood on end and he stopped in his tracks. The girl cried out, ‘Swine! You swine! You swine! Aah!’

The beating went on, the violent slaps clearly audible through the small window. Usāmah found himself in such turmoil of pain and nervous energy that for a moment he lost all sense of where he was. Then next [...] The shouting and screaming broke out again. The Arab girl was sobbing while a female Israeli soldier yelled, 'open your legs! I've got to see up there! Open your legs!'...The girl's voice rose again from the strip-search cubicle, sounding weak now, hoarse and distant, but still audible: 'You swine...'.<sup>27</sup>

In this context, the Arab girl symbolises the subjugated land and the Palestinian cause on the one hand, and what then appeared to be Palestinian submissiveness on the other. At first, the girl shouts and screams against her oppressors, the Israeli soldiers, but later her cries start to fade, just like the cause itself. The narrator comments, "The shouting and screaming broke out again. The Arab girl was sobbing while a female Israeli soldier yelled, 'open your legs! I've got to see up there! Open your legs!'"<sup>28</sup> The girl is abused, humiliated and exploited, just like the Palestinian land and its cause. On the other hand, Khalīfah attempts in this episode to solve the equation of '*irḍ*' and *Karāmah*,<sup>29</sup> thus providing intertextuality with her other novels. Similarly, Sa'diyyah's body symbolises the security of the land, and its description signifies the destructive/regenerative quality of woman, a quality which characterises carnival in general.<sup>30</sup> Zuhdī wants to wipe out the experience of miseries and insecurities of the prison and escape his harsh reality by the sexual act, so he tells her to stop interrogating him about his unexpected release: "Let me forget. Help me forget. I've dreamed so much, so very much, but I never imagined a reception as lavish, as generous, as this. These breasts, these thighs, havens of safety in an occupied land." He also realises at that moment that procreation is the only pleasure for miserable people: "The human race breeds on despite all disasters, that's the people's one remaining pleasure."<sup>31</sup> Sa'diyyah is the object of his desire; her body is the source of joy, security and happiness despite the occupation.

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<sup>27</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, pp. 13-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>29</sup> '*irḍ*' is the honour of woman vis a vis that of the *Karāmah* which is the honour of land.

<sup>30</sup> Ann Jefferson, 'Body Matters' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, (eds) Ken Hirschkop and David Shehed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 174.

The taxi is the chronotopic figure of movement, marking Usāmah's first encounter with Palestinians who belong to different social strata and are returning to the West Bank. It is a metaphor for the 'course of life'. There, Usāmah forms his first and lasting impression of his own people as preoccupied with trivial and materialistic things, unable to see the 'real picture', and he is driven by his hotheaded petulance to become engaged in destructive militant activities. On this journey from the borders to Nablus, he listens impatiently to the meaningless conversations of Abū Moḥammad and the driver. The woman in the back seat, wearing a plaster cast, mocks their clichés and hints at the secret build up of resistance, giving them wise advice to resist the occupation quietly:

“ ‘Believe it or not, the earth is not really barren and dead. But keep your mouth shut and leave some tracks wherever you go.’  
Usāmah said nothing for the rest of the journey. But when the taxi stopped and the passengers spilled out into the pavement in the main square of the commercial centre of town, he looked for the woman to say goodbye. She'd disappeared. A few days later, he saw her among the crowds in the old part of town. Her left forearm was no longer in a plaster cast.”<sup>32</sup>

The narrator here hints at the possibility of this woman's involvement as a resistance movement courier, an intertextuality with Lady Zakiyah in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*. This incident is significant because it summarises the political, social and ideological situation in Palestine, pointing from the beginning to Usāmah's short sightedness and murderous intentions.

The factory setting serves as the spatial chronotope of the 'threshold', a space where major plots take place, and as a metaphor for the new proletariat: working men gather in the same factory despite their differences. Two crucial incidents take place there. The first is Abū Ṣābir's injury, when he is a victim of the system. The second is when Zuhdī gets into a fight with Shlomo and ends up in prison. The significance of these chronotopes is that the notions of racism, inequality and suppression materialise within them. Moreover, it increases the possibility of a war. The other workers serve

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

as the ‘onlookers’ who, as Bakhtin would have it, ‘carnivalise’ the scene. Their inability to do anything, and the Jewish man’s unwillingness to call the ambulance for Abū Ṣābir because of his work permit, are a lesson for the Palestinians working there:

“The workers were shouting ‘‘Ādil! ‘Ādil!’ in a loud chorus as they stared at the man stretched out on the ground. Blood gushed from four of his fingers, the red flow sinking into the sandy soil from which the roots of orange trees had recently been torn out.”<sup>33</sup>

The images created here evoke feelings of pain and humiliation, as Khalīfah conflates psychic and physical injury. The image of Abū Ṣābir lying on the ground is derived from an iconography represented canonically in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. The excretion of bodily fluids gives physicality to events and suggests a pre-linguistic terrain with transgressive overtones. What seemed abstract before is rendered concrete by the reader.

The prison setting is the metaphorical chronotope of suppression and misery. The monologues record the Palestinians’ basic human need for food, love and sex. For example, Bāsil daydreams about women and his mother’s cooking. In this context sex metaphorically symbolises the male’s castration and subjugation. Women are the source of security and motherhood, giving them a vertical transcendence. So when Abu al-‘Izz bemoans his feeling of hunger — “Oh, how your stomach can rumble! Oh mother! A bowl of soup would be sweeter right now than Su‘ād Ḥusnī’s legs.”<sup>34</sup> — It simultaneously registers other issues such as the objectifying of the female body.

### **The Carnavalesque & Sacrificial Dismemberment**

This scene can be juxtaposed to the carnivalesque ‘sacrificial’ dismemberment present through the negative anatomical account of Elyās, Bāsil’s fellow prisoner, who feels insecure and agonised at their first encounter. Bakhtinian carnival and grotesque

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 126. It is worth noting here khalīfah’s reference to Su‘ād Ḥusnī<sup>34</sup>, in the same way that Emil Ḥabībī uses such references to emphasise the identity of the Palestinians as Arabs and link them with their rich Arabic heritage.

realism in this context signify life's 'change and renewal'. Bakhtin asserts, "In grotesque realism... the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people.... [T]his is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualised. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are constantly growing and renewed."<sup>35</sup> These images also serve to materialise spatial time in the novel, especially in places where time has no meaning, such as prison. Moreover, they capture Bāsil's desires, swinging between the heroic and the human, between the suppression of young Palestinians and his pride and self-conscious masculinity because of his imprisonment:

"Then he laughed, his torn lips revealing his smashed teeth, the mutilated muscles of his face puckering up. Bāsil was horrified at the sight, but managed to stretch out a hand that was cold with sweat. While he shook Elyās's left hand he glanced at his right; it was encased in black leather. Yes, victory demands a high price. The name Abū al-'Izz wasn't great after all, he told himself. I'm not making any plans for guerrilla action, not ever."<sup>36</sup>

The significance of this Rabelaisian motif of disfigurement is that it creates new meanings for the character and for the world on a textual level. Bāsil is deterred from taking part in any future heroic deeds when he witnesses the possible disfigurement that may result from it.

The chronotopic space of the street, scene of a confrontation between the two characters, signifies a scandal. This takes place in the 'square', and a radical change occurs, which fleshes out unspoken realities and 'turns the world inside out'. The dialogue between the two proves Usāmah's schemes inauthentic and his desires self-destructive, just as it provides evidence for 'Ādil's misery, suggesting at the same time the crowning and uncrowning of Usāmah:

"He leaned against the wall and began to retch. The stench of alcohol mixed with digestive juices spread in the night air. [...]"

<sup>35</sup> Ken Hirschkop and David Shehed (eds.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, p. 166.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 116.

‘Ādil wiped his mouth with his sleeve. He found he was weeping. His tears continued on their silent path. Suddenly he burst out sobbing. ‘Okay,’ he shouted, ‘convince me that what I’m doing isn’t part of the struggle, that the fight has fixed ground rules.’

Usāmah didn’t answer. He turned his head to one side to avoid the foul smell. ‘Ādil vomited again as he walked along, tottering. ‘And who is going to fight the battle of the stomachs?’[...] Angrily Usāmah clenched his fist and burst out, ‘No, it’s not really a farce at all. Here you are getting drunk while a girl in a room in a shed screams ‘you swine’!

‘Yes, here I am getting drunk while a girl in a shed screams ‘you swine’! And Abū Sābir lies crucified on a filthy bed. It’s a farce, I tell you, a farce!’<sup>37</sup>

This can be further analysed through Kristeva’s theory of abjection: “Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection [...] bodily fluids, such as blood, mucus, or urine are signs of health when they are within the body, but signs of a dangerous transgression when they are outside.”<sup>38</sup> She also points out that this functions metaphorically. ‘Ādil’s nausea, the intersection of juice, alcohol and tears, brings a new reality to the novelistic world. It symbolises his degradation and the inner transformation, which will culminate in the demolition of his family’s house and mark a distinct change in his ideology.

The firing at the hillside at Dayr Sharaf towards the end of the novel, where Zuhdī’s unintended death next to Usāmah takes place, represents the chronotopic space of the ‘square’ and stands for the turning point and ‘final moments of consciousness’, as Bakhtin defines them. ‘Turning points’ in this context can be seen in the anticipation of the subsequent *intifāḍah*, the Palestinian people’s uprising against their occupiers, to which Khalīfah beautifully alludes in the next paragraph:

“Another soldier fell against a rock; the grenade he’d been carrying exploded. Bits of human flesh and khaki clothing went flying. [...] He reached out his hand to touch the earth, mixed now with blood and tears. The land! Blood. Poetry. Dreams of love. In the village below the flute reminded you of weddings yet to come.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>38</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>39</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 152-3.

The mingling of blood and earth enacts a literal union of man and land, of masculine blood with mother earth. This scene reproduces a grotesque Bakhtinian realism of death, bulging human flesh, tears and blood which also corresponds to Kristeva's observation of the transgression of 'bodily margins'. This suggests that excremental body fluids and death are symbolic of external threat and danger. Bakhtin further highlights this notion: "The body capable of transgressing its own boundaries, of mixing up inner and outer realms."<sup>40</sup> This idea is supported by the death scene which signifies 'birth and renewal', the Palestinians' recognition of their collective desire and their unity in relation to the goal of a free Palestine, despite their diverse beliefs and values.

Abū Šābir's home is the chronotopic space of his internal life. He is constantly living in crisis or what Bakhtin defines as the 'threshold' element. He is unemployed because of his injury, struggling to get compensation and feels indebted to his wife. The significance of Usāmah's visit to him, and the meaningful look that Abū Šābir's little girl gives him, is highly carnivalised. In the sense that they permit a hidden side of human nature to express itself, it awakens a feeling of guilt in Usāmah. This scene merits further investigation in the light of Bakhtin's argument that "The behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property)."<sup>41</sup> This can be interpreted on two levels: the external, where it reminds him of all the new Palestinian generations who suffer miserable conditions and the prospect of an insecure future, and the internal, where it symbolises the subjugated Palestinian land and its neglect or abuse both by its own people and by the occupier:

" Usāmah pushed open the creaking wooden door and they found themselves in a small, paved courtyard [...] a little girl of about four sat on the filthy ground to the right of the bucket[...] she looked up at the three men, her gaze resting on Usāmah. Her long stare surprised him and made him ill at ease. He tried to cover his

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<sup>40</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>41</sup>M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 123.

embarrassment by gazing around him; filth and poverty were apparent everywhere. His nose was filled with the stench of decomposition and decay [...] was this the gaze of a child? Why do children lose their innocence? Why is she hostile to me? It's as if she knows!"<sup>42</sup>

Khalīfah's language here is loaded with expressive terms – filth, decay, stench – which represent the super-conscience of the character. This discourse represents a version of Bakhtin's language of pathos which gives a textual space for human nature to reveal itself and for the reader to reflect on it. However, regarding Usāmah's guilt, M. 'Abdul Ghanī suggests in *Self Criticism in the Palestinian Novel*<sup>43</sup> that it is a feature shared by most Palestinian writers, whether male or female. He observes that guilt is a persistent feature of the work of different generations of Palestinian writers, and it is usually explored through a character. Thus, Usāmah resonates the author's voice of wisdom, reflecting the idealistic person within every Palestinian who wishes to fulfil his people's hope of retaining their land. Usāmah finds the image of this young girl unforgettable, and his glimpses of her in the next chapter are associated with sadness, agony and ambivalence. He goes even further, speculating that the little girl might have read his mind and know his intentions against those who worked in Tel Aviv, her father being one of them.

Throughout the novel, women are limited to certain spatial boundaries, such as the home. Umm Şābir is portrayed as staying in her house most of the time. She is in a state of crisis, weeping over the loss of Abū Şābir's fingers and trying to sustain her family. Her only excursion is to visit the grocery shop nearby. Similarly, Sa'diyah is portrayed as staying at home, preoccupied with her internal life. Even when Zuhdi comes back from prison she is unaware of his arrival:

“When he reached his own neighbourhood the meat and vegetable sellers let out screams of surprise and delight and shouted upstairs to his wife; but she, oblivious to the outside world, was busy having her weekly bath. The steam and noise of the primus stove filled the

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<sup>42</sup> *Al-Sabbar*, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Shams al-Dīn Pasha. “The Palestinian and criticism”. From 'Abdul Ghanī. Mustāfa. *Self-Criticism in the Palestinian Novel. Ebdā'*. p.148.

small bathroom.”<sup>44</sup>

In a scene reminiscent of the harem, Sa'diyyah is taking a bath and 'oblivious to the outside world', an image that signifies her passivity and indulgence in domestic affairs through the imagery of 'enclosure and escape.' It serves as a spatial metaphor for the limitations imposed on women by society. This according to Gilbert and Gubar, symbolises the artist's despair at the spiritual constrictions of the home, "literally confined to the house, figuratively confined to a single 'place,' enclosed in parlors and encased in texts, imprisoned in kitchens and enshrined in stanzas."<sup>45</sup> This chronotope portrays the writer's innermost feelings of rebellion against the limitations set upon women.

### **Decay & Dislocation**

In an article dealing with the literary context of the Palestinian writer Emīl Ḥabībī, Akram F. Khāṭir observes:

“It is rare to find laughter in the works of modern Arab poets or novelists. The reality of military or political defeat, social decay and dislocation – both physical and psychic – overwhelm and permeate modern Arabic literature to an oppressive extreme. It is as if laughter particularly from a sense of irony, has become an illegitimate or untenable response to the problems of the Arab world. Indeed, the literary response to these crises has generally been either bleak social realism or self-involved individual alienation from society and its problems and failures... Emīl Ḥabībī is one of the few writers who prefer to laugh. From the same existentialist questions that have produced angst in the writings of Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā, Ghassān Kanafānī, and Eliās Khourī, Ḥabībī extracts laughter; from the pain he pulls out humour; from the maladies he produces satire.”<sup>46</sup>

This highlights the main trends within Palestinian literature, where alienated writers either respond bleakly to their oppressive reality or, as is the case with Ḥabībī, face

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<sup>44</sup> *Al-Sabbār*, p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Akram F. Khāṭir, Emīl Ḥabībī: “The Mirror of Irony in Palestinian Literature”, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, xxiv (1993) p. 75.

reality with a sense of humour, sarcasm and irony. Saḥar Khalīfah's *al-Ṣabbār* also mobilises the two latter literary techniques sarcasm and irony to considerable effect.

If the fundamental structure of this novel involves a binary arrangement, then the ironic scenes are based on contradiction. For example, when 'Ādil realises that it was Usāmah who murdered the Israeli officer, he thinks to himself, "My cousin kills a man and I carry off his daughter."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the narrator draws an ironic analogy between the city of Tel Aviv and New York: "The Shalom tower a reminder of its debt to the Empire State Building."<sup>48</sup> The resemblance between the two towers can be analysed with reference to 'Psychology and the Root of Designs',<sup>49</sup> which defines the intellectual system of ideas about art and architectural design as both cultural, combining religious and aesthetic sensitivity, and social. These observations can be valuably related to the transformation period through which Israel is also going, formed as it was from a multi-cultural population which has settled in Palestine since the earlier twentieth century. One would have to understand the Israelis' need to reproduce a familiar environment. Similarly, Zuhdī expresses his fascination with the other 'Ādil who shared the prison cell with him. He thinks to himself, "He's got a sharp mind and a hand that can split a head open without even using a wrench."<sup>50</sup> Zuhdī's fascination stems from the fact that he split open the head of Shlomo, an Israeli co-worker, for mocking the Arabs. This opposition of characters and events helps to emphasise the gap between the educated elite and the uneducated workers in the West Bank, and culminates in Zuhdī developing severe constipation in prison:

"This 'Ādil tells me, 'one's life is expendable in the cause of one's country.' For the cause of one's life, the country's expendable! You said that. Was it or was it Marx? I can't remember. My stomachache makes my head hurt and my headache makes my stomach hurt. The two have come together, and my constipation has become a common denominator, uniting two opposites."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Al-Sabbar*, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph L. Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-6.

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 176.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140

The analogy between kidney pain and the labour of childbirth is significant, as it becomes a metaphor for the stalemate in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as when Usāmah confronts ‘Ādil and accuses him of collaborating with the occupiers:

“Drunk! Which one of us isn’t? Some of us get high on the resistance. Some of us on the glories of warfare. And we get high on kidney pains, yes, they really hurt, even worse than birth pangs. But labour pains are at least followed by a birth.”<sup>52</sup>

Related to this is obscenity in literary texts, and Marina Stagh, in her book *The Limits of Freedom of Speech*, names obscenity, blasphemy and political opposition as the three famous taboos: “moral values and limits of tolerance are subjected to the shifts of public opinion, maybe not the population at large, so much as of urban intellectuals. What was considered highly offensive to public decency in the Anglo-Saxon world just some decades ago, is today looked upon as rather harmless and accepted by the great majority, while, to some extent, the reverse holds true for Egypt.”<sup>53</sup> This echoes Bakhtin’s “carnivalistic category of *profanation*: carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringing down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body. Carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings.”<sup>54</sup> Khalīfah adapts these ideas in this novel to produce the desired effect of foregrounding the results of socio-hierarchical inequality. This is a noticeable trait in her writing, and she particularly shares common ground with Emīl Ḥabībī in exceeding the limitations of religious taboo. For example, the novel opens with a religious violation, where the Koranic verses are twisted to serve the writer’s mode of sarcasm. Here it reflects the predominant feeling of the Palestinians, who are unsure of their situation in the present and future:

“The pine forests of Jirzīm, of al-Tur, of Ram-Allah. Pine trees, prickly pears, almonds, grapes, figs, olives. Mount Sinai and that

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>53</sup> M. Stagh, *The Limits of Freedom of Speech: Prose Literature and Prose Writers in Egypt under Nāṣir and Sadāt* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis, 1993) pp. 127-9.

<sup>54</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 123.

‘peaceful land’ that had never known peace. No; perhaps it had, once. A land of milk and honey, the ‘Promised Land’.”<sup>55</sup>

Here the writer juxtaposes the Koranic verses of the ‘peaceful land’ and the Talmud’s ‘promised land’, as if she is lost between the two and is confused about which one to believe. In another incident ‘Adil talks deliriously about freedom, to which all Palestinians aspire in their own different way. Yet it is noticeable how hopeless he is at this point, with his family obligations and his disagreement with Usāmah about risking his family’s welfare for the national cause. He looks sarcastically at Usāmah, who enjoys the luxury of dreaming of something like freedom. He compares the Palestinian’s dream of freedom to *Leilat al-Qadr*, the night during Ramadan when most Muslims await the granting of God’s mercy; in other words, he thinks it is impossible and will certainly not take place now:

“Freedom? What freedom? Further away than *Leilat al-Qadr*, the night of angelic revelation and peace when the skies are rent apart. Doesn’t the Koran say: ‘How will you know which the night it is? On that night the angels and the Holy Spirit will come down to earth.’ Yes, and the angels will smile. Nuwwār smiles too. Smiles at the future, at the unknown, at hope without end. But hope like that’s simply absurd.”<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the narrator gives the situation an ironic ‘sideward glance.’ For example, when Usāmah returns to his homeland, he reflects on the landscape happily, but the narrator states “But he was now a prisoner in the genie’s bottle”<sup>57</sup>; in other words, ‘the prisoner of his own desires.’ The narrator comments on Zuhdī’s attitude towards other prisoners who perceive him at first as a spy, “He is silent, just like the Lebanese border tanks.”<sup>58</sup>

The Syrian prisoner tells the other prisoners about his dream of seeing the face of a child, an incident in which Khalīfah blends symbolism with metaphor. The child’s face was at that point an illusion representing the hope that internal Palestinian

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<sup>55</sup> *Al-Sabbār*, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

conflict would cease, to which the mulberry incident also metaphorically alludes. Therefore the boy represents the obstacle with which the dreamer must come to terms. In this context, the boy, whose name is Niḍāl and is said to be his son, bears a birthmark on his face. He symbolises the struggle of the country and its shame, an emotion that can be interpreted on two levels. Firstly, it can be seen to represent the shame of the Arabs at not fighting fiercely to retain their lands (Palestine, the Golān Hights); secondly, it can be read as the shame of the Palestinians who fight over material things:

“I see the face of a child I don’t know, the Syrian replied. ‘ They say he’s my son. His name’s Niḍāl. I imagine his cheek with a red birthmark the size of a mulberry. He must have one. It’s an old story, one I’ve never forgotten. We were out walking in the Ṣalḥiah quarter in Damascus, and my wife Izzdihār, was in the first months of her pregnancy. A tall mulberry tree hung over the path from behind the wall of a villa. It was the red Damascene variety. Izzdihār asked me to pick her a berry, so the child wouldn’t have a birthmark on his face to spoil his appearance. So I picked up a stone and threw it at the tree. At that moment, the owner of the villa peered out from behind the wall and began swearing at me. Izzdihār took my hand and said that it wasn’t worth fighting over a berry.’”

‘Ādil, replies:

‘This story illustrates many things. You’re here in prison now for the sake of that man who owned the mulberry tree and the villa. You offered your life to defend his interests, whereas he begrudged you a single mulberry. Do you see what I mean.’<sup>59</sup>

The reader is offered an analysis, the characters’ interpretation of a narrative. This foregrounds for the reader the act of reaching, the meaning, the decoding of what the author has encoded: a collaborative exercise. ‘Ādil’s reply to the Syrian sums up the conflict and class division among the Palestinians. It implies that the poor are always exploited by the authorities and the privileged class. The commoners in such countries thus become either prisoners or martyrs. Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*,

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<sup>58</sup> The Arabic version of *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p.142.

observes that daydreaming is not a simple operation, but involves mechanisms of interpretation that link this wish-fulfilment fantasy with realism, desire and history.<sup>60</sup> Through this symbolic text Khalīfah realistically portrays the rift between the PLO and the Palestinians on the one hand, and between the elite and the working classes, who should be co-operative and united in such circumstances but squabble over trivialities (a mulberry) on the other. She is expressing an implied collective desire of unity between the Palestinians that would result in the empowerment of their cause.

Khalīfah foregrounds the decoding of a text's encoded meanings once again when she draws another ironic image of the situation of stalemate in Palestine through Abū Sālīm, who asks Zuhdī to read his letter to him in prison. Here, the calves are a metaphor for the three Palestinian revolutionary fronts. Elizabeth McKee observes: "The premature demise of the suckling calves represents the disappointing failure of all three organisations to make any real progress towards a satisfactory settlement."<sup>61</sup>:

"Zuhdī began the letter, with its news of the village, while the old man sighed and shook his head.

'...and we'd like you to know that Mas'ūdah's given birth to a white calf...'

Zuhdī's eyes opened wide. Mas'ūdah's given birth to a calf?

Mas'ūdah's the cow. Go on.

As Zuhdī read on, he smiled for the first time since he'd been in prison: 'We're delighted to tell you that your daughter-in-law Munīrah's had a boy. We've named him after you.'

The peasant nodded proudly. 'A boy at last, after five girls,' he said. 'Would you believe it? Do you have any children?'"<sup>62</sup>

Elizabeth McKee's analysis can be disputed on the basis of Bakhtin's Rabelaisian 'death and birth' images present in the same scene, which signify hierarchical change and renewal through Abū Sālīm's delight at the news of his daughter-in-law Munīrah's birth. Therefore, the death of the calves as opposed to the birth of the boy can be interpreted as prophetic of a still nascent national uprising.

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<sup>60</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 181-2.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth McKee, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>62</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, pp.129-130.

## Racism, Occupation and the Palestinian Crisis

Racism and oppression are the two main backdrops to events in Khalīfah's novels. These two experiences stem from the accretions of history and the Palestinians' daily endurance of interrogations, imprisonment and torture. Khalīfah articulates this predicament by highlighting the linguistic gap between the two, when Usāmah first arrives at the barracks and the Israeli soldier interrogates him:

“ ‘Why did your mother move to Shekem?’ ‘She likes Nāblus.’ ‘Why does she like Shekem?’ ‘She’s got lots of relatives in Nablus’... ‘Where’ve you travelled over the past five years? To Algeria?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Why Algeria?’ ‘You charge customs duty on Algeria too?’ ‘What was that?’ ‘Nothing.’”<sup>63</sup>

The internal polemical discourse is a theme which crops up frequently in daily Arab-Israeli communication, besides the abusive language. This play on words, to which Khāṭir refers in his critique of Emīl Ḥabībī's work, is also relevant in Khalīfah's *al-Sabbār*. It reflects this society's bewilderment and lack of homogeneity. The communication between the Jews and the Arabs underlines the persistent problem of inequality and injustice; it is the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed, which carries many political and social implications. This is evident in Usāmah's interrogation at the border by the Israeli soldier who insists on calling the Arab city Nablus by a Hebrew name, Shekem. Here Khaīlfah uses language to construct a picture of life in Israel, by playing on words and pronunciations. Akram Khāṭir explains, “this is a language replete with irony. It is the irony of mistake, which is inherent in the duality of a Palestinian-Israeli's identity, as well as that of a confused society to which he or she belongs. On another level, the play on words, pronounced differently by the oppressor and the oppressed – hints at the political impotence of Palestinians living in Israel when it equates being counted in the census of the state with castration. It is this impotence against a dominant political structure which feeds and nourishes the confusion in the lives of Palestinians living in Israel.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>64</sup> Khāṭir, *op. cit.*, p.86.

Similarly, Zuhdī is imprisoned when he knocks Shlomo on the head at the factory after his mockery of the Palestinians. Because of the Beysān bombing operation in which two Israeli soldiers and a woman were killed, Shlomo starts to bully Zuhdī about what has happened by saying “Terrorists! *Aravim muloukhlakhim!*”<sup>65</sup> Zuhdī’s violence can be analysed through Bakhtin’s observation: “When for a variety of reasons, social pressures and conflicts cannot be translated into a coherent language or even ideology, they may find expression by other means: as ‘nonsensical’ ruptures in the normal language of society, or as a turning away from language altogether, to retreat into silence or resort to physical force.”<sup>66</sup>

Khalīfah avoids self-pity in her account of the conflict within the different social classes of Palestinians, and within the PLO, which is bluntly criticised for its ‘short sightedness’. Here, Usāmah reproaches ‘Ādil for abandoning the resistance movement and for working in the Israeli factories. It is through their discussion that the reader comes to understand the difference between ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’: the problem for the Palestinians living in both the Occupied Territories and externally, earning their living whilst asking others to resist the occupiers:

“ ‘The only way I can take it is that you, like everyone else here, have abandoned the revolutionary movement. Our people abroad have noticed this, and they write about it all the time now.’

‘Write about it, do they? Let them live the way we live here, then we’d see what sort of problems came up.’[...]

‘Who are you talking about? The Palestinians in Kuwait, Dhahran and the Gulf? Let them help build industries in the West Bank and Gaza and we’d stop working “inside” straight away. But they won’t do that. You know why? Because they don’t want to risk their money; yet they want *us* to bear all the burdens of risk and sacrifice on our own.’

‘Yes, Usāmah agreed. And that’s exactly what we have to do. It’s we who are responsible for resistance, us first and last.’

‘And if we strive, how can we resist?’

‘Hunger will make revolution explode. Usāmah stopped.

‘Why are you smiling? It’s a well-known theory. Don’t you understand?’

<sup>65</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 112. (*Muloukhlakhim*: ‘dirty’ in Hebrew. The expression ‘dirty Arabs’ is a common racist epithet).

<sup>66</sup> Ken Hirschkop and David Shehed (eds), *op.cit.*, pp. 18-9.

‘And these “people” you talk about, do they go hungry? Look, friend, those people pile up their cash, and buy stocks and bonds and real estate in Beirut and Europe.’<sup>67</sup>

Khalīfah portrays the different strata of Palestinian society by articulating the social and economic gap between the bourgeoisie and the working class, the ‘us’ against ‘them’, an important discursive method in portraying such division. She attempts to form a *Weltanschauung*, or an individual social attitude through such descriptions. This feature appears in most of her novels; for example, in her criticism of the affluent Palestinians, or those who are undermining the resistance by working in Israel. They are not improving the situation because, as the French revolution shows, hunger and starvation brings about change and not vice versa.

The songs in this novel are internally dialogised; in other words, they are revelatory and prophetic. As Bakhtin observes, “These descriptive and expressive means that are direct and poetic retain their direct significance when they are incorporated into such a figure, but at the same time they are ‘qualified’ and ‘externalised,’ shown as something historically relative [...] They illuminate the world and are themselves illuminated.”<sup>68</sup>:

“Mountain, greet the plain and the valley.  
Greet the trees that line the flanks of my country.  
Though the enemy harvests our fields,  
I will seed the ground again with my sons.”<sup>69</sup>

These lines demonstrate a unity between the physical reality of the (male) person and the actual land, ground or earth of the nature perceived here as female and fertile, the mother earth or motherland. The novel hardly needs female characters, because the very soil of the motherland itself is female. These lines show a belief in the importance of a resistance movement with the help of a completely new cadre of women and children. As Bakhtin has observed there is a ‘unity’, a self-reflectivity,<sup>70</sup> between the author’s language and the poem. However, on other occasions, these

<sup>67</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, pp. 98-9.

<sup>68</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

poems convey a stronger sense of the Palestinians' misery, such as when prisoners unite to sing the national anthem:

“No, we’ll not die, but we’ll  
Uproot death from our land.  
There, over there, far, far away  
The soldiers will bear me, my friends, casting me into the evil  
gloom.  
They searched my room, brother,  
But they found only books  
And my little brothers, starved and weak.  
They woke them up with their kicks  
And lit up anger in their eyes.  
My mother gave a long groan  
And my brothers screamed around them,  
Each with a son in gaol.  
And still my father’s face appears  
Before me, arming me with hope.”<sup>71</sup>

The anthem here registers the folkloric songs that define the Palestinians' identity and their misery and oppression at the hands of the Israelis. The dominant image created in this poem is of the younger brothers being 'starved and weak', while the anger of the line 'And lit up anger in their eyes' is that reproduced by racism and oppression. This ignites further violence in the young boys' eyes.

### **The Silent Emergence of New Female Identities**

In this novel Khalīfah utilises patriarchal female stereotypes as a means to highlight flaws in the totally homosocial economic world. As observed by Elizabeth McKee: “it is in the gaps and silences of women’s voices that Khalīfah makes her most powerful criticism of the homosocial economy of violence that infects the entire novelistic world [with] its contagion.”<sup>72</sup> This can be seen when the woman at the border crossing screams and wails at the Israeli officer, begging him to allow her not to pay the duty on some trivial clothes. The significance of her presence in the novelistic world is that it shows the chasm between Usāmah’s idealism and reality. He mocks her: “Effendi? Effendi! She called him! Usāmah almost reached out to slap the woman’s black-

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<sup>71</sup>*Al-Šabbār*, p.120.

swathed head.”<sup>73</sup> The subversion of female characters in the novel is therefore intended to deconstruct Palestinian patriarchal hierarchies by revealing the male’s inability to sustain the political, social and economic situation. The female presence is felt throughout the novel in the background of events and characters: she is the woman of wisdom who boards the taxi and is suspected of being a courier for the resistance movement; she is a fighter, like Līnah, or the girl tortured at the border; she is the self-sacrificing mother Umm Şābir, who sustains family life when Abu Şābir is unemployed because of his injury:

“Beating her breast in frenzy, Umm Şābir screamed, ‘His right hand? Oh no, I can’t stand it!’

She began pacing quickly between kitchen and bathroom, bathroom and bedroom, bedroom and kitchen. In the middle of a room filled with various ill-assorted bits of furniture, she came to a halt and began moaning, ‘How will we eat? How will we eat?’

‘Ādil tried to console her. ‘God will provide, Umm Şābir’

The woman paid no attention to his words, though she was staring at him in uncontrolled terror as she beat her breast: ‘We couldn’t believe it when he found a job that gave us enough to live on. You have been struck by the evil eye, Abu Şābir! [...] if only it was my hand and not yours!’”<sup>74</sup>

The image of Umm Şābir epitomises submission and bewilderment at what life will be like with Abu Şābir out of work. The male is perceived as a superior and a provider for the family, thus confirming the female’s domesticity, and also as occupying the wilderness. The spatial imagery of the house further emphasises this point which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, conveys “the equally uncomfortable spatial option of expulsion into the cold outside”<sup>75</sup> Umm Şābir’s fear is manifested in her hallucination and in the descriptive narrative. Through such images and events Khalīfah is throwing a stone into a pool and seeing how the ripples spread. For example, Umm Şābir sustains her familial responsibility, thus revealing the weakness of the male and deconstructing the phallogocentric world. This recurring theme emphasises Khalīfah’s

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Mckee, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>73</sup> *Al-Şabbār*, p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>75</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman In The Attic*, p. 86.

feminist inclinations and her attempts to transform her society and convince Palestinians that women may have another role.

In addition, the woman is a housewife like Sa'diyyah, who is a symbol of security, motherhood and subjugation, but it is worth noting the sense of ridicule in the representation of this character at this stage:

“ ‘My wife Sa'diyyah heard it on the radio, on Woman's Hour. So she started cooking lentils in all kinds of ways – lentils with stock, lentil soup with carrots and chard, lentils in their pods and out of them. And then *mujaddarah*,<sup>76</sup> oh how we've eaten *mujaddarah*! Till it blew us out like balloons. I begged her to ease off, but she didn't take any notice [...] Finally I had to threaten to divorce her if she didn't keep lentils out of the house for an entire year.”<sup>77</sup>

This scene is internally dialogised, signifying the Palestinian woman's peripheral role on the one hand and her immense domesticity. It can be juxtaposed to another, when Zuhdī is in prison and daydreams about her cooking:

“Food, a bed, a woman. Sa'diyyah's thighs shine in my memory like the sands of Haifa harbour. And here I sit in prison, listening to heroic anthems and squirming with desire for a dish of hot lentil soup!”<sup>78</sup>

Both Zuhdī and Bāsil are portrayed as eager to fulfil their basic desires for food, sex and bed during their time in prison. Many scenes depict their longing for the female as object of desire. These can be related to the 'voyeuristic' objectification of the female, and the psychoanalytic conception of the 'look', discussed by Sartre as well as others [Lacan, Freud, Kristeva and Barthes]. The 'look' is reduced within patriarchy to that of the masculine and the phallic, objectifying the subject. No longer is it for itself but for others. Freud analyses the desire / drive to look on the basis of the binary opposition of passive / active, which gives the male mastery over the world. This theory is useful in this context because it reveals the intensified suppression of the

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<sup>76</sup> A dish made of lentils and rice or cracked wheat.

<sup>77</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p.45.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Palestinian male in prison, as well as his feeling of facticity which he can transcend only by transmuting desires into daydreaming. This idea is confirmed by Sartre: "It would be a pure flight from facticity toward other possibles. [...] Everyone is aware that there is a great abyss between sexual desire and other appetites."<sup>79</sup>

Generally, Khalīfah reverts to a purely male perspective in her representations of women. This can be explained by the fact that women were constrained in this part of the world to just such roles; and by remembering that the novel is a variation of *al-adab al-multazim*, committed didactic literature, popular in the 1950s, which saw the world as polarised between a number of opposites. However, in the 1970s and after the defeat of the Arabs in 1967, a more refined sense of social realism emerged, which attempted to echo reality more subtly. These factors over-determine Khalīfah's tendency to represent women in *al-Ṣabbār* from a distinctly male point of view, as they were in that part of the world, at that time, living in the harsh conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank. This leaves the image of the selfless woman presented here to conform to Gilbert and Gubar's 'angel in the house':

"God protect you, Sa'diyyah ! ḥamādah's still young. It would be easier if he were Ṣābir's age. Despite the cool breeze, he was dripping with sweat. Hooray for the sand-storms of Kuwait! Do you believe me, 'Ādil al-Karmī, my brother? I swear by all that's holy that sitting in the Humūz café's worth more than the whole world..."<sup>80</sup>

Women are stereotyped as 'passive, helpless, or shallow', a purely patriarchal image, or evil and angelic, passive and active, selfish and selfless. Khalīfah uses these patriarchal images of the angelic Sa'diyyah, the helpless Nuwwār and 'devilish' Umm Ṣābir the eavesdropper, who are the most important female characters in the sub-textual world of *al-Ṣabbār*. This discourse helps to reveal the erroneousness of this homosocial order which marginalises women and gives them only a peripheral space in society. This point, however, calls into question the notion that despite the

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<sup>79</sup> J.P Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>80</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p. 183.

marginalisation of women in the text, their own voices were strongly heard as fighters. This is something that the author intentionally wants the reader to acknowledge, as it reflects the reality of women's preoccupation in the resistance movement.

However, one cannot ignore the fact that Khalīfah offers a realistic image of the male by not placing him in a strong and powerful position. On the contrary, she represents men as either weak or vulnerable, as is the case with 'Ādil al-Karmī, who is torn between two desires: to fulfil his dreams of having a proper job or to serve the cause of a 'free Palestine'. 'Ādil's weakness is most evident when Usāmah reproaches him for becoming materialistic and working in the Israeli factories:

“ I don't know how to begin, but you know that the way you're acting is wrong. What would people say about us, 'Ādil? Don't you see you're setting a bad example to the other men? And what if your father found out that your working over there, in Israel, like a common labourer? Have you thought of that? I tell you, he'd prefer to die a thousand deaths rather than see his son sink as low as this... You weren't born to do this kind of work. Not just because you're furthering the enemy's interests, but because you're qualified for better things. Speak, 'Ādil, say something, defend yourself. Tell me honestly, are you content with what you're doing? ”<sup>81</sup>

Earlier in the novel, the woman 'in the back seat' ridicules Usāmah and all male passengers with their clichés. She is the voice of wisdom, who implies the secret existence of a movement in the West Bank. She warns them: “But keep your mouth shut and leave some tracks wherever you go.”<sup>82</sup> Significantly, this scene further exposes the flaws of patriarchy. However, this woman seems to be part of a pattern in Khalīfah's novels, carrying a meaningful undercurrent about the unaccredited role of the Palestinian woman in the resistance movement. She is portrayed as someone who belongs to the underground, to the facticity of the female as opposed to the transcendence of the male.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

## The Mother: a Preserver of Patriarchy

The mother is represented as a model of old conventions who restrains the female character. She is represented negatively, and the modern female character rebels against her. In *al-Šabbār*, Nuwwār is very remote from her mother. She is a passive girl in love with the freedom fighter Šāliḥ al-Šafadī. Belonging to the feudal al-Karmī family, she knows that it is impossible for them to marry, so she keeps her love affair a secret from the rest of her family, even from her mother. Nuwwār is utterly dissociated from her mother due to her fear of the old social conventions which would force her to marry someone else. The truth is revealed when someone proposes to her and Bāsil, in a shocking manner, tells the family about her love for Šāliḥ. Here, Nuwwār demonstrates her passivity. She cannot face her family and Bāsil has to act on her behalf after begging her uselessly to announce it herself. She is obliged to reveal her secret and announces that she will only marry Šāliḥ:

“ Then, without warning, he heard himself speaking solemnly. Slowly. As though reading a formal statement, he said, Nuwwār al-Karmī loves Šāliḥ al-Šafadī, but won't admit it. She's promised to wait for him as long as he's in prison. That's assuming the occupation ends, she plans to marry him no matter what all of you say. And most of all, no matter what her father says' Nuwwār moaned, from the depths of her soul. 'Bāsil [...]' She cried out in anguish [...]' Nuwwār al-Karmī loves a freedom fighter. But I don't know how any freedom fighter loves a spineless girl like Nuwwār al-Karmī [...] Her father stared at her in amazement. 'So it's true, then?' he muttered.

'One hundred percent true,' answered Bāsil indifferently.

Nuwwār jumped to her feet and burst out, 'Yes, yes! I will marry him! I won't marry anyone but Šāliḥ ... even if I have to wait a hundred years, I'll only marry Šāliḥ.' »<sup>83</sup>

The last sentence signifies Nuwwār's aberration from the maternal and the conventions it represents. She is no longer living in her mother's shadow. One might anticipate that this marks a turning point in Nuwwār's character, yet in the sequel she remains the same fragmented and undeveloped person. However, the insignificance of the al-Karmī mother's existence can be seen as repressed by the overpowering

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<sup>83</sup> *Al-Šabbār*, pp. 199-200.

personality of the patriarchal father figure. She is recognised by the narrator as a domesticated figure, who appears on the scene only to say that 'dinner is ready',<sup>84</sup> or is portrayed as busy with her cooking. She is the keeper of the father's authority, complaining that some familial issues, like Nuwwar's admission that she loves Ṣāliḥ, may disturb him. The mother's reaction marks her subjugation to the father. As she sobs, she starts blaming her children for what may happen to their father: "You'll have to account to God for what you've done, Bāsil," she cried plaintively. "Have you lost your mind? I'm ruined, finished."<sup>85</sup> She sees her existence as entirely dependant on the father's, which emphasises the fact that the role of the mother in the 'Third World' is worthy of separate consideration. It is far from the image of individuality and selfhood noticeable in western feminist theories and in the white South African mothers who are reliable decision makers in the family, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Her weakness, however, is a threat to the family and especially to Nuwwār. It is significant nevertheless to see that the grandmother has the strength and power to stand in opposition to the father figure, by mentioning Usāmah, whom she believes is suitable for Nuwwār. This point corresponds to 'Third World' feminist theory, which suggests that mothers acquire power by producing, raising and educating men.<sup>86</sup> The grandmother therefore has authority over the father just as the al-Karmī mother does over her sons.

The collective identity of women and sisterhood is often understood as the outcome of suffering and pain. Women relate to each other and pull together when they are under oppression of any kind. This is clear in *al-Ṣabbār* even though the female presence is subverted by that of the male, which occupies the main textual space of the novel. Nevertheless, one can detect this through the female dialogue, such as when they are threatened by the curfew orders in Nablus:

"All over the old part of the town, the women gathered at their windows trying to borrow whatever they could from each other. The situation was desperate. Most of those who lived in the old

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-1.

<sup>86</sup> Ania Loomba, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

neighbourhood were labourers, greengrocers, butchers, or sellers of *falāfil* and *tamriyyah*; they were generally poor and kept nothing in store... 'God is most great!' repeated the neighbours in unison. Gathered at the windows, the women raised their voices in loud ululations, while the girls continued to beat out a rhythm on the empty tin cans. A single piercing girlish voice began the song of solidarity once again."<sup>87</sup>

This scene shows the women's solidarity which can be seen, according to Bakhtin, as belonging to the dialogism of the oppressed, the 'Us' of Palestinian women against the 'Them' of the occupiers.<sup>88</sup> This signifies the women's collective subjection both to patriarchy and to the occupiers. Women in this scene are united by shared experience and rituals, not only because they are part of a sub-culture but under an economic and political cause. In these conditions, domestic duties such as providing food bring them closer together.

This solidarity may also take another form, as when Umm Şābir witnesses the slaughter of the Israeli officer. Here the position of the reader is one of sympathy and identification with the officer's wife and his daughter, whom Umm Şābir covers with her own veil:

"Umm Şābir's eyes met those of the Israeli woman; she seemed to be both begging for help and screaming in pain. Involuntarily, something was shaking the locked doors of Umm Şābir's heart. She softened and responded to the woman's unspoken plea. 'God have mercy on you!' she muttered.

And the sight of the little girl, lying there on the pavement with her legs exposed up to the crotch, made Umm Şābir think of her own girls, of all the little girls. She took off her veil and covered the girl's naked thighs, murmuring as she bent over the unconscious child, 'I'm so sorry for you, my daughter'."<sup>89</sup>

This scene portrays Umm Şābir's ambivalent feelings of identification with the enemy's wife, regardless of their differences. The Israeli woman's helplessness encourages Umm Şābir to sympathise with her. She covers the girl because it leads

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<sup>87</sup> *Al-Şabbār*, pp. 103.105

<sup>88</sup> Dale Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (eds), *Feminism, Bakhtin, And The Dialogic*, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> *Al-Şabbār*, p. 159.

her to reflect on 'all girls'. Her feeling towards the girl is primarily a sympathy for her own offspring rather than towards the fainting girl herself. Sartre's 'The Us-Objects'<sup>90</sup> suggests that once the oppressors' 'look' has been eliminated, they no longer represent the 'Third' against the 'Us'.

In another scene, Khalīfah again expresses the ambivalent feelings of love and hatred, compassion and envy, between the Israeli woman and Umm Şābir. The former is alienated by the latter, identified as the 'Third', or the oppressor, against the 'Us'. Sartre comments on this process as follows: "In the look of the 'Third', and it is this collective alienation which I assume when saying 'Us.' From this point of view the privileges of the 'Third' and 'our' burdens, 'our' miseries have value at first only as a *signification*; they signify the independence of the 'Third' in relation to 'Us'; they present our alienation to us more plainly."<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the Israeli woman's attempt to shield Muḥammad can be seen as an attempt to transcend her image as oppressor and allow her maternal nature to prevail. Umm Şābir, however, still holds a grudge against her as part of the system who brought destruction not only to her country but also her life:

"The little boy stamped his foot and pointed at a bunch of bananas, but Umm Şābir tugged him away, still keeping an eye on the Israeli woman. She, in turn, was looking at Muḥammad with genuine concern, but her stare sent Umm Şābir into a rage. She slapped the child hard on the back of his head and he cried out. The Israeli woman put out her arm to shield the boy from his mother's blows. 'No, no! That's not nice,' she said in Arabic. 'Not nice'.

Umm Şābir retorts:

"What's my son got to do with you, you slut? Sorry for him, are you? If you're so full of compassion, why don't you ask your husband about my husband's lost fingers?"<sup>92</sup>

This scene relates paradigmatically to the incident between the master and slave in *July's People*, in which Maureen vainly tries to befriend July's people. Although this

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<sup>90</sup> J. P Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-422.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

situation is slightly different, it exposes the master's ignorance of the suppressed feelings caused by a deeper ideological difference, which the affluent and stable Israeli woman cannot fully apprehend. However this incident gives credence to the argument that sisterhood is the outcome of a collective feeling of oppression and suffering. By the same token, the lack of common ground and shared life experience between the two produces no feelings of sorority.

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The end of *al-Ṣabbār* marks the shift in national mood from moderation and materialism to extremism and the reawakening of the national cause, characterised in the novel by the presence of the disorganised militias. It is in this context that 'Adil's personal identity interacts with the collective national identity. The outset of the novel emphasises the ideological gap between him and his cousin Usāmah, who stands in opposition to him both personally and politically, whereas the end reveals 'Adil's assimilation towards him. At this point their differences dissolve, and 'Adil's realisation of the change is symbolically alluded to in the demolition of the Karmī house. The fact that 'Adil does not join any militant movement in *Abbād al-Shams* underlines his individuality, a residue of his bourgeois upbringing. Instead he opts for moderate resistance through working as a journalist and adoption of a Marxist ideology, which, as he sees it, serves the Palestinian cause, and which is perceived by both writers as the only answer to their predicaments. Through such characters Khalīfah reveals the visions of transition in her society. On another level, 'Adil's ideological shifts are analogous to those of Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*, before the latter submits to the political cause, as we will see in the next chapter. Both authors therefore display a tendency to observe history through the personal and private experience of their characters, registering their contradictory thoughts, changes of attitude, ideological persuasion and personality, as a way of showing these characters' maturity and appreciation of political and social obligations at a given historical moment.

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<sup>92</sup> *Al-Ṣabbār*, p.157.

The father figure is dynamically present in *al-Ṣabbār* and *Burger's Daughter*: the Karmī father and Lionel Burger both stand as politically powerful in their own right and are the reason behind 'Adil and Rosa's confusion and shifting ideological inclination. At certain points in their lives 'Adil and Rosa begin to question their fathers' imposition of ideologies on them, ending up at variance with the father's beliefs in 'Adil's case and with reconciliation in Rosa's case. So 'Adil's rejection of his father's bourgeois ideals and his preference for Marxism harmonises with Khalīfah's beliefs and marks a commonality with Gordimer, as will be discussed in the analysis of the following novels. Both writers therefore choose to convey the transition of political consciousness through the different characters and voices in the novels, highlighting their protagonists' troubled consciousness before reaching a political and social compromise. Among the other voices that awaken 'Adil to his political duty is that of his brother Bāsil, who stands in opposition to the father's and 'Adil's beliefs. His presence in the novel serves as an ideological endorsement to that of his cousin Usāmah, just as when the different addressees assist Gordimer's Rosa in reaching a decision in life. Here we might mention the antagonism developed in the novel between Baasie and Rosa, who stands in personal and political opposition to her, and awakens her to the duty of realising her political inheritance.

## Chapter Two

### *Burger's Daughter* (1979)

*Burger's Daughter* revolves around the character of Rosa, the daughter of the political activist and leader, Lionel Burger, who from an early age becomes involved in her father's cause. As she matures, and especially after her father's death, she begins to question her received political and social beliefs, and rebels against those who have always known her as the loyal daughter. The character of Lionel is based on Abram Fischer, one of the most important leaders of the South African Communist Party (SACP).<sup>1</sup> The story of his daughter is, however, entirely fictional and it reflects Gordimer's concern with the issue of the white revolution in South Africa and whether the black people would respond to it positively, amidst the more oppositional and antagonistic attractions of the Black Consciousness Movement which denounced the liberal whites and their collaboration. The theme of *Burger's Daughter* is common to many of Gordimer's novels, concerned as it is with the historical commitment and subjectivity of a protagonist who is torn between the reality of her country and her individuality.<sup>2</sup> Gordimer employs this narrative as part of her commitment to black liberation in South Africa – a commitment which Graham Huggan attributes to the influence of Sartre:

“Commitment: the word harks back to the *littérature engagée* of Sartre, and there are certainly echoes in Gordimer of Sartre's now-famous definition of writing as a ‘certain way of wanting freedom’.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986) p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lying Days* (1953), *Occasion for Loving* (1960), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), and *Burger's Daughter* (1979), these novels revolve around female protagonists who engage in personal struggle with the conflict between their political beliefs and their individualities.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Huggan, “Collector's Art, Collective Action: The Search for Commitment in Nadine Gordimer's Fiction”, in Bruce King (ed.), *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer* (London: The Macmillan, 1993) p. 33.

*Burger's Daughter* is an interrogative novel. The character of Rosa is an intersection of different ideologies that are shaped by various cultures, places and beliefs, which combine to sculpt her subjectivity. Bakhtin's dialogism is therefore employed to reveal this heteroglossic interaction of ideologies and its effect on Rosa:

“Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole—there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others.”<sup>4</sup>

Rosa is engaged in a long process of interrogation of herself and of others, and this form of narrative helps to solve the contradictions of politics, place, race and gender that come with a problematic character like Rosa. It enables the reader to acknowledge the set of values that shape her existence and at times isolate her from others. Rosa's character is moulded by her colonial reality, a reality defined by space, politics and history. John K. Noyes, in *Colonial Space*, links colonial space to the construction of subjectivity, pointing out that, “it is where the space of subjectivity intersects with a socially constructed space that we must seek the subject of colonization.”<sup>5</sup> This relation of space to subjectivity, according to Shirley Ardener, is dependent on both geography and subject: “behaviour and space are mutually dependent...space defines the people in it...people define space.”<sup>6</sup> This enables a reading of the narrative discourse that encompasses both South Africa and the south of France. Gordimer thus focuses on representing not only the colonial female, which in itself is a problematic issue, but also the Communist leader's daughter whose contradictions stem from her ‘place’. This produces an insurmountable tension in Rosa, a contradiction of identity:

“If I'd been black that would at least have given the information I was from Africa. Even at a three-hundred-year remove, a black American. But nobody

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<sup>4</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 426.

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Noyes, *Colonial Space: Speciality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992) pp. 64-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

could see me, there, for what I am back where I come from. Nobody in Paris – except, of course, there’s the cousin.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the novel explores Rosa’s experience once she has acquired the freedom to decide about “being or not being the daughter of Lionel Burger.” The story of Rosa’s search for identity and her selfhood takes her on a journey to Europe, where she contacts her surrogate mother, Lionel’s first wife Katya Bagnelli, and associates with friends who view life differently. As she discovers a completely new world – at times shallow and materialistic – she starts to construct an alternative reading of her own experience.

### **The Conflict of Place and Identity in Rosa**

This novel is essentially a fictional autobiography of Rosa, a white South African woman, focusing on her inner conflict and struggle to find an autonomous identity. This conflict is related to the issue of racism, or the ‘Prospero complex’,<sup>8</sup> an idea which, according to Stephen Clingman,<sup>9</sup> influenced Gordimer at the time. The ‘Prospero complex’, based on a particular reading of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, sees Prospero as a colonial figure whose daughter Miranda suffers from an imaginary attempted rape by Caliban, the colonised subject enslaved by her father. Mannoni argues that the colonial fails to see the black person as an autonomous ‘other’: they have contradictory feelings of fear and desire for other races. Mannoni links the ‘flight’ of the white people to this ‘Prospero complex’:

“What the Colonial in common with Prospero lacks, is awareness of the world of others, a world in which Others have to be respected. This is the world from which the colonial has fled because he cannot accept men as they are. Rejection of that world is combined with an urge to dominate, an urge which is infantile in origin and which social adaptation has failed to discipline. The reason the colonial himself gives for his flight — whether he says it was the desire to travel...or he simply wanted a freer life.—”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 231.

<sup>8</sup> Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The psychology of Colonialism*. Cited by Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986) pp. 107-8.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Clingman, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Frantz Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp.107-8.

Therefore, Rosa's flight to Europe is an escape from commitments or, to borrow Rushdie's phrase, an attempt to 'fly and flee'<sup>11</sup> a result of the fact that she cannot accept the South African situation, which, with the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement, denies any co-operation with the whites. Her sense of place in South Africa is therefore associated with conflict and intolerable historical burdens, resulting in her desire to flee the whole complex situation.

The novel dwells on the inner world of the heroine, corresponding in this respect to Rogers' observation of the importance of the internal to the female writer.<sup>12</sup> The epigraph of the first chapter, a quote from Claude Levi-Strauss: "I am the place in which something has occurred", further highlights this point. This 'place' can refer to the external space outside the prison as well as the internal space of Rosa's body, which is turned inside out when her menstruation coincides with her parents' detention. 'The place' refers to her experience of the intersection of sexual processes and politics; the menstrual blood represents, as Bakhtin argues, the danger issuing from identity (social or sexual). This event emphasises Rosa's identity crisis, emblematic of the white South African's experience. Daphne Read relates the novel's politics of place to the female experience of menstruation, which for her symbolises the dissonance within, and restructuring of, South Africa that will inevitably take place. She cites Elizabeth Meese's statement that, "this particular figuring of the white female body suggests the organic destruction of the white order in South Africa and its sterility, rather than fertility."<sup>13</sup> Thus Gordimer's belief that the black majority should rule South Africa is symbolically expressed.

The novel's narrative technique is based on the use of the first and third person, the alternation between the 'she' and 'I', which informs the structure of the novel and depicts both the inner, subjective world of Rosa and the outer, more objective world. According to Louise Yelin,<sup>14</sup> the novel's partial dialogical structure is created through

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<sup>11</sup> Salman Rushdie. *Shame* (London: Vintage, 1995) p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> J. M. Rogers. *Aspects of The Female Novel* (New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1991) p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Daphne Read, "The Politics of Place in Burger's Daughter", in Bruce King, pp. 121-22.

<sup>14</sup> Louise Yelin, *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Ithaca

the co-existence of Rosa's first-person narrative, which occupies the greater part of the text, with the third-person narrative of the omniscient narrator. In each chapter, the narrative alternates between the second-person 'you' and the first-person 'I' when Rosa addresses a silent interlocutor. Judie Newman argues that this technique allows the reader to mediate between the 'I' of the internal voice, which invites one into 'a secret intimacy', and the 'she' of the external image, which allows the reader freedom to identify with the surrogate other.<sup>15</sup> For example, the 'she' of the external world can be seen through the perspective of the headmistress's report at the beginning of the novel. Here the narrator describes Rosa as the world sees her, while her internal life is still unknown:

"Rosemarie Burger, according to the headmistress's report one of the most promising seniors in the school in spite of the disadvantages — in a manner of speaking — of her family background, came to school the morning after her mother was detained just as on any other day. She asked to see the headmistress and requested to be allowed to go home early in order to take comforts to her mother [...] She displayed 'remarkable maturity'."<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the 'I' of Rosa's internal voice reveals itself to Conrad, who helps to bring the female psychology to the fore and encourages her to talk about herself as an individual. Rosa opens up to him after her father's death, expressing her feelings of oppression and resentment at being Burger's daughter. Such feelings are the result of the pressure on her as a young girl and the fact that her parents never considered her opinion of the political commitments that were thrust upon her. She learns from an early age to suppress her feelings of love, or surprise, because she has been brought up in a manner that encourages secrecy rather than spontaneity. Therefore, when the opportunity of leading a normal life comes along, she takes it:

"Now you are free. The knowledge that my father was not there ever, any more, that he was not simply hidden away by walls and steel grills; this disembowelling childish dolour that left me standing in the middle of them all needing to whimper, howl, while I could say

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and London: Cornell University Press, 1998) p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> Judie Newman, *Nadine Gordimer* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 11.

nothing, tell nobody: suddenly it was something else. Now you are free.”<sup>17</sup>

Rosa’s voice, the expression of her self, carries aspects of both the confessional and the ‘talking cure’. Rosa is constantly addressing someone, whether it be Conrad, her surrogate mother Katya, her father Lionel, or the reader. Each addressee in the novel marks a different stage of her life; throughout these stages Rosa is involved in the constant search for herself, her history and the meaning of her existence. Newman comments on the significance of Gordimer’s use of the addressed ‘you’ in the novel:

“Rosa’s first person narrative is directed to three people, each addressed as ‘you’: Conrad, a surrogate brother with whom she enjoys childish erotic freedom, Katya, a sexually permissive replacement mother, and finally Lionel Burger, the father to whom she eventually returns. ‘You’ is obviously also the reader who is initiated into these three identities.[...]In the novel Gordimer’s narrative technique draws her reader into a tension of freedom, progressing from Conrad’s inner psychological existence to a fresh orientation towards the world of the autonomous other.”<sup>18</sup>

This is a complex technique which gives voice to repressed femininity and the distinct female imagination; the interrogations by Conrad and the intimate conversations with Katya as well as the monologues addressed to Lionel, all give voice to the muted female perspective and help to ‘decolonise’ the female imagination. They also position the reader in relation to the text. The narrative mode provides an outlet for Rosa’s intimate feelings and secrets, and she refers to it overtly at the beginning of the novel:

“One is never talking to oneself, always one is addressed to someone. Suddenly, without knowing the reason, at different stages in one’s life, one is addressing this person or that all the time, even dreams are performed before an audience.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Judie Newman, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>19</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 16.

Through her conversations with Conrad Rosa starts to rebel against her father's political commitments and through her surrogate mother she is brought into the sensual world and becomes Chabaliere's mistress. When she addresses Katya, her words carry an underlying sorrow and a continuous critical appraisal of the latter's life and mentality; for example, she notes her superficiality in deceiving Lionel with someone like Dick:

"You've never asked me why I came and I don't ask that, either. You tell me anecdotes of your youth that could transform my own. Several times I could almost have exchanged in the same way an anecdote about how I used to dress up and visit my 'fiancé' in jail. [...] the little something going on with comrade Dick — what'd he say then? Perhaps he didn't notice. You deceived him because you were not of his calibre; it was your revenge for being lesser. [...] you were made fully conscious of your shortcomings by his not even noticing the sort of peccadilloes you'd console yourself with."<sup>20</sup>

### **Ambiguities in the Novel: the Sudden Return of Rosa**

Gordimer's novels contain both explicit and implicit ways of anticipating future events; they are either mentioned in the text, or hinted at through signs which the protagonist tries to interpret. For example, when Rosa is stopped in France by an old woman who seems very similar to Katya and her friends, Gordimer writes:

"I had met a woman in her nightdress wandering in the street. She was like anyone else: Katya, Gaby, Donna; poor thing, a hamster turning her female treadmill. I remember every detail of that street, could walk it with my eyes shut. My sense of sorority was clear. Nothing can be avoided. [...] No one can defect. I don't know the ideology: It's about suffering. How to end suffering. And it ends in suffering."<sup>21</sup>

Here Rosa avoids any exchange with the woman, upon whom she inscribes her own prejudices. Rosa strips the woman of her history, her voice, her individuality. She is objectified and fetishised into a sign or symbol of useless pain. When Rosa sees the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

old woman wandering in her nightdress in the middle of the night, she realises that suffering is a part of life whether one is in Europe or South Africa. However, to suffer for a noble cause like Burger's, as Rosa sees it, is definitely the right decision, since suffering for the benefit of others is better than the supposedly meaningless, lonely suffering of materialistic women who only value youth, beauty and personal relationships. Gordimer uses this woman's appearance to awaken and express something in Rosa. She wonders whether she can defect from her responsibilities as Lionel Burger's daughter, or indeed from a past which her father saw as noble and meaningful. This incident strengthens her conviction that she will return to her country. Rosa wants to tell Katya about this incident but decides not to, because this woman seems to her, like Katya and her friends, lost within the shallow world of vanity and, paradoxically, youth. Rosa sees Katya as perhaps finding herself one day in a similar situation:

"I came flying up the hill to look for you singing while you upholster an old chair or paint a brave coat of red on your toenails. I wanted to ask who she was and tell you what happened. But when I saw you, Katya, I said nothing. It might happen to you. When I am gone. Someday."<sup>22</sup>

The letter Rosa writes to Madame Bagnelli from prison is another example of the implicit anticipation of events. In it she refers to the reflection of the light coming through the window of the cell, which signifies to her the righteousness of their cause and the hope for a future of equality and freedom in South Africa (the same light is mentioned earlier by Lionel Burger during his time in prison):

"In a passage dealing with the comforts of a cell as if describing the features of a tourist hotel that wasn't quite what the brochure might have suggested — *I have rigged up out of fruit boxes a sort of Japanese-style portable desk...and that's what I'm writing at now* — there was a reference to a water mark of light that came into the cell at sundown every evening, reflected from some west-facing surface outside; something Lionel Burger once mentioned. But the line had been deleted by the prison censor."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

Christian iconography provides a context for this image, which is emblematic of wrongful suffering and of God's blessing of that suffering. The phrase 'water mark' metaphorically reinforces the idea of a seal of righteousness. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Flora Donaldson remarks on Rosa's psychological condition, saying that she looks the same as when she was fourteen years old. This remark, paradoxically, given Rosa's contempt for 'youth', reflects her contentment and happiness at having left the freedom of France and opting instead for political engagement in her own country. It also reflects Rosa's happiness and peace of mind, which are reflected in her appearance and mood. She is as innocent as the young fourteen-year-old Rosa, but "livelier":

"Flora reported that Rosa 'hadn't changed much'. She remarked on this to her husband William. — She's all right. In good shape. She looked like a little girl, I gather Leela Govined or somebody's cut her hair again for her, just to here, in her neck. [...] About fourteen...except that she's somehow livelier than she used to be. In a way less reserved."<sup>24</sup>

The novel is not devoid of ambiguities as when, for example, Rosa expresses her attitude towards Communist Party's activities by refusing to photocopy some political pamphlets brought by her childhood friend Clare. This incident reveals her confusion about the Liberal Party and the communist ideology represented by her father. Rosa tries to convince Clare that the best way to bring about change in the country is to encourage the small minority of white revolutionaries to work with the black majority. She explains that many people must be recruited, including children. There is an irony here, as Rosa has herself suffered the imposition of ideology before. Here she anticipates the success of the Soweto movement in which she has become involved and for which she has been imprisoned:

"The future he [Lionel Burger] was living for until the day he died can be achieved only by black people with the involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries who have solved the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

contradiction between black consciousness and class consciousness, and qualify to make unconditional common cause with the struggle for full liberation...it is necessary for these few to come into the country secretly or be recruited within it... from among the good risks, children, lovers and friends."<sup>25</sup>

This passage reveals the idealism of Rosa's opinions, suggested by the word 'only', which she adopts from her father's position. Her viewpoint incorporates the 'necessity' of the 'imperialist' absolving himself through implementing justice.

The narrative technique of eschewing the plot<sup>26</sup> is pivotal in this novel: no clear explanation is given for Rosa's abrupt decision to leave her lover and Europe and return to South Africa. The decision does not seem to conform to any plot. Bruce King argues that this technique is used by both male and female writers, such as Ibsen, or Shakespeare in his major tragedies, and that it is accompanied by the use of implied subtexts of past and present events, while the narrative is subverted through ambiguities, gaps and interruptions, and the recourse to poetic style.<sup>27</sup> Rosa's sudden return can therefore be interpreted through the novel's web of implied subtexts, of which there are many. While Rosa is in Europe she is an attentive observer of European culture, both present and past, and very aware of the attitude of Katya's friends and her own relationship with Chabaliere. The scene in which she views paintings by Bonnard and a series of tapestries in the Musée de Cluny is particularly informative:

"They looked at paintings.— In Africa one goes to see the people. In Europe, it's pictures. But she was seeing in Bonnard canvases... a confirmation of the experience running within her. The people she was living among, the way of apprehending, of being alive, at the river, were coexistent with the life fixed by the painter's vision. And how could that be?—

In the fifty years between the two paintings, there was the growth of fascism, two wars — the Occupation — and for Bonnard it is as if nothing's happened. Nothing."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce King, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, pp. 286-7.

Here Gordimer reveals the extent to which Rosa remains trapped within her own historical formation, unable to perceive the implications of visual representation. These representations arguably offer the possibility of different historical viewpoints. Rosa sees only a singularity of interpretations determined by the materiality of paint rather than a creative multiplicity. She relates to the lady in the tapestries, who seems to resemble her in many ways. In the first few tapestries, the lady is shown enjoying the pleasures of this represented, symbolic world in its sensuality and beauty. But in the last tapestry, "By My Own Will", she rejects all worldly pleasures, which are symbolised by a jewellery box. This dialectic of representation and interpretation produces a subplot of textual production and evaluation by way of constructing a notion of the self as opposed to the other.

Towards the end of the second chapter, another implicit subtext emerges when Rosa unexpectedly sees Baasie at a party in Europe. He confronts her with her reality, that of not recognising him as an 'other'. He asks her to acknowledge him as Zwelinzima Vulindlela rather than Baasie, the adopted black brother who was a construct in Rosa's mind rather than master of his own identity. His insistence on being called by his real name demonstrates his denial of the Afrikaner identity imposed on him by her father when he was adopted, and forces her to acknowledge him as the 'other', rather than as part of her past. He also accuses her of supporting a system that suppresses black identity. In this light, it is worth citing Newman's explanation for Rosa's return:

"Whereas blacks had never been truly 'other' for her, by the end of the novel Rosa has reached the point where they are objects of neither a mental projection nor of displacement, but exist fully in their own right. This allows her own authentic political re-engagement."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cited by Stephen Clingman, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-4.

## The Novel of Interrogation

Like *‘Abbād al-Shams, Burger’s Daughter* follows Hegel’s dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Thesis here refers to the situation into which Rosa was born, and the political and social commitments forced upon her; antithesis refers to her total rejection of her political inheritance, relationships and place; synthesis is achieved through her final acceptance of her past and her political and social re-engagement. In undergoing these stages, the novel follows a chronologically sequential order: a beginning in which Rosa is an adolescent, a dramatic and difficult climax, which involves suffering and the struggle for a private life, and an end entailing the final re-union with her inheritance. Each chapter starts with an epigraph which encodes the events of the chapter. The opening Lévi Strauss quote—“I am the place in which something has occurred” — signifies Rosa’s preoccupation with feeling objectified in the eyes of others. The epigraph to the second chapter is from Wang Yang-Ming: “To know and not to act is not to know”. This points to Rosa’s awareness that she is abandoning the cause by travelling to Europe. The third chapter is headed by the SACP<sup>30</sup> slogan, “Peace. Land. Bread”, and thus signifies Rosa’s reunion with her father’s political cause.

At the beginning of the novel Rosa is a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl whose parents are political detainees. She is aware of her different status to other girls, and feels set apart. She displays what is seen as ‘great maturity’, especially when she asks her headmistress for permission to leave school to take some things to her mother, Cathy Burger, who has been detained in prison the day before. Throughout, Rosa remembers her abnormal childhood, with parents who exploited her to serve this cause of theirs about which she knew nothing. The novel expresses the heroine’s resentment and condemnation of those parents. As an adolescent, for example, she is sent to visit her father’s colleague, Noel de Witt, in prison, as he has no family. Posing as his fiancée, she takes him books and other provisions, and conveys political messages through seemingly innocent expressions of love. As de Witt had lived with the family, it is quite plausible for Rosa to act as his fiancée. After his release from prison, it is certain

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<sup>30</sup> South African Communist Party.

that he will either be placed under house arrest or banned from political activity, so his escape has to be planned. The job of delivering him an Australian passport, while he is in hiding, falls to Rosa. As she has secretly fallen in love with him, this experience represents a nadir of emotional and mental abuse for her. Here she exists as a sign functioning within a system of exchange which may in itself be neutral, as Levi-Strauss argues, but which has established a value-system for the woman who has become an object, precisely not acting out her own desire [being the subject in the exchange] but another's, [the desire of the father].<sup>31</sup>

The author confronts her female characters with the ideas of objectification and age, to which she refers as 'truth'. Gordimer herself underlines this point: "in the first place, I am a woman. In the second place, women are preoccupied with this, it is part of their sexual roles. From a tender age women have the feeling that they must be accepted physically. But when it comes to men, they are forgiven for the normal changes of aging. Yet, a woman does not forgive herself."<sup>32</sup> Rosa is made to confront the ideology of beauty and aging dominant in twentieth century Western culture. She rejects this ideology and this type of suffering, acquiring insight and personal growth, and decides to suffer for the benefit of others rather than be the object of Chabali's desire. She therefore leaves him, overcoming the inevitable prospect of becoming like Katya and her friends who struggle against age and physical decay. Rosa thus achieves stability and happiness by deciding to return to South Africa, reuniting with her political inheritance and working as physiotherapist in the hospital. However, there are gaps within the subplots of the second and third chapters, while Rosa's sudden return to South Africa in the final chapter is somewhat ambiguous, forcing the reader to fill in the gaps through the implicit signs affecting her decision: the life of Katya and her friends, the tapestry scene and the confrontation with Baasie. These 'gaps' are concealed by recourse to the "proaietic code" which encodes the actions of the narrative, as Roland Barthes explains:

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<sup>31</sup> Levi-Strauss, in Elizabeth Cowie, "a woman as Sign", in *m/f: A Feminist Journal*, no 1, 1978. p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Rose Petterson, *Nadine Gordimer's One Story of a State Apart*. PhD. Thesis (Sweden: Acta University, 1995) p. 149.

“It delimits a textual zone of discrete and multiple sequences: sets of actions that begin and end, continue and stop in time. In fact, since a narrative consists of so much proaietic encoding of simple linear temporality, this code can easily conceal an ellipsis, allowing an event that is not narrated to be inferred from its effect.”<sup>33</sup>

One of these subplots is developed at the beginning of the third chapter when Rosa recalls how she felt when Baasie call her in the middle of the night. She is confronted with black consciousness, and in particular the accusation that the South African whites have taken all the credit for the struggle against the Apartheid system. Up to this point, Rosa felt that it would be possible to stay in Europe, but she now realises that she cannot escape her heritage and that she must fight for her identity:

“I cannot explain to anyone why that telephone call in the middle of the night made everything that was possible, impossible. Not to anyone. I cannot understand why what *he* had to say and his manner — incensed me so.”<sup>34</sup>

The other subplot that requires attention in this regard involves Rosa’s experiences during her visits to the Musée de Cluny. When she looks at the tapestries depicting the five senses and the pleasures of the world, they have a strong effect on her mind and precipitate her return. She realises that she does not want to be like the lady in the tapestry, gazing into a hand-held mirror and seeing only an imaginary world, and rejects the notion of being an object in the eyes of others. She wants to be part of a real world rather than an imagined one and to have a real identity as the subject of her desires:

“there she sits, gazing, gazing. And if it’s time for the museum to close, she can come back tomorrow and another day, any day, days. Sits gazing, this creature that has never been.”<sup>35</sup>

Gordimer confirms the importance of such subplots in her explanation for Rosa’s sudden return to South Africa:

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires (eds.), *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 328.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 341.

“...one thing I think lots of people have missed—the reason why Rosa goes back to South Africa and, ultimately, to prison. It’s not just because she has that terrible midnight telephone call with her former black step-brother, Baasie, and that really brings her nose to nose with reality. It started long before, it started in France, in that village, when she met that woman in the street in her dressing gown, who doesn’t know where she is. And it really hits Rosa that you get old, lonely, dotty. That you suffer. That Katya running from political suffering, has simply postponed what is coming.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Anxieties of ‘Space’ in *Burger’s Daughter***

According to Clingman, “the novel’s major themes concern a challenge to the whole idea of political or historical commitment. Thus along with Marx, who stands behind the text of *Burger’s Daughter* as a kind of symbolic analytical figurehead, are two others: Freud and, less so, Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Given this framework, one can further analyse the symbolic, sexual, existential and political implications of the novel, as these fields manipulate its textual world.

There are various settings in *Burger’s Daughter*. The novel opens with a depiction of two major spaces, South Africa and southern France. The space of South Africa is diverse: Rosa’s father’s Communist house, the black African townships, and the prison. This is space that reinforces racial discrimination and segregation, while the French space is that which nurtures Rosa’s previously suppressed sensuality and sexuality, freeing her from her past burdens. The narrator comments on Rosa’s nurtured sensuality when she is in love with Chabaliel: ‘he stroked away on her eyelids and in the bend of her elbows the years and places that could not exist, his for her, hers for him. Those of the present and immediate past did not seem to have much importance.’<sup>38</sup> Rosa’s spatial confusion is registered in her language, referring to South Africa as “Lionel’s country”, to her house as “that house” and to her father’s colleagues in the Communist Party as the “followers”. In all of these metaphors, the

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<sup>36</sup>Susan Gardner, “A story for this Place and Time: An Interview with Nadine Gordimer About *Burger’s Daughter*.” *Kunapipi* 3.2. 1981: 111.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Clingman, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

writer constructs a detachment for Rosa from her political inheritance as Burger's daughter, and a rejection of her past as the daughter of activist parents who involved her in a political path that was not of her own volition.

The chronotopes, however, create a shift from time to space; at times they are told as Rosa's reflections on certain issues that arose in a certain space in her chronotopic memory. This, according to Bakhtin, is typical of the 'journey' that is "constructed according to the chronotope of memory, by means of the formal chronotopes of prolepsis and analepsis. The way in which these two deviations from a narrative present work imitates and reproduces the logic of memory, so that the reader's 'journey' towards the end of the text does not always proceed straightforwardly."<sup>39</sup> For example, the prison setting functions as the chronotopic space of the 'threshold', a metaphor for Rosa's fantasy and suffering. She talks to Conrad about her visits to her father's friend Noel de Witt in prison, how she posed as his fiancée to bring him political messages disguised as expressions of love, and how she truly fell in love with him:

"Every month I was told what must be communicated in the guise of my loving prison letter. At night sitting up in bed in my old room in that house, smoking cigarettes at that time, not yet eighteen, I rewrote each 500 words again and again.[...]On the night before the day itself finally arrived I washed my hair; before leaving for the prison I trickled perfume between my breasts and cupped some to rub on my belly and thighs. I chose a dress that showed my legs, or trousers and a shirt that emphasized my femaleness with their sexual ambiguity... I took a flower with me.[...] At home, my father.[...]interrogated about what Noel had managed to convey under the lovey-dovey."<sup>40</sup>

This chronotope fleshes time in space through analepsis, portraying Rosa's feelings of displacement and alienation on the one hand and her ambivalent feelings of pride and exploitation on the other. Her body and sexuality in this paragraph present her as an object of exchange as well as unchallenged subject of her own desires. Levi-Strauss

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<sup>38</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 285.

<sup>39</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 223.

posits three levels of communication in patriarchal culture: verbal, myth and kinship.<sup>41</sup> Woman, therefore, is seen as a 'message' communicated within this culture, with the female body functioning as an object of the male gaze. Rosa describes herself constantly as a 'sign' e.g. the description of her preparation to visit De Witt.

Meanwhile, the setting of the cottage functions as the chronotopic space of Bakhtin's 'boudoirs and parlours', standing metaphorically for her inner secrets. There, Gordimer allows Rosa to show her intimate feelings towards Conrad – a liberal and existentialist character who interrogates her past. Conrad's liberal existentialism becomes explicit when he tells her of his own first impressions of her:

“— The day somebody said look, that's Rosa Burger [...] from the first time [...] I have the impression you've grown up entirely through other people. What they told you was appropriate to feel and do. How did you begin to know yourself? You go through the emotions [...] what's expected of you. What you've come to rely on.—”<sup>42</sup>

Conrad tries to let Rosa see the world from a different perspective and to adopt a more liberal attitude towards life. He tells her that she should have a better understanding of what she wants and likes in life: she should stop taking values as absolute and try to evaluate them herself rather than as concrete rules to follow. This echoes Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*:

“We should learn to avoid the “spirit of seriousness” [...] which makes us pretend that values are absolute, *given* somehow independently of any human subjective judgement.[...] Once this spirit has been dismissed, then it necessarily follows that a man will recognize himself as the source of all values, and when he has done this it will follow that he realizes that he can choose to value whatever he likes, and is free from the restraints of the conventional, the established or the apparently inescapable bonds of duty or taboo.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Douglas, 'The Meaning of Myth' in *A.S.A. Monographs 5, The Structural Study of Myth*. Edmund Leach (ed.) (London: Tavistock Publications, 1968) pp. 49-113.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel

This chronotope therefore serves as the place that made her production of her own subjectivity possible; Conrad's ideas help her to construct this individuality.

The chronotopic space of Rosa's internal life shifts between time and space as she recalls the way she has been exploited by her parents and Communist Party members as a messenger, such as when she had to smuggle a message to her mother in prison:

"The hot-water bottle is my own idea. My mother never used one; and so — as I prepared the device I imagined her swiftly discovering it — she would realize there must be some special reason for its having been sent. Between the black rubber washer and the base of the screw-top I have folded a slip of thin paper.[...]Then this innocently unsuitable tone became the perfect vehicle for the important thing I needed to convey. *Dad and I are fine and looking after everything. Lots of love from both.* She would know at once I was telling her my father had not been taken since she had gone."<sup>44</sup>

The swimming pool, which is the heart of Burger's house, serves as the chronotopic space for their social and political role, a gathering place for people of different colours and backgrounds. It symbolises Lionel's liberalism against the discriminating Apartheid system:

"That swimming pool was enjoyed by many people. It became the tradition, in summer, for us to keep open house round it at Sunday lunch — Lionel Burger's braaivleis. My mother swam; she kept a supply of blow-up armlets and it was a rule of the house, dutifully followed by new guests, new contacts, who did not know that the Burgers had a son."<sup>45</sup>

People did not know that the Burgers had a son, and this sentence sums up their priorities as a family. Despite the loss of their son in that same pool, they have continued their political mission for the liberation of black people. It reflects their sacrifice for the cause, especially one in which the Black Consciousness Movement denies them a role.

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E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1989) p. xiv.

<sup>44</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

The chronotopic space of the road, where she sees the drunk black man beating the donkey, marks Rosa's clash with reality as a white South African; she is caught in the split position of being born in a country dominated by political struggle and, at the same time being a white. She explains her confusion over this incident, saying it caused as much suffering to her as it did to the animal, as she is in a country where she cannot defend an animal without being psychologically torn between cruelty and racism. The incident is a symbol of her predicament and her guilt: she does not know what to do about the situation in her country. It provokes her realisation that she cannot live in "Lionel's country" and the consequent desire to defect and leave for Europe. Rosa's suffering reaches a climax with this incident, which is constructed by Gordimer to highlight metaphorically the pain and suffering of which Rosa is conscious. Moreover, she is alienated; both self aware and also self-denying, and by taking no action she destroys herself. Her passivity in this scene recalls Freud's discussion of "ego-psychology, which is a given identity strengthened by socialisation."<sup>46</sup> This process can be both positive and negative, and Rosa's socialisation in South Africa, depriving her as it did of her spontaneity, has indeed been negative. The alternation between first and third person, whereby Rosa mirrors herself as another person, suggests a discourse shifting between subjectivity and objectification:

"I drove because the horrible drunk was black, poor and brutalized. If somebody's going to be brought to account, I am accountable for him, to him as he is for the donkey. Yet the suffering — while I saw it was the sum of suffering to me. I let him beat the donkey. The man was a black...I couldn't bear to see myself — her — Rosa Burger — as one of those whites who can care more for animals than people.[...]After the donkey I couldn't stop myself. I don't know how to live in Lionel's country."<sup>47</sup>

In this scene Gordimer uses expressive terms such as 'drunk', 'brutalized' and 'suffering', to demonstrate Rosa's heightened awareness. This discourse is a version of Bakhtin's novelistic pathos, which elaborates human nature and focuses on the

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1984) pp. 56-7.

“heroic subjectivity by representing the self-consciousness of characters, a textual space of reflection that seemed to endow them with a human potential greater than their circumstances.”<sup>48</sup> This particular scene, according to J.U. Jacobs, is an accumulation of the Dostoevskian novels popular among black South Africans, who “like to read Dostoevsky because they want to feel miserable, to glory in another’s misery.”<sup>49</sup> The tramp’s death scene in the park also serves as the chronotopic metaphor for internal change; Rosa acknowledges the limitations of the South African political system (Apartheid) as well as her father’s liberal Communism. Lévi-Strauss relates the death and life to the myth, seeing them as contraries that can be resolved for the individual on the mythical level. If they are to be taken as contradictory then they are related to the collective culture or community, in other words, the death or survival of that community.<sup>50</sup>

Rosa’s journey to France functions as the chronotopic space of travel, and time takes precedence over space. Gordimer follows Rosa from South Africa to France and recounts in minute detail her various rites of passage from passive schoolgirl to inquisitive young woman and, later, believer in the noble cause of black people and opponent of Western culture and ideology. During her stay with Katya, Rosa observes European culture from a South African point of view:

“If I am curious about them, these people, to me it seems they allow me to be so because I am a foreigner. But I see it’s that they are not afraid of being found out, the nature of their motives is shared and discussed.[...]They recognise their only imperatives as dependence on a tight-knotted net of friendship, and dedication to avoiding tax wherever possible.[...]There was nothing sexual about the closeness; it was the huddle of the confidences common among all of you, the friends in the village — the divorced women and women widowed, like Madame Bagnelli, by lovers, the old lesbians and young homosexuals.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Nancy Glazener, “Dialogic subversion: Bakhtin, the novel and Gertrude Stein” in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds.) *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) p. 119.

<sup>49</sup> J. U. Jacobs, “Nadine Gordimer’s Intertextuality: Authority and Authorship in *My Son’s Story*”, in *English in South Africa*, Vol. 20-21 (South Africa: Rhodes University, 1993) p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> K.O.L. Burridge, ‘Lévi-Strauss and Myth’. In *A.S.A. Monographs 5, op. cit.*, pp. 91-8.

<sup>51</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, pp. 241-3.

This chronotope is a metaphor for Rosa's awakening to cultural difference, whereby she observes the difference in priorities between a materialistic world like Europe and a struggling one like South Africa. In the former, people are mainly concerned with money, tax and art, and their lives are dominated by serial relationships. In South Africa, however, Rosa sees people as principally concerned with politics and struggle, and their lives as a cycle of oppression and violence. She is surprised at the level of importance attached to issues like age, decay and homosexuality by the Europeans, and how openly they discuss governmental issues like tax.

The Soweto student movement, towards the end of the novel, functions as the chronotopic space of the 'square', marking the end of Rosa's confusion and suffering and the beginning of her social and political re-engagement. She returns with a new attitude, far from the dialectic of her inherited political and ideological beliefs. She feels the equal of those around her, 'like anyone else', and is content as such. She realises therefore that she no longer needs to invent metaphors for her suffering as she had done previously. According to Susan Winnett,<sup>52</sup> suffering is part of the white South African negotiation between self and society, and Rosa has passed the stage of thinking of herself in terms of what others see. She is by this stage a new and autonomous person who does not view herself as a projection of others' perceptions. Winnett attributes Rosa's ultimate possession of the right metaphors to the fact that she is imprisoned for something she has done, and not because she is the daughter of Lionel. Therefore, at the end of the novel Gordimer informs the reader that Rosa is very content with her life. She works as a physiotherapist, not a political leader, and is aware that her suffering has ended because she is now taking decisions for herself:

"I don't know the ideology:  
It's about suffering.  
How to end suffering.  
And it ends in suffering. Yes, it's strange to live in a country where  
there are still heroes. Like anyone else, I do what I can. I am  
teaching them how to walk again, at Baragwanath Hospital. They  
put one foot before the other."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Winnett, in Bruce King, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>53</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 332.

## Racism vs. Guilt

The crucial relationship between sex and politics pervades life in South Africa. Gordimer comments:

“I think there may be a particular connection between sexuality, sensuality, and politics inside South Africa. Because, after all, what is Apartheid all about? It’s about the body. It’s about physical difference. It’s about black skin, and it’s about woolly hair instead of straight long blond hair, and black skin instead of white skin. The whole legal system is based on the physical. And I think maybe subconsciously that comes into my work too.”<sup>54</sup>

The fact that racism is based on the Manichean thinking which attaches everything good to the whites and everything bad to the blacks is evident in the novel. Rosa confronts her own racism and stereotyped prejudices when she observes herself. She feels ambivalent towards her black friend Marisa Kgosana, whom she watches silently in the beauty shop – Marisa is too gorgeous and graceful to be a black South African. In the eyes of the white saleswoman her beauty makes her seem more like a tourist from the Seychelles:

“If the white people in the shop saw only errand boys and tea-girls and street sweepers instead of black people, now they saw Marisa. The saleswoman spoke to me with the smile of one white woman to another, both admiring a foreign visitor.—Where’s she from? One of those French islands? Seychelles or Mauritius; it was what she understood by the island. I told her:— From Soweto.—— Fancy!— She was ready to learn something, her new-moon eyebrows above the golden frame of her glasses.”<sup>55</sup>

When the saleswoman overhears the word “island”, she assumes that Marisa is from one of the exotic French islands. It does not occur to her that she could have just come from Robben Island, where her husband is a prisoner. On one level, this incident reflects the irony that is a feature of Gordimer’s fiction. On a deeper level, it has racial

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<sup>54</sup> *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer*. Nancy Topping Bazin and Marilyn Dallman Seymour (eds). Jackson: U Mississippi. 1990. p. 304.

connotations. This image of Marisa is juxtaposed with one of Baasie, whom Rosa remembers as a dark and dirty creature. She recalls the time when they shared a bed and she woke up to find it wet; she always accused him of wetting the bed. Kristeva's analysis of Bakhtin's work suggests a distinction between those fluids like urine and dung, or 'gay matters', which 'degrade and transform'.<sup>56</sup> Here the escaping fluid may be seen as racial degradation developing into revolution. What cannot be said within colonial patriarchal language may be enacted by the body, and the involuntary emission of bodily fluids may therefore be seen as the expression of the oppressed:

"I was remembering a special, spreading warmth when Baasie had wet the bed in our sleep. In the morning the sheets were cold and smelly, I told tales to my mother — Look what Baasie's done in his bed! — but in the night I didn't know whether this warmth that took us back into the enveloping fluids of a host body came from him or me."<sup>57</sup>

There is a reference here to the 'host body', the maternal womb, as well as a sharing of a secret space that is original and outside the body. The novel foregrounds the problematic relationships between whites and blacks, which is depicted through its dialogic and heteroglotic structure. This is most evident in the episode in Paris where Rosa is mugged by a black man. Her reaction is stained with the ideology of the 'place' she rejected, so she lets him go free:

"We were still close. His fear of me melted to a presence of connivance and contempt; because if I wouldn't denounce him while I held him, no one need believe me now that I had set him free. It was a secret between us, among them; a ridiculous position we were in, until leisurely—he couldn't hurry like a thief—he made himself appear to be pushed again, to drift on, moving thin shoulders swinging in a tenth-hand aspiration, some-one's once-plum-coloured jacket with the hunched cut I'd seen that day on sharp young Frenchmen dressed as they thought the rich and successful did."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 139.

<sup>56</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>58</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 234.

Rosa's 'secret' here is the difficult ideology inherent in the idea of 'place', and the complexity of Apartheid and colonialism. The fact that she is far away from South Africa does not remove the burden of guilt.

Being Burger's daughter, Rosa is aware that her identity is related to that of her parents in a particular sense, and she wonders if others can see her as she really is. She realises the importance of playing the role of the father's daughter, but later becomes resentful of everything associated with him, which leads to her rebellion. Through the character of Conrad, Gordimer has Rosa learn to open up in an attempt to liberate herself from her social and historical specificity. Louis Yelin<sup>59</sup> attributes Gordimer's use of the "connection" theme between Rosa and Conrad to the influence of E.M Forster:<sup>60</sup>

*"Burger's Daughter* refashions Forster's examination of connection across class and gender and friendship between colonizer and colonized — that is, across racial differences — as an inquiry into the possibility of connection, or friendship, between blacks and whites in Apartheid South Africa"<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, Gordimer sheds light on the corruption of the South African ruling class through the political figure of Brandt Vermeulen, a member of the South African parliament and a participant in the racist political system. She portrays this character as someone who has appropriated sexual liberation: erotic *objects d'art* decorate the façade of Brandt's house. Aesthetically, he is fascinated by Rosa's beauty and treats her as an object of sexual desire, which explains his willingness to help her get a passport. Their meeting however, is highly dialogised, with Rosa's silence signifying her denial of the corrupt system. Significantly, Judie Newman quotes Abram Fischer's view of art:

"all art is conditioned by time and represents humanity as it corresponds to the ideas and aspirations of a particular historical situation...art in the dawn of humanity had little to do with 'beauty'

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<sup>59</sup> Louis Yelin, *op. cit.*, p.119.

<sup>60</sup> A colonial British writer, whom Gordimer acknowledge as an influence.

<sup>61</sup> Louis Yelin, *op. cit.*, p.119.

and nothing at all to do with any aesthetic desire”, the argument continues, saying that art has a social function in enlightening men and it highlights the fact that “in a decaying society art.[...]must also reflect decay...Art must show the world as changeable. And help to change it.”<sup>62</sup>

It is clear, then, that Brandt’s presence has a profound meaning for the narrative; he represents the social and political background to the novel. The decomposing art collection reveals his own internal decay as a white politician in South Africa and a collaborator in its oppressive regime:

“The façade was a statement related to those with which Brandt Vermeulen liked good-humouredly to surprise, to confound disdain in symposia — no, I do not live in accordance with my newspaper image of the worldly man-about-town Afrikaner divorcee...once alone, she became aware of, a life-size plastic female torso.”<sup>63</sup>

Gordimer is committed to representing the lived ideology of her age in a realistic way. She recognises the suffering of both whites and blacks and, as Dorothy Driver comments, “her major literary effort seems to be geared towards freeing herself from her white consciousness and freeing white consciousness from the colonial strictures which trap whites into roles of capitalist exploiters [...] always in some way perpetrators and perpetuators of apartheid, that final and most inhuman entrenchment of colonialism.”<sup>64</sup> This is clearly the case in the incident with the black man and the donkey, when Rosa has an urge to use her authority as a white but cannot act on it, since it would look as if she cared more for animals than black people. This situation reflects the complexity of white consciousness, in which feelings are suppressed due to colour. Rosa does not want to exploit her position in this situation:

“I had only to career down on that scene with my car and my white authority...with my knowledge of how to deliver them over to the police...I could formulate everything they were, as the act I had witnessed; they would have their lives summed up for them

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<sup>62</sup> Judie Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>63</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, pp. 179-81.

<sup>64</sup> Dorothy Driver, “Nadine Gordimer: The Politician of Women”, in Rowland Smith (ed.), *Critical Essays on Nadine Gordimer* (Boston: G. K. Hall & co, 1990) p. 180.

officially at last by me, the white woman — the final meaning of a day of other appalling things, violence, disasters, urgencies, deprivations which suddenly would become, was nothing but what it had led up to: the man among them beating their donkey.”<sup>65</sup>

Gordimer uses Bakhtin’s ‘sideward glance’ to reveal the white’s feeling of guilt by foregrounding the racism in France towards Algerian workers who emigrate there (sometimes illegally) to find work. This issue is of great concern to Rosa’s lover, Bernard Chabaliere, who talks to her about his proposed PhD thesis about the *ped noir*<sup>66</sup> in the south of France and the effect of ‘their’ mentality on French culture:

“They have in their blood somewhere the qualities of the ancient cultures, the temperaments, but they now bring back to France from her imperialist period the particular values and mores colonizers develop. The locust people. Descend on the land, eat the crop, and be ready to fly when the enslaved population comes after you...a million unemployed in France this summer, but I don’t think you will find one among them. Many have their money in Monaco — tax reasons.[...] d’you know that 2 per cent of the population there is *ped noir*.”<sup>67</sup>

Gordimer explains the political history of her country in the first chapter through the use of pamphlets and by citing the political charges against Lionel which date back to before Rosa’s birth. Certain biographers, who wanted to record Lionel’s life after his death, are also cited in order to provide details of political history. This informative technique, much employed in *Burger’s Daughter*, is highly dialogised, in the sense that it brings reality into the text through the intervention of another voice:

“The strike was 76,000 black miners’ genuine and justifiable protest against exploitation and contemptuous disregard of the needs, as workers and human beings, of the 400,000 black men in the industry.[...]Documentation available put beyond doubt of anyone studying it in retrospect that the Communist Party had been and was at the time of the strike closely involved with the miner’s union.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 209.

<sup>66</sup> People of Algerian origins.

<sup>67</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 274.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 91-2.

Clingman offers the following observation on this technique: "In this way a textual collage is built up in *Burger's Daughter*, cutting across temporal, geographical, political and ideological space."<sup>69</sup> This documentation provides the reader with the political reality confronted by Rosa. Meanwhile, her visit to the old townships enables her to see the reality of the Black Consciousness Movement, which discredits her father's liberal movement and rejects collaboration with whites. Marisa's house enables her to consider the 'other' ideology and put her father's liberalism in a new political context:

"The future he was living for until the day he died can be achieved only by black people with the involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries who have solved the contradiction between black consciousness and class consciousness, and qualify to make unconditional common cause with the struggle for full liberation, e.g., national and social revolution."<sup>70</sup>

This social and political vision becomes a reality towards the end of the novel. This outcome is rooted in Gordimer's belief in Marxism as a solution to the oppression of the blacks in South Africa. This is apparent when the omniscient narrator says:

"The Marxist solution is based on the elimination of contradiction between the form of social control and the economy. [...] The white man had built a society that tried to contain and justify the contradictions of capitalist means of production and feudal social forms. The resulting devastation I, a privileged young white, had had before my eyes since my birth. Black men, women and children living in the miseries of insecurity, poverty, and degradation on the farms where I grew up, and in the 'dark Satanic mills' of the industry that bought their labour cheap and disqualified them by colour from organizing themselves or taking part in the successive governments that decreed their lot as eternal inferiors, if not slaves.[...] A change of social control in compatibility with the change in methods of production — known in Marxist language as "revolution"— in this I saw the answer to the racialism that was destroying our country then is destroying it even more surely and systematically now."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Stephen Clingman, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>70</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

This point expresses her radical ideology and raises another related but problematic issue, that of feminism and Marxism. According to Foucault, "Feminists argue that classical Marxism marginalises women in two ways. Firstly, by privileging the labour/capital distinction, it renders women peripheral unless they are engaged in productive wage labour. Secondly, by emphasising the primacy of economic determination, women's oppression is reduced to an ideological effect."<sup>72</sup> This paradoxical point is treated by Gordimer as crucial to her female protagonists, who are presented as dependent and privileged white females in constant doubt about the falsity of their existence in a materialistic culture. This is the case with Rosa and her rejection of the sensuality and materialism of the West, and with Maureen in *July's People*, who deplores the lack of an economic structure in the old world. Rosa's re-engagement is in accord with Gordimer's Marxist beliefs, as is Maureen's dialectic comment on the 'master bedroom' as opposed to the 'mud hut'. Her final flight is the definitive symbol of her rejection of a primitive life.

Furthermore, Katya tells Rosa that Lionel's colleagues thought of him as a God-like figure. Here Gordimer is emphasising the effects of the confluence of Marxist and Christian belief that underlies the equation between the god-like Lionel and Lenin. Christianity appears to be subordinated to Marxism, the latter forming the ideological basis of the Communist Party to which Lionel Burger belongs. References to Marx and Lenin are frequently used to signify Lionel's political role and importance. The sanctity of the cause is portrayed in the account of Lionel seeing the reflected light in his prison cell. Later on, that same reflection is mentioned in a letter from Rosa to Katya:

"We take nature more easily, the sun's always here. Except in prison; even in Africa, prisons are dark. Lionel said how the sun never came into his cell, only the coloured reflection of some sunsets, that would make a parallelogram coated with delicate pearly light, broken by the interruption of the bars, on the wall opposite his window."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Foucault, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) p. 24.

## Self and Other in Rosa

One of the most significant literary aspects in this novel is its analysis of Rosa's alienation and the different stages she undergoes before reaching self-realisation. Throughout the novel Rosa is in a state of self-observation, on a constant search for identity and autonomy. This induces her to analyse her name, which means 'the rose', the implication being that she belongs to the whites and has European origins.<sup>74</sup> She also comments on her grandmother's grave, which has round glass domes and faded plastic roses underneath:

"But my double given name contained also the claim of Marie Burger and her descendants to that order of life, secure in the sanctions of the family, church, law — and all these contained in the ultimate sanctions of colour, that was maintained without question on the domain, drop and farm, where she lay."<sup>75</sup>

This scene is juxtaposed with the description of her loneliness in the city. She works on the twenty-sixth floor of a building with an artificial climate that renders her lifeless, artificial, and anonymous in the eyes of others, just like the plastic roses on her grandmother's grave:

"Up on the twenty-sixth floor the smoked glass windows made the climate of each day the same cool mean, neither night nor day; I came down into the city to repossess a specific sense of these things. I came to be anonymous, to be like other people."<sup>76</sup>

Pertinent to her search for selfhood is the recurrent motif of the mirror, which symbolises the stages in Rosa's development, and both her subjectivity and her public relationship with the world. Sartre stresses the importance of the relationship between self and other: one is seen differently by others and the body is the focus of this

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> Rosa refers to the German socialist leader Rosa Luxemburg who cofounded (1918) the Spartacus Party, which became the German Communist Party. She was arrested after the Spartacist uprising in 1919 and subsequently murdered. Luxemburg's theoretical works include *Accumulation of Capital* (1913).

<sup>75</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

difference. There is also a link to Simone De Beauvoir's 'The Narcissist'<sup>77</sup> mentioned earlier, which sees the ego, expressed by the woman's 'gaze' into her self, as absolute. She is therefore led into self-analysis in an attempt to find her reality. At the beginning of the novel, Rosa looks in the mirror in an attempt to see herself as others see her:

"I shall never know. It's all concocted. I saw — see — that profile in a hand held mirror directed towards another mirror; I know how I survived, not unhappy, if not popular then in unspoken, acknowledged inkling that I was superior to them"<sup>78</sup>

Later on, when she is immersed in the sensuality of her relationship with Chabalier, she sees her reflection in the mirror but no longer feels the same threat from others as she did previously. She begins to see herself as she is, without the external intrusion, and this incident in particular marks the beginning of her emancipation. This suggests that mirrors reveal the truth. The reference to the 'threshold', according to Bakhtin, concerns the place where 'crisis and turning points occur',<sup>79</sup> symbolising the end of her confusion: "In the bar where she had sat seeing others living in the mirror, there was no threshold between her reflection and her self."<sup>80</sup> The mirror image is also used when she returns to Africa, recalling the Musée de Cluny and the unicorn tapestry that she always went to see with Chabalier. While the lady admires the pleasures of the world and its imaginary beauty – like the unicorn reflected in the mirror she holds – the mirror reflects her own perception of it:

"On an azure island of a thousand flowers the lady is holding a mirror in which the unicorn with his forelegs on the folded-back red velvet of her dress's lining sees a tiny image of himself. But the oval of the mirror cuts off the image just at the level at which the horn rises from his head."<sup>81</sup>

In this series of six tapestries, the five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch – are all depicted. Rosa remembers particularly the sixth tapestry, in which the lady

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<sup>77</sup> Simone De Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley (ed.) (London: Picador, 1988) p. 641.

<sup>78</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>80</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 272.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

plays with a jewellery box. According to Newman,<sup>82</sup> this tapestry “by my own free will” shows the lady not receiving the necklace but replacing it in the box, which reflects her power and will to resist the lure of the five senses depicted in the preceding tapestries. This reflects Rosa’s decision to leave the sensual pleasures of a materialistic country and her private life with Chabalier, which was devoid of social responsibility, and return to South Africa. It suggests a certain Puritanism; she remembers staring at this particular tapestry, which stands for her rejection of narcissism and her realisation that life as a mistress in France is meaningless, “*un paradis inventé*”, as the landscape in the tapestry suggests:

“A sixth tapestry shows the Lady before a sumptuous pavilion or tent, amusing herself with a box of jewels.[...]A legend is woven in gold round the canopy of the tent, *A mon seul désir*... There she sits, gazing, gazing.

An old and lovely world, gardens and gentle beauties among gentle beasts. Such harmony and sensual peace in the age of the thumbscrew and dungeon that there it comes with its ivory spiral horn.”<sup>83</sup>

Rosa’s interpretation of the tapestry is revealing: it is symbolic of a historical period in South Africa. It also suggests that the role of artistic production is to do the work of the thumbscrew, i.e. to reflect it, which is obviously untenable. One could also read it as ‘opposing’ the thumbscrew, plague and mortality.

### **Recommitment and Rosa’s New Identity**

The main theme of this novel is the political struggle against the Apartheid system in South Africa, but, paradoxically, this is depicted through the character of Rosa, a white female living in a country where whites are alienated from the black majority. It is worth noting the controversy surrounding Gordimer’s stance on feminist issues prevalent in Europe and the USA at the time the novel was written. Karen Lazar observes the following:

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<sup>82</sup> Judie Newman, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>83</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, pp. 340-1.

“Gordimer’s approach to gender questions is highly variable, and her fluctuating sympathy with or hostility to feminism follow no neat chronological pattern...her variation in approach to sexual questions, makes it difficult to read her stories as ‘feminist’ or ‘antifeminist’ representations, and this ambiguity of interpretation is heightened by her frequent usage of the ironical voice...but this authorial tone does not obscure the fact that damaging and collusive evaluations of women are present.”<sup>84</sup>

Until the 1980s Gordimer was, according to Lazar, hostile to feminist issues because she thought they were meaningless in a country where a white woman enjoyed all the privileges that black men and women never had. Lazar also points out that it is difficult to classify Gordimer’s stories as feminist or anti-feminist.<sup>85</sup> However, Gordimer does reveal certain post-colonial characteristics. She follows neither Western or colonial feminism in her scrutiny of the white female as she attempts to identify her ‘place’ in the world. For example, female physical appearance and beauty is valued in *Burger’s Daughter*, when Rosa is presented as an attractive female in contrast to her childhood friend Clare Terblanche:

“At the inner starting-point of each eyebrow a few hairs, like Dick’s her father’s stood up — hackles that gave intensity to her face. She rubbed between them with the voluptuousness of her assuagement; the peeling eczema danced into life and a patch of red gauze appeared on the white healthy skin of either cheek.”<sup>86</sup>

The same approach is adopted in the description of Katya, who has become old and fat and relies on playing the fool in order to attract others, as if to compensate for the youthful attractiveness that she has lost. According to Rosa, this “sometimes deteriorates into what I don’t want to watch — a desire to please — just to please, without remembering how, any more.”<sup>87</sup> This is the kind of irony at which Gordimer excels: she juxtaposes beauty to identity, which Katya has lost by abandoning Lionel’s ideology, leaving the country, and trying too hard to remain the centre of attention.

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<sup>84</sup> Karen Lazar, “Feminism as ‘Piffling? Ambiguities in Gordimer’s Short Stories.” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 2.1. (1990): 114-115.

<sup>85</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 215.

Rosa is introverted, questioning and mature for her age. The reader identifies with her alienation as a white in South Africa. Her inner conflicts regarding black people and her role in life are revealed time and again: she is afraid of being accused of racism when she sees the black man beating the donkey; the death of the tramp next to her in the park brings her face to face with mortality; and she is made to observe the world of sensuality and spiritual emptiness in France. The novel deals with her struggle for autonomy, initially depicting her as objectified by others, subjected to her father's power, and a narcissist who is constantly aware of her own reflection in the mirror. From an early age, she is presented as a sexual object, particularly when she visits Noel de Witt in prison and dresses in an alluring and feminine way.

When she returns from Europe, however, she has become the subject, rather than the object, of desire, and has gained autonomy. As Newman explains, "Rosa was an unreal creature, she existed in the projections of others. In returning to South Africa, Rosa chooses not to be such an image, an object to be displayed and desired... [Her] progress towards autonomy involves coming to terms with the mythic masks which men have fastened over the female face and correcting the errors of her own internal eye."<sup>88</sup> Gordimer constructs her texts to represent the psychological life of her white female protagonists. This novel in particular emphasises the importance of the development of the inner masculinity of the female through separation from the mother and turning towards a masculine figure, as Rogers has pointed out. Rosa is a woman who develops self-confidence and autonomy as a result of her relationships with men, unlike Clare, who is controlled by her parents and lacks relationships that will lead her towards an encounter with the real world. Clare does not develop her 'inner masculinity', which, according to Rogers, would incite her to question her status quo. This issue is highlighted when Rosa bluntly advises her to move away from her parents. This is the time when Rosa herself is flirting with the idea of abandoning her past:

"What conformists: the children of our parents.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>88</sup> Judie Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

— Dick and Ivy conformists!—Her face screwed towards me.  
— Not them — us. Did you ever think of that? Other people break away. They live completely different lives. Parents and children don't understand each other — there's nothing to say, between them. Some sort of natural insurance against repetition.[...] Not us. We live as they lived."<sup>89</sup>

Gordimer contrasts Rosa and Clare, linking the latter's passivity to her plain looks and "dumb flesh".<sup>90</sup> While Rosa ultimately appears strong, confident and self-composed, Clare is diffident and worried. Rose Pettersson comments:

"The narrative reflects the confrontation between the two young women...in conventional terms, a measure of extent to which the text encodes and mirrors how traditional values and perceptions of patriarchy are internalised. The girls are rivals, with Rosa clearly the superior of the two because of her physical qualities, which are defined in relation to male approval and appreciation."<sup>91</sup>

Gordimer suggests that Rosa has perhaps absorbed the ideology of physical appearance at the centre of Apartheid, which places her within the sphere of the patriarchal value system. Rosa evaluates Clare's physical appearance; the reader can sense confusion of identity implied by the 'dandruff' and 'eczema', aggravated by nervousness and indifference towards curing it because of the politics of 'place' that encourages them to consider such things as superficial:

"She is something sad rather than ugly, a woman without sexual pride.[...]why didn't Dick and Ivy have her treated when we were little? The dandruff, and the eczema it caused, they were of nervous origin. Why did we pretend not to notice this affliction? It was 'unimportant'."<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the novel Rosa is represented as a stubborn woman who not only abandons the activities of the Communist Party – a responsibility that she inherits as Burger's daughter – but also leaves the country for the sake of her private life. Her

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<sup>89</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 127.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> Rose Pettersson, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>92</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, pp. 123-4.

alter ego or inquisitive mind are described at the beginning, and she never stops reflecting on her life. Moreover, she is a pretty girl who is proud of her natural beauty and her superiority to the likes of Clare, a feeling which grows through her relationships with men — Noel de Witt, the Swedish journalist, and Conrad, who encourages her to rebel against her unquestioning loyalty to the party and her father's cause. Her contact with these masculine figure gives her the strength to confront and reject what she feels to be exploitation. Moreover, Rosa's various sexual relationships are discussed overtly in the novel. Each of these has its own significance in her life. Through her sexual endeavours and multiple relationships, Rosa grows politically and develops an independent personality. The clandestine weekend Rosa spends in the Western Transvaal with the Swedish journalist — who is used as a means to deliver a passbook to one of her father's colleagues — marks her interest in the private world of sensuality. Through these erotic personal experiences she expresses her desire, as the subject of the encounter, and through her body she develops individuality:

“And in the drop that Sunday I went back to the hotel and carried a beer, glass down over the bottle smoking cold at the neck, to my Swede, I didn't tell him, either. He cajoled me back to bed and typewritten pages floated away to the floor all around us. The hotel's Selena or Elsie knocked on the door and went away again; hotel servants understand never to ask questions. That's how it's done. He made love to me with the dragon Hoover breathing in the corridor outside.”<sup>93</sup>

By contrast, Clare is represented as less experienced with men. When Rosa expresses warmth towards Clare's parents, Clare thinks that she is refreshing their relationship and tells her about her own relationship with her friend's husband. Rosa observes how Clare's feelings are always subordinated to politics and therefore considered unimportant. This is further emphasised when Gordimer makes explicit reference to the strength of character demonstrated by Rosa's mother when her son Tony drowns in the swimming pool: she cries silently and then carries on with her work. The narrator comments: “It's only people who wallow in the present who submit.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

During the psychological conflict over loyalty to her father's cause and the pursuit of selfhood and individuality, Rosa is seen to be undermining her father's fight for freedom in South Africa. She does not value his leadership of the Communist Party but, on the contrary, feels exploited by her parents and at one point even wishes that her father was dead:

"My studies, my work, my love affairs must fit in with the twice-monthly visits to the prison, for life, as long as he lives — if he had lived. My professor, my employers, my men must accept this overruling. I have no passport because I am my father's daughter. People who associate with me must be prepared to be suspects.[...]And I knew I must have wished him to die; that to exult and to sorrow were the same thing for me."<sup>95</sup>

In the final chapter, Gordimer depicts Rosa's maturity and reopens the question of individuality by representing her as an assertive and independent woman who decides to end her relationship with Chabalier, which was founded on deceit, and to live a 'real' life. Prior to her decision to return to South Africa, Rosa's unhappiness is tangible when she looks at a photo of Chabalier and his family. She refuses the prospect of being mistress again and rejects the idea of being a submissive and passive creature, like the women she befriends in France:

"I realise that. I feel no jealousy although I have seen her photograph — she was on one he showed me when I asked to see his children. She is a pretty woman with a pert, determined head whom I can imagine saying, as you told me Ugo's wife did: You can have as many women as you like so long as don't bring them into my home and I don't know about them. —An indestructible bourgeoisie—you said of Ugo's wife, and you laughed generously, Katya.— That was good. I didn't want to destroy anyone; I didn't want anything of hers. —And you had your Bagnelli for more than fifteen years. Bobby had her Colonel. It's possible.[...]We could even have a child. —You're the kind of person who can do that — He's said it to me. —I wouldn't be afraid to let us have a child."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-3.

Rosa had realised from the very beginning that she was different from her peers, and that her family life was also different, whether negatively or positively. This familial burden prompts her to defect from her patriarchal world and seek justification for all her uncertainties as a daughter of a leading political activist. She suffers the conflicts between loyalty to her father's cause and her need for personal freedom. Ultimately, she decides to fight for her father's cause — which becomes her own — and for the black people. The question remains as to what extent is Rosa no longer simply subsumed within patriarchal ideology and has made it her own instead? The novel thus ends by depicting her as content and happy, committed to a humane cause in which she fully believes.

The development undergone by Rosa towards the end of the novel can be contrasted with her former feeling of objectification as summed up by the epigraph of the first chapter. This epigraph can be analysed with reference to Ann Jefferson's Sartrean observation:

“the subject is vulnerable to the Other on two counts: in the first place, he cannot control the image or interpretation that his body constitutes in the eyes of the others. And in the second place, the Other is liable to reduce the subject to being a mere object, only a body, and thus denying what Sartre calls the subject's transcendence.”<sup>97</sup>

Transcendence, according to Sartre, is related to the masculine whereas facticity is related to the feminine, a theory that corresponds to Cixous' binary opposition of activity and passivity. This novel, however, casts doubt on Sartre's idea of masculine transcendence. In the final chapter Rosa is portrayed as someone no longer aware of the 'other', who has in fact transcended the obstacle of being a mere object of others' perceptions. The changes that she undergoes (an example of *Bildungsroman*) can be seen as representing an instinctive tendency, regardless of gender, which can be explained in terms of Freudian ego.<sup>98</sup> In this the instinctual energies, or 'id', mediate the gap between conscious and unconscious, or between the inner demands of the ego

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<sup>97</sup> Ann Jefferson, "Body matters: Self and Other in Bakhtin, Sartre and Barthes", in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

on the one hand and the demands of the external world and limitations of the id on the other. This is what drives the development of identity and, therefore, Rosa's defection from South Africa too, as well as being an example of the Prospero complex. By going to Europe and trying a different life, Rosa strengthens her identity, giving rise to a conflict between her id and her ego. When she returns to South Africa, she satisfies her ego by finding an identity of her own. Therefore, while the theme of female development recurs in women's fiction, here it is not necessarily because it is a particularly feminine issue, but because, as in the *Bildungsroman*, the female writer is preoccupied with representing the protagonist's psychological development.

### **The Missing Mother: Rosa's Emotional Plight**

The death of the heroine's mother is a common motif in twentieth century women's novels. Judith Gardiner argues that it indicates the birth of the heroine's identity<sup>99</sup> and that this separation from the mother helps the daughter to develop her inner self and subjectivity. Moreover, Rogers claims that the turning from mother to father, or to the masculine 'other', gives the heroine strength and power.<sup>100</sup> She becomes fully co-opted into the patriarchal order, or at least establishes a working relationship with it. Such a pattern is present in this novel, in which the bond between the mother and daughter is broken. At first, it is hinted by a vague reference to Rosa's mother not supporting her daughter, and it is subsequently realised by her death. It is revealing here to note Gordimer's experience with her own mother. In a 1997 interview,<sup>101</sup> she recalls her difficult childhood from the age of four to ten when dancing was her passion. However, a heart weakness was discovered and the passion was cut short. In addition, her mother made the difficult decision of taking her out of school and arranging for her to have private home tutoring. She was therefore taken away from the normal children's environment and associated from an early age with adults. John

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<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference*, (ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982) pp. 244-53.

<sup>100</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>101</sup> Cited in Bruce King, p. 22.

Cook comments that this inspired Gordimer to write of protagonists who escaped their mothers and “who would live their lives.”<sup>102</sup> Gordimer herself says:

“I spent my whole life, from eleven to sixteen, with older people, with people of my mother’s generation. She carted me around to tea parties — I simply lived her life. [...] I got to the stage where I could really hardly talk to other children. I was a little old woman.”<sup>103</sup>

In the first chapter of *Burger’s Daughter* Rosa is portrayed as a composed child who can take care of the household while her parents are detained. The reader observes Cathy Burger’s remoteness and detachment from her daughter, and Rosa’s need for a more intimate relationship in which she can express her private self. This is most evident in the scene where Rosa describes her first period, a recurring scene discussed above in relation to Kristeva’s work which reasserts her identity confusion:

“But real awareness is all focused in the lower part of my pelvis, in the leaden, dragging, wringing pain there. Can any one describe the peculiar fierce concentration of the body’s forces in the menstruation of early puberty? The bleeding began just after my father had made me go back to bed after my mother had been away. No pain; just wetness that I tested with my finger, turned on the light to verify: yes blood”<sup>104</sup>

Rosa comes across as emotionally detached from her mother, who forces her to get involved in some of the political missions. She suffers a conflict between her personal need for affection and the political commitments that are imposed upon her. This particular conflict surfaces when Rosa develops feelings towards Noel and feels unable to express her emotions to her mother. In a monologue, she describes the need to talk to her mother, when she was alive, about her suppressed love for Noel. Her mother’s lack of affection and disregard for her feelings saddens her, and, towards the end of the novel, she still remembers her mother as a remote figure in her life:

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 15.

“Her eyes moved above his head among trees, passers-by and — quick down — in a private motivation of inner vision as alert and dissimulating as the gaze her mother had been equally unaware of, looking up to see the daughter coming slowly over the gravel from the visit to her ‘fiancé’ in prison.”<sup>105</sup>

Rosa here describes how her mother was more alert to the political cause than to her feelings. She remembers her as a collaborator in her exploitation, treating her as an adult, rather than an adolescent, and failing to understand her emotional life. However, from an early age Rosa learns not to turn to the mother but to the other, that is, her boyfriends. Paradoxically, there are glimpses in the novel of Rosa treasuring dear memories of her father: trying to teach her swimming, putting her to sleep, and teaching her, ‘his hands on my shoulder’ ‘his exact turn of phrase, his cadence’, details which suggest the Oedipal:

“Reading in the car while she waited for me outside the prison, my mother would look up, as she heard me return, with her shrewd, anxious, complicit, welcoming expression that awaited me as a little girl when I was released from my first days of school. Had I done well? Here was my support, my reward, and the guarantor to whom I was contracted for my performance. At home, my father, his hands on my shoulders where I sat at table. [...] I remember word for word, his exact turn of phrase, his cadence — so that, decoding his meanings, glancing from one to another for confirmation of interpretation, my father, mother and I could rely on each nuance being the prisoner’s own.”<sup>106</sup>

Moreover, Rosa still remembers her mother’s toughness with her secret collaborators, like the woman who became one of the hangers-on in the Burgers’ house after Cathy had done her a few favours. To Rosa, this woman was vague and mysterious, although she helped in the political activities of the group, keeping illegal funds and renting a house under her name. She later falls in love with Lionel Burger because “he made her feel like a woman”,<sup>107</sup> but it is a hopeless attraction. However, although she frequented the house, her absence, unlike that of others, goes unnoticed. Rosa never likes this woman, who is portrayed as the victim of Apartheid and in need of work and

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

who Rosa's mother decides to let teach the children of the Communist Party members, Rosa, Baasie, Tony and other coloured children. Although she is not exploited by the Burgers and is grateful for such favours, in the end she betrays Lionel by giving evidence against him:

“Maybe my mother knew she could count on the genteel, school-girl code of such a person never to inquire about the contents or address of, let alone open, letters she was asked to deliver abroad. It was little enough to ask of someone too eager to be needed? This quick realization within my mother would be signalled by that sudden seizing glance.[...]It was a glance that slipped the leash.”<sup>108</sup>

Gordimer presents Katya Burger, Lionel's first wife, as the opposite of Cathy in both ideological and psychological terms. Katya compensates for all the emotions and attention Rosa misses in her mother. She nurtures Rosa sensually and spiritually and introduces her to the artistic world of France and to her circle of friends, who enjoy worldly pleasures. Rosa develops an intimate bond with Katya that she never had with her real mother. Yelin explains:

“Katya is Cathy's opposite or double. Her name, Katya, echoes Cathy's, and she harks back to the idealized mother or fantasy or family romance, the mother that the female subject of classical psychoanalytic theory has never known or, having known, has forgotten.”<sup>109</sup>

Katya tells Rosa many anecdotes about her defection from “Lionel's world” and her relationships with men:

“As Madame Bagnelli was talking, the girl was looking at the woman who had fallen in love with Lionel Burger. The woman felt the way she was suddenly seen, and became Katya.”<sup>110</sup>

However, at the end of the novel, Rosa reunites with her father rather than her mother, emphasising her love for him, reconnecting with his responsibilities and political

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>109</sup> Louise Yelin, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>110</sup> *Burgers Daughter*, p. 247.

legacy and addressing him in a forgiving and tender tone. This narrative locates “development with a sexual awakening that recovers a lost or absent mother, or with a quest, a struggle to voice and realise aspirations, that emancipates the protagonist from filial bonds.”<sup>111</sup> She thus identifies with her father’s cause and realises the importance of her role as Burger’s daughter in South Africa:

“Something sublime in you — I couldn’t say it to anyone else...you used me as prison visitor, courier, whatever I was good for, you went to prison for your life and ended it there, but would you have seen yourself watching Tony and me, hand-in-hand, approaching guns? You will never tell me. You will never know...but you were a bit like the black children — you had the elation.”<sup>112</sup>

### **The Complexity of Sisterhood**

The situation in South Africa during Apartheid was oppressive in its foregrounding of racism and it therefore undermining any notion of sisterhood between black and white women. Any sense of female collective identity was almost entirely non-existent. Rosa, however, being a member of the liberation movement and the daughter of a leader in the Liberal Communist Party, is one of Gordimer’s protagonists who belong to the subgroups of whites who aspire to equality and justice in South Africa. She therefore shares in the collective identity of women who belong to the same political group, such as Marisa Kgosana, the wife of an imprisoned political leader who is portrayed as a beautiful and slender woman. There is an implicit irony in the incident with the female sales assistant:

“Marisa is banned and under house arrest. I am named. The law forbids us to meet or speak, let alone embrace; we take what chances come, of meeting like this, in passing, on neutral or anonymous grounds.[...]As she disappeared and reappeared through the shoppers there was only consciousness of the admiration she exacted, with her extravagant dress, the Ruritanian pan-Africa of triumphant splendour and royal beauty that is subject to no known boundaries of old custom or new warring political ideologies in black countries...the saleswoman spoke to me with the smile of one

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<sup>111</sup> Louis Yelin, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>112</sup> *Burger’s Daughter*, p. 349.

white woman to another, both admiring a foreign visitor.—Where is she from? One of those French islands?”<sup>113</sup>

The whites' perception of black people is racist in the sense that it follows the binary opposition in which good is associated with clean, white and spiritual and bad with dirty, black and material:

“Things associated with the body are dirty; those things which may be seen as non sensuous are clean. Racism therefore depends upon the displacement of ‘dirty’ activities onto an alter ego...fantasies of dirt underlie racism, which is the product of sexual repression.”<sup>114</sup>

Another time, Rosa attends a black community meeting at Flora's house, a customary meeting point for black liberation politicians. As the daughter of politically active parents, she is welcomed in their midst, and at the end of the meeting she offers other members a lift home. Although this may be seen to exhibit a sense of sisterhood that transcends the limits of gender, race and class differences, Rosa nevertheless shows some scepticism, which reflects a feeling of vulnerability towards black people who are in turn fearful of the whites. Rosa's monologues indicate that racial differences are at times augmented by the passivity of the blacks, who seem to inadvertently encourage their oppression by asking for ‘old’ but essential items for their people. Rosa is somewhat irritated by the weakness of black women and wishes them to be more assertive in demanding their rights. Here she engages with a suppressed collective identity, observing of their humble demands:

“The black ladies' fear of drawing attention as ‘agitators’ and the white ladies' determination to have ‘nothing to do’ with the politics.[...]Black women were complaining, opportuning for the crèches, orphans, blind, crippled or aged of their ‘place’. They asked for old ‘cots’, ‘old’ school primers, ‘old’ toys and furniture, ‘old’ Braille typewriters, ‘old’ building materials.”<sup>115</sup>

At the end of the novel, Rosa gets involved in the Soweto movement and is imprisoned. There is a kind of sorority shared by the prisoners, who are of different

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>114</sup> Judie Newman, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

racess and colours, such as her childhood friend Clare Terblanche and Marisa Kgosana. In spite of all the barriers separating black and white prisoners, they still manage to organise their activities and communicate, sending messages, sharing cigarettes and singing together:

“Where Rosa and Clare Terblanche found themselves held there were also coloured, Indian and African women; different colours and grades of pigmentation did not occupy adjoining cells or those served by the same lavatories and baths, nor were they allowed into the prison yard at the same time, but the prison was so old that actual physical barriers against internal communication were ramshackle and the vigilance of the female warders, mini skirted novices dedicated to the Chief Matron as to the abbess of an Order, could not prevent messages, the small precious gifts of prison economy (cigarettes, a peach, a tube of hand-cream, a minute electric torch) from being exchanged between the races. Or songs.”<sup>116</sup>

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In *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer develops Rosa's personality through the Hegelian dialectics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Much of the text is devoted to portraying the ongoing conflict between her personal and national identities, with the latter ultimately prevailing. Gordimer establishes Rosa's character through the various media of addressees, symbolic episodes and inner monologues, which reveal a constant tension between her and reality, i.e. the dialectic of 'self and identity' that is a major white South African complex. The novel uses a series of implicit sub-texts to insinuate the reasons behind Rosa's abrupt decision to leave the relative comfort of Europe and return to South Africa, convinced of her social and political heritage. She returns to take up radical activism, only to find herself imprisoned for her involvement in the Soweto movement, but it is something that she accepts as part of life's suffering. This awakening to the political cause recalls that of 'Adil in *al-Şabbār*, while her abandonment of material pleasure resembles that of Sa'diyyah, and to a lesser extent Rafīf, in *Abbād al-Shams*, who give up their worldly dreams to embroil

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

themselves in their national uprising. Gordimer effects a gradual transition in Rosa's attitude from an indulgent and lenient person into a strong and decisive one, reflecting in the process the change in national mood from moderation to extremism. Therefore, characters in the novels in question act as yardsticks with regard to the political and social changes in their countries, offering the reader another discourse through which to envisage their respective development.

Gordimer and Khalīfah's novels are structured around Marxist and Feminist ideologies, as they serve the writers' intentions of rectifying and transforming their realities. Both writers deal with racism, patriarchal oppression, and economical and class inequalities. For example, Rosa's perceptions at the end of the novel are an epitome of Gordimer's Marxist and feminist ideals, as evinced in her contempt for the racism of Apartheid, her rejection of the whites' privileged status and of the bourgeois exploitation of the black masses. These ideals also shine through clearly in Baasie's resentment of the likes of Rosa and her father, who are perceived as taking all the credit from the poor blacks. We find the same view on Khalīfah's part in the next novel, when through the episode involving the Syrian prisoner she alludes to the exploitation of the poor by those in more privileged positions and the various resistance organisations. She also contextualises Marxism and feminism through characters like Rafif, whose different layers of consciousness are revealed through her exposure to the outer world, while she feels frustrated and indignant throughout the novel at the sexism and discrimination of the magazine office.

Moreover, the ideologies generated as a response to the decaying systems of Apartheid and Zionism are also questioned by both writers, through their respective critiques of the liberal Communist Party and the *intifāḍah*. We will see in the next chapter how Khalīfah's criticism of the *intifāḍah* (resistance movement) is conveyed through the multiple voices in her novel, and imply the extent of corruption in the different militant organisations. This criticism assumes a moderate tone when, in the following chapter, Sa'diyyah faces the *fida'iyīn* for the first time in her life and finds her most fundamental ethical beliefs being destabilised in a world that has long forgotten justice. We will also see that this episode in particular is an embryonic

reference to the transition of national consciousness from alienation and confusion to transcendence and violence. The technique of contemplating political answers through protagonists thereby enables the reader to reflect on the credibility and authenticity of such imposed ideologies and their relative suitability for the collective national cause.

## Chapter Three

### *'Abbād al-Shams (Sunflowers) 1980*

This novel is the sequel to *al-Ṣabbār (Wild Thorns, 1976)*, continuing the saga of the al-Karmī feudal family through the characters of 'Ādil, Bāsil and Nuwwār. Male predominance, however, is subverted by the emergence of three female characters: Rafif, Sa'diyyah and Khaḍrah. The external conflict remains that between the Israelis and the Palestinians but another, internal, conflict involves the women of the Occupied Territories: their struggle for independence and freedom both from the external enemy and from the internal patriarchal system and old conventions. The novel opens with lines taken from Fadwā Ṭūqān's *Unshūdat al-Ṣayrūrah (The Song of Becoming)*:

They grew in the desolate forest of night in the  
Shade of the bitter cactus,  
They grew older than the years of their lives,  
They grew and clung together in a secret word of love,  
They bore its letters Biblically, Quranically,  
Spoke in whispers,  
They grew with the henna plants and when they were covered by the  
*Kūfiyyah*  
They became the blossom of the sunflowers.

Khalīfah uses this poem as an epigraph to the novel as it evokes the image of young Palestinians growing up in difficult circumstances. The implication is that by fighting for their land (*intifāḍah*) the Palestinians become, not bitter like the cactus, but bright, like sunflowers. There is a sense of transcendence and solidarity with the Palestinians portrayed as struggling on many levels: social, economic and political. Like the black South Africans, they are going through a politically transitional period in which their existence on the map remains uncertain. The characters and events conform to Antonio Gramsci's theory of "living in the interregnum [with its consequences] of

morbid symptoms.”<sup>1</sup> These ‘morbid symptoms’ take the form of the killings, the distortions of the Palestinian infrastructure, and the attendant imprisonment, struggle and conflict. Like Gordimer, Khalīfah makes the public subject a private one; she dwells on the characters’ personal conflicts and struggles, specifically those between the characters of Raffif and ‘Ādil. The former is a feminist revolutionary in love with the latter, who is a conformist, conventional in his reactions towards private and public events and unable to satisfy her love. In addition, there is the conflict between Sa’diyyah and Khaḍrah, who are portrayed as close friends but who nevertheless represent different social strata. Sa’diyyah is from Nablus and tries to earn her living after the death by martyrdom of her husband Zuhdī, whereas Khaḍrah is a loose woman, brought up in the camps, experienced in the miseries of life and therefore tougher than Sa’diyyah. Simultaneously, Nuwwār suffers inner ideological conflicts concerning her love for Ṣāliḥ al-Ṣafadī, for whom she had promised to wait in *al-Ṣabbār*. Here, however, she realises that she cannot do so and decides to marry whoever proposes to her.

### **The Emerging Female Voices**

In this novel Khalīfah gives a voice to repressed female voices; firstly to Raffif, the educated journalist who is desperately in love with ‘Ādil, secondly to Sa’diyyah, who is uneducated and sheltered by marriage from the outside world and who comes face to face with life’s harshness when she decides to earn her own living. Unlike *al-Ṣabbār* the presence of female characters in *‘Abbād al-Shams* allows more textual space for dialogic monologues that express and debate the characters’ inherited social values. Sa’diyyah’s place in the narrative is a good example. Khalīfah’s consciousness is revealed through a reading that suggests that Khaḍrah (the prostitute in the novel) is the author’s double or unconscious. It is she who exhibits many courageous and outrageous characteristics to which Sa’diyyah secretly aspires. She also shows masculine characteristics that give Sa’diyyah a feeling of ‘guardianship’ in her

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (eds) (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971) p. 276.

presence. This notion corresponds to Gilbert and Gubar's 'moments of escape', to which many female writers allude. They state that:

"The explosive violence of these moments of escape that women writers continually imagine for themselves return us to the phenomenon of the mad double so many of these women have projected into their works. For it is, after all, through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts, while at the same time it is through the double's violence that this anxious author articulates for herself the costly destructiveness of anger repressed until it can no longer be contained."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore Khaḍrah, the opposite of the submissive and silent Sa'diyyah, may be seen as the dark double of the author. Through the double, Khalīfah wants to rearticulate 'self definitions' that the patriarchal culture has imposed on women, for example, the implications of a Palestinian woman working in Tel Aviv, as in the case of Sa'diyyah, and of a set of values that no longer corresponds to the social and political circumstances. Therefore, the dialectic between the two characters brings into focus the sharp ideological differences between right and wrong in a world that has long forgotten justice – this theme, which ironically doubts the existence of God, is a recurrent one in Palestinian literature (Ḥabībi and Kanafāni). However, in many instances the reader is invited, through the dialogue between the two characters, as well as through that between Sa'diyyah and the *fidā'iyyīn*, to witness the interrogation and destabilisation of Sa'diyyah's fundamental ideological beliefs. The reader is allowed a glance into her consciousness:

" She was pensive for a while:

- Sa'diyyah! Are you still saying that stealing is a sin? I say it isn't a sin. Everybody steals, and everyone panders. Smut, poor people like us get found out over a small theft, while the rich and strong steal the world and what's in it; and no one senses or exposes them. What if I didn't steal the rice and sugar, how will I eat *Kabāb*?

Sa'diyyah was startled, and said disapprovingly:

-And must you eat *Kabābs*?

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman In The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 85.

-Aha. It must be *Kabābs*, who's *Kabāb* for then? Why should some have it and not others? Would you please tell me?  
 -This is our fate, Khaḍrah and one must be content with whatever is dealt. She grumbled.  
 -To hell with fate, and the division. And who is the dealer?  
 -God is, Khaḍrah; don't be a sinner.  
 -No, it isn't God. If it is *him*, then he is wrong. Why should *we* know God, while others ignore him? You silly cow, didn't you hear what the soldier told you, that there is no God? He went on beating you while you pleaded 'for God's sake'.<sup>3</sup>

This passage reflects the theme of *'Abbād al-Shams*, which is based on the binary opposition of characters, places and ideologies. These polarities involve good and bad, virtuous and evil, active and passive. Their significance lies in the way in which they highlight the morbid symptoms of the transitional period in which Palestinians are caught. Divided into many camps, they are either fiercely fighting for the freedom of their land, or torn between radical and moderate political alternatives. There are others, like Sa'diyyah, who is passive, and, ironically, is conveyed as someone who has never encountered the *fidā'iyyīn*, despite the fact that her husband was a martyr himself. This shows Khalīfah's intention of pointing up her own people's ignorance (especially women's) of their political context and rights, a point reminiscent of Gordimer's comment on black writers:

"The Aristotelian catharsis, relieving black self-pity and white guilt, was clearly not the mode in which black writers could give the answer black resistance required from them. ... This mode of writing was the beginning of the black writer's function as a revolutionary; it was also the beginning of a conception of himself differing from that of the white writer's self-image. The black writer's consciousness of himself as a writer comes now from his participation in those living conditions; in the judgment of his people."<sup>4</sup>

This accords with Khalīfah's didactic and critical mode of writing, which is frequently accentuated through the use of humour. Throughout the novel, Khalīfah does not shy away from pinpointing the Palestinian's social and political errors.

<sup>3</sup> *'Abbād al-Shams*, (my translation) pp. 90-1.

<sup>4</sup> N.Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum", *New York review of Books*, January 20, 1983, p. 25.

Moreover, Khalīfah calls into question Rogers' suggestion that female writers dwell on the inner, rather than the outer, world of the heroine. The epigraph of this novel, the poem by Fadwā Ṭūqān, is a case in point, as it contains an explicit reference to the young Palestinians who join the *intifāḍah*: "They grew older than the years of their lives ... when they were covered by the *Kūfiyyah*". These lines signify the writer's concern with the external world, in the sense that they highlight the issue of Palestine and encourage the Palestinian's struggle for freedom. On the other hand, the narrative technique is based on the alternation of first and third person, with the omniscient narrator, the 'she' who glance into the inner world of Sa'diyyah, Rafīf, Abū al-'Izz as well as the external world, revolving around them. The omniscient narrator's presence is felt throughout the novel. He/she gives an account of the external world surrounding the characters as well as of their inner thoughts and reflections. Moreover, the narrative world is preoccupied with Sa'diyyah's struggle with the condition of widowhood and trying to earn a living. In the following passage, she visualises her dream house and future lifestyle. It is a dialogised monologue, in the sense that it represents a complete social and traditional backdrop to this character, transmitting what others say about her, all the gossip, rumours and opinions that shaped her existence and that impel her to be like Ṣabīḥah. On the other hand, Khalīfah challenges the social restrictions imposed on women by their own gender, by the use of what Bakhtin defines as 'eavesdroppers' in the form of the annoying female neighbours. Sa'diyyah is presented as highly conscious of her neighbours' suspicious looks and well aware of their gossip, whispers and tale-telling. She is alienated from her own village and feels stifled by their inquisitive stares, becoming in effect a 'prisoner' of her own gender, as Gilbert and Gubar would see it<sup>5</sup>:

"But she is going to buy that land in the sunny mountain. She is going to get a plot next to Ṣabīḥah, the teacher, and she is going to raise from ground: room by room. And when the children are all grown up, and able to support her financially, she is going to build a glass conservatory on the top floor, where she will sit to have her morning coffee; looking down on the city as though it is a carpet stretched out beneath her feet. She would have arrived at the top then, like others who have done so. And, then she would stick her

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<sup>5</sup> S. Gilbert & S. Gubar, *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

tongue out at this cruel town, and give Umm Şabir and Umm Taḥsīn a peevish smile. She will remind them of the alleged scandals, as she offers them sweet *Kunāfah* on plates as brilliant as diamonds are. She will strut in front of them wearing her *maxi* dress — one of the many presents from her children who live in the Gulf. She will smack her lips as she watches them eyeing her red furry slippers with envy. But she would be an old and grey haired lady then, and it would not be appropriate to wear red. Alas.”<sup>6</sup>

This passage has echoes of Virginia Woolf’s autobiographical writing, which reveals much of the inner self alongside the outer world of events and actions; in other words, it reflects the depth of the soul and “the consciousness of other groups impinging upon [ourselves]; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other to make us different from that.”<sup>7</sup> However, Sa’diyyah’s aspirations to be like her mediator Şabīḥah fail because of the occupiers who confiscate her plot. This incident reflects the obstacles that arise from living in ‘an interregnum’, when life does not follow a logical pattern, but rather is blocked with mischief and suppression. Sa’diyyah’s frustration accumulates to the point where she finally explodes, articulating the rage both of the author and the nation over the oppression witnessed in their homeland.

Rafīf, on the other hand, is described as a modern woman who is fighting for equality with her male colleagues in the magazine. Her struggle functions both on an emotional level – she is desperately in love with ‘Ādil, who refuses to commit himself in any way – and on a professional level. Her career, like the magazine itself, is going nowhere. Rafīf’s character is given a psychological dimension through monologues in which she addresses both her sociologist friend Salwā, ‘Ādil, and her mother. This technique, which reflects Khalīfah’s interest in women’s psychology and the space it allows for retrospective analysis, is a frequent feature in the novel:

“Is there anyone who feels for her in this world? The mother doesn’t understand her, neither does ‘Ādil nor Salwā. ‘Ādil’s wounded heart still bleeds, and Salwā says ‘you are still free, Rafīf’. What freedom, you noble daughter? Freedom in a kingdom that is no larger than a

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<sup>6</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past” in *Moments of Being: a collection of autobiographical writing*, Jeanne Schulkind (ed.) (London: Harcourt, 1985) p. 80.

square foot, which they use like an hors d'oeuvre; to unplug their blocked appetites?"<sup>8</sup>

Despite Khalīfah's preoccupation with the issue of equality, she does not overlook the resulting solitude which women experience. This is highlighted through Rafīf's and Sa'diyyah's repetition of the words 'solitude' and 'loneliness'. Simultaneously, Rafīf's emotions are given considerable textual space. Her ambivalent feelings towards 'Ādil are intricately traced, including the concomitant mood swings. When he is tender, she is tempted, and when he is indifferent she is distressed and rebellious. She is infuriated by his coldness:

"He wants me to be a man, to be a woman, and an ass. To see everything and still be an ass...be the fuel for the fainting revolution, and for his coldness."<sup>9</sup>

### **Ambiguity and the Implications of a New Reality: the *intifāḍah***

The anticipation of events in this novel takes both an explicit and an implicit form, in the sense that the writer uses allegory to hint at future political events such as the *intifāḍah*. Cook comments: "The world may not have heard of the *intifāḍah* until 1987 but it is clear from this exposé by a twentieth-century Arab Cassandra that its roots had already sunk deep."<sup>10</sup> It also anticipates the call for peace between the antagonists; she explicitly and didactically gives voice to a plea for moderation in the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, saying that a literary movement should be encouraged instead of reiterating the usual Palestinian call to violence in response to the Israeli occupation:

"Going back to the comments of Israeli professors, for there was a very important question among these comments, she asked: 'Why do you not translate a number of Palestinian literary works and studies into Hebrew? Why do we not hear from the Palestinian side, except threats, bombs, or complaints and grievances?'

Khaḍrūn and other *Leftists* commented: 'Why don't we put our hands together and face the occupation, the authority, and ignorance

<sup>8</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Cook, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p.205.

on both sides? We translate your literature and studies. You translate our literature and studies; and we split the cost of publishing a joint supplement?"<sup>11</sup>

Like Dostoevsky, Khalīfah presents in the Turkish bath scene a carnivalesque crowning and decrowning; the crowning of Khaḍrah becomes the symbol of unity for the Palestinians of different social strata. The many local Palestinian woman at the bath function as Bakhtinian 'onlookers' who impel Sa'diyyah to ignore Khaḍrah for fear of their rumours. This incident uncrowns Sa'diyyah, as through it she increases the divisions between Palestinians. The symbol of the Turkish bath resembles the crowded 'square' where a scandal or a crisis takes place, signifying a point of radical change. The bath takes on a feast-like atmosphere, with food and drinks passed round and they eat, drink, dance and sing, while Khaḍrah, the figure at the centre of attention, starts a quarrel with the others. At first Sa'diyyah pretends not to know her, but then takes pity on her when it is clear that she has lost consciousness. The 'feast' in the novel symbolises a change of social and political hierarchies:

"Khaḍrah went on dancing and clowning around, scattering jokes and using good and bad words alike. Sumayyiah asked her joyously while laughing:

-Who's that woman, darling?

She didn't answer her and pretended she didn't hear. She did the same when the female attendant nudged her in the waist asking:

-who's that woman Sa'diyyah?

She then sang at the top of her husky voice: *Sa'diyyah, oh! Sa'diyyah...I've been calling you for two years, answer me Sa'diyyah.*

Other women echo her in chorus, signalling Sa'diyyah to join in the celebration. But Sa'diyyah continued to ignore them, keeping her face stern. She was scared and frightened, and wished she could blink and find herself far away from Khaḍrah, the women, and the whole district.

Once again, she felt estranged and closed in. She was over whelmed with such fear as she had never felt before, except twice. Once, the day Zuhdī died. And another time when the occupying forces entered the city when she was at the policeman's house."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Khalīfah here also points to the immanent internal danger for Palestinians and their political differences, which are always threatening to explode. This fact is implied in the quarrel between Khaḍrah and other women in the bath. The fall of this character symbolises the fall of the union, and this scene fleshes out unspoken realities and 'turns the world inside out'. Sa'diyyah's reaction to Khaḍrah is significant. She tries in the first place to ignore her, but then her feelings become ambivalent and she is not sure how to react. Finally, when Khaḍrah is in danger, Sa'diyyah comes to her rescue. If Khaḍrah is seen as the author's double, one realises the significance of Sa'diyyah's shameful and ambivalent feelings as representative of the majority of women in Nablus, those who usually pay more attention to the honour of women than of the land ('ird vs. sharaf). At that point she is not sure whether to show others that she is a friend of Khaḍrah or not, because of the rumours it might provoke. Therefore, her decision to rescue Khaḍrah connotes the union of all Palestinians despite their different social and political strata. Khalīfah is implying here that the Palestinians should unite to secure their dream of an independent state, with the other women in the bath symbolising the obstacles hindering the realisation of such a dream. On a deeper level, this ambivalence towards Khaḍrah in fact generates a struggle between Sa'diyyah's thoughts and feelings. This signifies the writer's anticipation of unity among Palestinians in general, and women in particular, those who will participate in all aspects of life, during and after the *intifāḍah*.

The episode of Khaḍrah who, after being brutally beaten by other women in the Turkish bath and having fainted by the time Sa'diyyah decides to help her escape, is characteristic of the female avoidance of narrative climax. The reader is obliged to infer the significance of this fainting. It can be interpreted symbolically (on the basis of Arabic, Russian and Italian literature) by equating woman with the subjugated land. The woman becomes a voiceless object, a presence through her absence from patriarchal language. This would imply the author's fear that divisions between the Palestinians will result in the death of her land. The significance of this technique lies

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in its propensity to create an unlimited imaginative (dialogic) response in the reader's mind:

“Finally she managed to get to Khaḍrah and threw herself at her, shielding her from the blows of the gang; and shouted:

-Get up Khaḍrah! Get up!

But Khaḍrah's strength had vanished and, she lay stretched out on the ground bleeding; receiving the blows without fighting back.

Unable to face the gang alone, Sa'diyyah wailed, but went on tugging Khaḍrah's arm screaming:

-Come on Khaḍrah! Let's run!

Khaḍrah let out a final whisper, before falling unconscious:

-Where to?”<sup>13</sup>

This scene is contradictory to the earlier one when Khaḍrah confronts both Sa'diyyah and the Israeli soldier. Khaḍrah asks the bus driver to take them for a ride by the seaside, a prohibited area. They are caught by Israeli soldiers, who assume malicious intent. The two women are taken to prison, but Khaḍrah surprises Sa'diyyah there by tricking the soldier into approaching her and then fiercely attacking him. She then turns to Sa'diyyah and asks her to escape with her. Reluctant to follow this bizarre suggestion, Khaḍrah accuses her of being the reason for their failure to escape. However Khaḍrah's entry into the textual world brings with it a different ideological and moral understanding. This can be observed through her use of conventional proverbs, which identify her as courageous and scrupulous: “What are we to do, sisters? As they say, it's better to be wounded in the heart, than to be disgraced in public”. She corrects them: “its better to be disgraced in public than to be wounded in the heart.”<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the novel, however, when the collective tortures, with Sa'diyyah's son Rashād being one of the victims, take place, she tries desperately from her window to pick him out in the crowds, but eventually she starts to mumble incoherently before losing consciousness. She oscillates between waking and sleeping, unconscious of time. Here Khalīfah slows down the development of conflict in the narrative whenever a dialogised climax to an event is needed. This highlights the misery of a mother who, unable to save her son's life, starts to hallucinate:

“She raised herself up from her unconscious state, lifted her head from the girl’s lap, and saw the bodies still lined up in the school yard. She looked at her watch, to check the time but saw only a black circle on her wrist, and a steel shining under the sun’s beam.”<sup>15</sup>

Women are frequently represented as outside time and history, especially through their symbolic values as ‘natural’ or embodying the earth itself. The significance of Sa’diyyah’s checking her watch is that it marks her brief displacement from time and history; she was delirious, although when she regains consciousness she is not alone, but supported by Raffi and all the women of her village. Therefore she did not escape reality, as other female protagonists might; instead, she takes on Khaḍrah’s characteristics and overcomes her fear and passivity. This can be explained with reference to mediation: “in many respects... mediation follows a similar path to male subject/mediator relations where Khaḍrah’s ‘devil-may-care’ amorality causes much consternation in Sa’diyyah while she is in close proximity to her, but takes on an ethereal mediating prestige when they are apart.”<sup>16</sup> This explains Sa’diyyah’s aggressive reaction when she is looking for her son, and her physical attack on the Israeli officer at the end of the novel.

The novel ends with the resistance still ongoing, and Khalifah eschews the plot to stimulate the reader into imagining or predicting many possible futures. In other words, it is left open so that the reader can “supply what is not there”<sup>17</sup> — either a bloody war or an independent state for Palestinians. So this technique assists the writer outside the historical time, or in the chaotic transitional period, by inserting gaps and ellipses for the reader to interpret. The eschewing of an end in this context can be intentional because it internalises the theme of struggle and corresponds to the novel’s subtexts. Hafez observes that “by its very nature, the ending echoes elements tucked away in the interior of the story and sheds new lights on others [...] the ending

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth McKee, *Triangular Desire and Narrative Structure in the Novels of Levantine Women Writers*. PhD thesis (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994) p. 179.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

recalls this information and draws attention to certain aspects more than others, affecting its hierarchal rearrangements.”<sup>18</sup> The change in Sa‘diyyah’s character at the end of the novel marks the change in the nation’s mood from moderation to extremism. Thus, the image provoked by her and other women and children attacking the Israeli soldiers draws the reader’s attention to the symbolic code of Sa‘diyyah’s last sentence “Attack them, Rashād, attack them my dear, attack them, Zuhdī.”<sup>19</sup> Zuhdī’s name in this context implies a vision of reunion with the dead, while their use of pebbles conveys the idea of martyrdom.

*‘Abbād al-Shams*, conforms to Hegel’s dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Thesis refers to the political and social situation into which Sa‘diyyah, Raffī, ‘Ādil and Bāsīl were born, antithesis to their struggle against that reality, and synthesis to their acceptance of it. Therefore, the novel follows a chronologically sequential order: a beginning where the protagonists recognise their problems, a climax in which they are all disorientated and an end where they are reunited with their social and political identities. The female characters in this novel fight alternately and in their own different ways, for independence, freedom and integrity, whereas male characters such as ‘Ādil, whose problems were delineated in *al-Ṣabbār*, takes a more pivotal role. He responds to the resistance movement through his work on the magazine in a re-engagement with his political and social inheritance.

Because this is the sequel to *al-Ṣabbār* we find analepsis to past events. For example, there is a reference to ‘Ādil’s ‘shameful’ work in Tel Aviv, which contradicts Rogers’ idea that women’s writing is necessarily non-sequential; at the beginning of *‘Abbād al-Shams*, the narrator gives ‘Ādil al-Karmī a brief descriptive background. In the following passage the sarcastic and manipulative tone is marked:

“Another, more oppressing dignitary passed by. Oh! What articles you have published... ‘Ādil al-Karmī, you are such an arrogant red bastard! You have forgotten your roots. As if the Jews did not blow up other homes, only his father’s. As if no other father has lost his

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<sup>18</sup> Sabry Hafez. *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993) p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> *‘Abbād al-Shams*, p. 279.

status but only him. They are the articles of a scandalised, envious worker who was once employed in their factories, and now returns with ideologies of the Red, the enemy of the people and the homeland; to cover up what happened a long time ago. That is an issue the town shall never forgive, even if it were to be hit by the earthquake of '29. This town does not forget scandals. Don't you forget that your parents are no longer affluent. Your mum no longer prepares elaborate meals everyday. Your own home has become a mere hole in the wall. You are no longer dignitary. Even if the government is reinstated, there wouldn't be among you one who is fit to govern a hole, or rule over a throne."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the notion of women's non-suspenseful writing is validated to some extent, in the sense that Sa'diyah, after experiencing widowhood, becomes an independent personality, seeking work in Israel and thus challenging the homosocial rules of her society. But Khalifah skilfully breaks this element of non-suspense by introducing Khaḍrah — on her first trip to Tel Aviv— who stands in an ethical and social opposition to Sa'diyah and whose presence generates a comedy of errors. After their release from prison in Tel Aviv, they arrive late in Nablus, but to the disappointment of Sa'diyah's, who is anxious about her children, the city is under curfew. So Khaḍrah takes her to a nearby camp to spend the night in one of the deserted tents. There they prepare some food and tea but as they are eating, they hear people approaching and switch off the light. Men masked in *kuffiyat*,<sup>21</sup> who to the relief of the women are *fidā'iyyīn*, enter the tent and they share food and conversation. This conversation, and the confiscation of her land towards the end of the novel, are subtexts that affect Sa'diyah's decision to encourage her boys to take part in the resistance movement. This decision is significant because it is out of character for Sa'diyah — her only dream was to build a house on a hill outside Nablus. However, these incidents, along with other subtexts in the novel, change her fundamentally. Towards the end, Sa'diyah looks back on her life and, despite her efforts to retain some hope in the future, she is overwhelmed by the perpetual frustrations of her existence:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> A *kuffiyah* is a type of male Arab head-dress.

“Long ago, when I sat by the window, I used to find brightness, and be uplifted. Watching passers-by day and night, and exchanging greetings with smiling faces, the bleakness of the district was light, it’s humidity; warmth. I used to wait for sunset when the *Muezzin* says *allah-u-akbar*, and Zuhdī would appear, turning my night into daylight. Today, the call to the prayer only announces the onset of sunset, restless nights and the memory of who used to be. The call to prayer no longer brings Zuhdī, instead it announces darkness. And the window that used to open onto people, opened now into sorrow and bleakness. The young boy who says ‘mummy, our district’, will soon grow feathers on his wings and fly away, never to return to the district, nor call out ‘mummy’. This is our fate Sa’diyyah. Our kismet is to sweat, and oil the machine with our sweat. At the end of the day, dinner remains untouched on the table, with no one to eat it.”<sup>22</sup>

The call for prayer, once a good omen that reminded Sa’diyyah of her past, turns into a sign of gloom and sorrow. This change marks her underlying doubts about peace; after her husband’s death and the confiscation of her plot by the Israelis, she feels weak. Through her character Khalifah foreshadows a deeper ontological problem, that of the continuing suffering of the Palestinians and the never-ending conflict. Sa’diyyah’s monologue reflects her innermost feelings, which can be interpreted as the author’s own beliefs about the political dilemma in Palestine noticeable throughout the images and subtexts that she uses. It is more precise, however, to interpret subtexts and the ‘unsaid’ as follows:

“Since the unsaid in a literary text is established in contrast to what is said, we can detect the features, the contours, of the unsaid by identifying patterns of ellipses, through a hermeneutic reading of a censored style. Ellipses are the connection...between the subliminal style...and a forbidden obsession. A subtext, consisting of the clearly stated unsaid [...] an inter-said, is indicated through ellipses and metaphor, and constitutes a unifying matrix for what appears to be a loosely-connected series of stories.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn (eds), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1985) p.100.

Moreover, Khalīfah explicitly raises the level of suspense by repeating vague sentences like ‘Ādil’s repeated answers to Abū al-‘Izz: “Reality is crisis, there is more than one dimension to the picture”<sup>24</sup>, and, “Abū al-‘Izz, you will discover more than what you see.”<sup>25</sup> Here Khalīfah appears to be raising the possibility of multiple interpretations of events. This is suggested by the metaphor of the ‘picture’, in which an opposition is generated between the visible and the unseen. Here ‘Ādil’s answers signify his own disappointment with the political situation and his belief that it is more complex than it seems. However, such sentences awaken the reader to the hypothesis of a ‘conspiracy theory’ because of the continuous disappointments endured by the Palestinians in their efforts to acquire an independent state.

### **The Chronotope: a Mirror of Life**

*Al-Ṣabbār*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, belongs to the realism of the committed literature which was popular at that time. In *‘Abbād al-Shams*, feminism has also had an influence. The novel addresses two major issues, the political and the feminist. Khalīfah uses the literary techniques of carnivalesque scenes, for example, polyphony, social heteroglossia and the incorporation of song, to further define the Palestinian identity. However, *‘Abbād al-Shams* underlying ideologies are contradictory, oscillating between the conflicting beliefs of Islam and Marxism. Similarly, its underlying structure incorporates a binary opposition of character, place development and morality. This strategy enables Khalīfah to convey the fluctuating social, political, moral and ideological situation in Palestine.

The settings of *‘Abbād al-Shams* are diverse, each having a certain significance. The bus, prison, Turkish bath, Sa‘diyyah’s dream land, the borderlines of Nablus, the tent and the office of the magazine, all contribute to render time material in the novel’s space. Time and space intersect, giving life and concreteness to events through the chronotopes of the ‘road’, the ‘threshold’ and the ‘town’. The bus is the chronotopic figure of movement, or the ‘road’ that marks the encounter between Sa‘diyyah and Khaḍrah. It signifies new departures and beginnings, which, according to Bakhtin, are

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<sup>24</sup> *‘Abbād al-Shams*, p. 101.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

a metaphor for “the course of life.”<sup>26</sup> The ‘road’ chronotope gives people who belong to different social classes, religions, ages and nationalities a chance to meet at a particular time in space. Khaḍrah is presented in this novel as a ‘mad woman’ who falls out of the ordinary logic and relationships of life. All life is carnivalised around this character, particularly in juxtaposition to the more rational character of Sa‘diyyah. From this pairing and from the traditional plot-situations develop a carnivalistic play of sharp contrasts and unexpected changes. Therefore, Khaḍrah can be seen as reminiscent of Dostoevsky’s idiot, where the representation of two contrasting characters involves a carnivalistic frankness, noticeable in their dialogue. The significance of this encounter in *‘Abbād al-Shams* is that it marks a new beginning for Sa‘diyyah, who takes on a new role in life, that of an independent working woman, responsible for supporting her children. On a more profound level, it marks the change brought to her understanding of the external world with which she has contact, exemplified in Khaḍrah, the *fidā’iyyīn*, society and the noble cause of a free Palestine.

On the other hand, the prison setting is the metaphorical chronotope of the punishment and misery that threatens Palestinians on a daily basis. When Khaḍrah feels like taking a bus to see the seaside, the Israeli soldiers impede her spontaneous act by putting her and Sa‘diyyah in prison. Moreover, the Turkish bath is the chronotopic space of Palestinian women’s implied vow to be united. There is an immense significance of the scene in which Khaḍrah causes a fight among women who belong to different parts of Palestine, because they overcome their antagonistic feelings:

“Women, women! In the name of God! I beg you. What’s this nonsense and narrow-mindedness? After everything that happened to us, you are still bickering: Nabulsi, Javite and, Gazzan? Damn you Khaḍrah, you shameless woman! We have opened our hearts to you, you became the apple of our eyes and, you’ve proved to be shameless and flippant. Me shameless and flippant? All of Nablus is shameless and flippant. We have served you, embraced you and,

shared our bread and salt with you, shared the very same cell-where we exchange grievances together; and when life did what life does, you forgot all about us! I abhor such a town that doesn’t honour a

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<sup>26</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (tran.)(USA: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 244.

friend nor a companion. Shame on you, shame to your town, shame on whoever keeps your company. Nablus? What a liar and deceiver you are."<sup>27</sup>

The bath has a special meaning to Sa'diyyah: it was the place where brides were groomed in preparation for marriage, and this particular bath therefore becomes the metaphorical chronotope for renewal and rebirth. The festive scene that follows, where women in the bath gather around a table cloth covered with bowls of food, signifies their renewed solidarity.

Sa'diyyah's flat is the chronotopic space of her internal life, where she is portrayed as living in crisis, or in what Bakhtin calls the 'threshold' element. It is where most of her monologues take place, and where she is at odds with the world because of her alienation from neighbours like Umm Taḥsīn and Umm Ṣabir, women who act as 'eavesdroppers'. Bakhtin links this kind of privatisation of the chronotope with a certain kind of character which enables the reader to acknowledge the secrets of the boudoir and the parlour: "the depiction of houses [...] which focuses on the relation between time and space in peoples lives, as these are given meaning by their background of work, suffering, travel, war and death. [And] the presence of prostitutes and courtesans [...] is functionally similar to that of servants in novels, as all these groups are in good positions to find out the 'secrets and intimacies' of private life"<sup>28</sup> Inside her flat she is conscious of her loneliness and continues to talk to the picture of Zuhdī. She recalls the dusk hours when she used to look through the window and see him returning from work; the prayer call brought her happiness then, but no longer. Here, the prayer call is the chronotopic symbol of her sadness and frustration over the loss of her husband, corresponding to Virginia Woolf's description in "A Sketch of the Past"<sup>29</sup> of certain objects that acquired symbolic meanings in her consciousness, becoming part of her self, and gaining a more complex meaning over time.

Later, Sa'diyyah and Khaḍrah are forced to stay in a tent in a nearby camp on their return from Tel Aviv, because of the curfew in Nablus. In this chronotopic space of

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<sup>27</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 206.

<sup>29</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, pp. 22-67.

encounter, Sa'diyyah for the first time in her life encounters the masked *fidā'iyīn*. Initially frightened, she overcomes her fear when Khaḍrah starts chatting with them. This incident is a typical chronotope of the 'road': Sa'diyyah meets people whom she would have never met otherwise. The significance of this chronotope is that it changes her and her concrete beliefs in relation to the particular moral issues that form the subject of their debate.

"Khaḍrah said: 'she's still saying that theft is forbidden'. A *fidā'i* answered: 'How about killing, Is it forbidden too, Sa'diyyah?' She was confused, thought about it seriously, and said: 'It is forbidden'. 'How about killers Sa'diyyah?' 'The killer should be killed by the name of God'. 'Sa'diyyah, are you sure? Think about it'."<sup>30</sup>

In an attempt to articulate the social specificity of women in Palestine, Khalīfah uses the chronotopic space of the street and the incident of the man riding a donkey to elucidate the modern woman's problem of having to live the contradictions of the new and old worlds. Raffī, who is insulted by the harassment, regrets the fact that she is one of many Palestinian women to be harassed in the streets because of her exposure to the outside world. In the following passage, however, Khalīfah compares the educated Arab man with the uneducated, and mediates through the female body a set of decaying values that are inherent to society, internalising at the same time a pre-linguistic terrain with transgressive overtones so that what seemed abstract is rendered concrete by the reader. The metaphor of 'embroidery' draws the reader's attention to the significance of the house in relation to women in the Third World. It registers with it the corollary code of the domestic life that Raffī no longer inhabits:

"Even you? And why not? You are all alike, that way. Is 'Ādil al-Karmī more refined than you? What did he see in me? He lusts after me and demands I be something else. Demands that I carry the burden of the wheel of my history, as well as his. Demands that I am intelligent, cultivated and that I work hard constantly: just like your donkey!

He demands that my energy does not wane and that I don't stumble. Demands that I be a man, be a woman and, be a donkey. That I see what I see and remain a fool. Demands that I fuel this cold revolution, that I fuel his coolness and fuel his cold, apathetic mind.

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<sup>30</sup> 'Abbād al-Shams, p. 99.

At least you, riding this donkey, are not asking me to be more than what you have mounted! I wish I had remained that way, unchanged. But I am no longer stuck with embroidering. When are they going to understand that? I no longer do embroidery, although it is still going on everywhere.”<sup>31</sup>

Gilbert and Gubar relate the metaphor of embroidery to the ‘house image’, which “has become the topography of our inmost being.”<sup>32</sup> This represents Rafif’s conflicting desires, the switch between her career and the security of the home, between being a subject and an object vis-à-vis the opposition between backward and advanced. What Khalīfah proposes here is that women cannot attain maturity without recognising the self as simultaneously both subject and object.

The setting of the magazine office serves as the chronotopic metaphor for a Palestinian parliament; where intellectuals gather to discuss political and social issues in a democratic atmosphere; by voting, men and women, Arabs and non-Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims can reach justice. The significance of this chronotope is that it materialises the idea of an independent state and renders the new world visible. This visualisation is not imaginary but based on real solutions, such as harmony with the right-wing party in the Israeli government: both sides giving voice to moderation as the only way forward for peace in the region:

“This is pure dichotomy! You salute the rage of the worker of the peasant, and that of oppressed people, and when a woman is enraged you stare and throw at her face ‘complex, frustrated, powerless, short-sighted, it’s not your time’. Whose time is it then? Is it the time of workers, peasants, and oppressed people? What about me? Aren’t I a man’s proletariat? Didn’t Marx and Engel’s say that? Why do you sanctify everything he said, but ignore this point?”<sup>33</sup>

The schoolyard is the spatial chronotope of the ‘open square’, that is, the locus of action and events. Bakhtin highlights this point further: “in Dostoevsky, for example, the threshold, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 205.

square [...] are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man.”<sup>34</sup> It therefore implies the Palestinians’ unity in fierce resistance and continuation of their uprising against the occupiers. Khalīfah uses Bakhtin’s language of pathos in the novel’s last scene, in which Israeli officers order all males over the age of thirteen to gather in the village school yard, to articulate the poignant reality of racism in Palestine, and again in the description of an old man on all fours beaten with a pole by the officer. In addition, the sound of communal torture, with the old man mumbling God’s name, the description of bleeding noses and swelling bodies, converge to expose the occupiers’ brutality. Many of the images evoke feelings of pain and humiliation, with Khalīfah using the specific language of physical suffering: beating, bleeding, swelling. This scene echoes Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* in two ways. Firstly, the narrative is in the third-person, through the character of Sa’diyyah, portrayed as a witness as she searches for her son Rashād among the crowds. Secondly, there are the onlookers; all the women of the village watch the scene in torment through their windows. This, according to Bakhtin, ‘carnivalises’ the scene. It is ‘they’ who act as the provocateurs in the uprising that follows. On the other hand, Khalīfah’s use of excremental imagery is significant in that it renders the abstract concrete in the reader’s mind. It also marks the destruction of hierarchy and materialises images of life as undifferentiated and purely physical. The end of this novel displays a revealing parallel with that of Gordimer’s *July’s People*; they share the continuity of an event and a sense of danger that predicts the emergence of a new reality.

### **Occupation and Racism**

Racism is a persistent backdrop to the events in *‘Abbād al-Shams*. The writer, who belongs to the oppressed, does not adopt a self-pitying attitude, but rather focuses on

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<sup>34</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 248.

ways to remedy the situation and on describing the conditions of that oppression. Many episodes in the novel therefore oblige the reader to acknowledge the atrocities inflicted on the Palestinians. The Israeli soldier is the figure of executioner; while the many checkpoints, with their opportunities for verbal and physical abuse, form part of the Palestinian's disturbing reality. Racial discrimination is inflicted not only on Muslim and Christian Arabs but also on Jewish Arabs, which explains the friendship developed later in the novel between Abū al-'Izz and Khoḍrūn, who is a German Jew with an Egyptian mother. Theirs is a fraternal relationship based around their mutual suffering of discrimination:

“Abū al-'Izz told Khoḍrūn:  
-But you're an Egyptian Jew.  
-My mother is and my father is German and I am Ṣabra.  
-How would you categorise yourself, with the Ashkinaz or Safardim?  
-I stopped categorising myself.  
-You did, but not Israelis.  
-No, they did not.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Israel routinely confiscates bank accounts, businesses and land, refusing to pay compensation to the dispossessed. Here Khalīfah focuses on two confiscations, of the al-Karmī farm and of Sa'diyyah's plot of land. Such disastrous incidents explain 'Ādil's reiteration that “reality is crisis”. Khalīfah intensifies the tone of self-criticism by using polyphony to circulate meaning in the novel, and to draw a thin line between Israeli racism and prejudice which originates from within, through the dilemma of Abū al-Fawwāres, who opens his heart to Abū al-'Izz and tells him of his political struggle:

“When I came out of prison and they refused to re-employ me; I was not devastated. I was expecting this, an ex-convict who returns to his teaching post? Impossible.[...] Is it right that I should lose my job? To be honest with you, the world suddenly turned black before my very eyes. I had only experienced this emotion twice before. Once, when Qāsem's government threw me out of the last Arab land I sought refuge in. The other was when the Lebanese government did

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<sup>35</sup> *'Abbād al-Shams*, p. 236.

the same. At both times, in fact at these three times, I felt it does not make a difference whether I exist or not. I wished I had never been born, so I wouldn't have been an Arab to witness what I had; and that's a long story, when I was pushed into Diaspora many times; not once. Every inch of the Arab World has condemned me: Jordan has, Syria has, Iraq, Egypt and Algeria; until the journey finally ended in Lebanon."<sup>36</sup>

This incident highlights the fact that neither the Palestinian nor the other Arab governments were supportive or behaved honourably towards ex-political prisoners. In the above passage, Abū al-Fawwāres's sense of identity is crushed by the Palestinian government's negligence and indifference towards him. Khalīfah articulates the poignant reality of brave men who have spent most of their life fighting for their country's freedom and being rewarded by punishment from their government. The multi-voiced discourse is therefore an effective narrative strategy not only in order to communicate the general meaning, but also to enable the writer to criticise the political situation and the passivity of the Arab world.

Significantly, the binary opposition of white and coloured is manifest in Khalīfah's "sideward glance"<sup>37</sup> over the issue of the white occupiers. When Abū al-'Izz reflects on the existence of the oppressive occupier, he thinks: "A white face, a white face with black heart,"<sup>38</sup> recalling Fanon's 'black skin, white masks'. Terry Collits argues that "Skin is not just assumed like a mask: it is god-given even if its meanings are social, discursive. What skin and masks have in common is that they mark the interface between the self and the world: they are the border."<sup>39</sup> Here, Khalīfah intentionally treats the Israeli officers with indifference. Maḥmūd Ghanayim states that "Portraying the Jewish character in a negative manner, dealing with them within the political dimension and seeing them as masters and rulers — these characterisations are consistent with the constraints imposed by the reader in the Arab world on the Arab writer in Israel. Indifference dominates in the treatment of Jewish characters in fiction, and such characters are often presented in a superficial manner

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>37</sup> Louise Yelin, in *Feminism, Bakhtin And The Dialogic*. Bauer M. Dale and Susan Jaret McKinstry (eds) ( New York: State of New York University Press, 1991) p. 225.

<sup>38</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 277.

that fits in well with preconceived opinions. Often, we observe that writers simply avoid situations that include the appearance of Jewish characters.”<sup>40</sup> This notion can be reduced to the Palestinians’ feeling of marginalisation and their acknowledgment that the Israeli officers are what Sartre<sup>41</sup> defines as ‘*Thirds*’ as opposed to ‘Us’: they share a feeling of collective alienation from the oppressive ‘*Thirds*’.

### **The Novel of Suffering and Irony**

Khalifah uses Fadwa Ṭūqān’s poem, ‘The Song of Becoming’, as an epigraph to express the novelist’s underlying mood of optimism. In common with many other Palestinians, Ṭūqān had hopes for the resistance movement and the *fidā’iyyīn* when this poem was written in 1967, suggesting the inevitability of the *intifāḍah*. Then there is the symbolism of novels’ titles: *The Wild Thorn* and *The Sunflower*. The first signifies the Palestinians’ misery, the second their hope for a new era of peace. Khalifah also draws images that harbour metaphors and symbols of fertility such as ‘al-‘ain’, or the spring, used with reference to Sa’diyyah, who remembers the time before her marriage to Zuhdī when she used to carry water from the spring. The image is suggestive of her continuous emotional and material generosity and her tenderness towards her children, an image through which she comes to symbolise the maternal and the subjugated earth. Images of mother/earth are related to fertility and the ‘womb’ an element of birth and conceiving. Bakhtin argues that these metaphoric appropriations are general and not specifically aimed at real or fictional females, but are a “de-femalising” of the female body. He points out that women’s “lives, like their bodies, are melted down into a generalised human existence.”<sup>42</sup> This image is contextualised with the Palestinians’ problem of water deficiency, of which the reader is made aware through Sa’diyyah’s stream of consciousness on the deteriorating situation in the West Bank: “the springs have dried, so have the wells, ‘they’ have counted and taxed the rain drops [...] every thing has changed.”<sup>43</sup> ‘Al-hout’, or the

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idiom*. John Drakakis (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> Maḥmūd Ghanayim, “A Magic Journey: the admission of Palestinian fiction in Israel to the Arab world.” In *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. I, No. 2, 1998. p. 220.

<sup>41</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

<sup>42</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 154.

whale, is also used symbolically, with reference to 'Ādil, signifying his importance to Raff and her resentment at her unrequited love:

"I refuse to be fused in the stomach of the whale. I'll never make a God of him [...] You don't need me! Just say it. I refuse to be buried alive in the stomach of the whale."<sup>44</sup>

The whale as symbol and image bears a feminist meaning. Raff is outraged at loving 'Ādil and refuses to worship him like a God. She refuses to be submissive to him and he is depicted as a whale, a creature known for its omnivorous nature. This symbolism corresponds to 'Ādil's image in the novel, where he is represented as part of the feudal Karmī family, using his connections and occupation to fulfil his political ambitions. Raff therefore promises herself not to let him get what he wants from her.

Bakhtin observes of laughter and its ability to express a desire or state of mind that cannot be verbalised bluntly or freely: "Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below [...] doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it."<sup>45</sup> There is a similar function in irony, a technique expertly used by Palestinian writers, particularly the women among them, as it provides an oblique approach to taboo subjects. For example, the situations into which Khaḍrah and Sa'diyyah are dragged are so ironic that they raise a number of issues that remain unresolved in that part of the world, most notably the obscenity of the women's humiliation of women. This is highlighted by Khaḍrah, whose introduction to the narrative provokes laughter as much as it points to the Palestinians' poignant reality:

"Huh! They hit me, my God, one hell of a beating! So what? I've been beaten more times than there are hairs on a head! My father beating me, my husband beating me- beating and more beating. But by God, being beaten by the Jews is better, at least one feels respectable [...] Look, woman, you just don't know what being

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> M. M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 23.

beaten does to you. The first, second and third time you keep quiet, but after that you say, in the name of God! You roll up your sleeves, bare your teeth and charge on in, biting left and right.”<sup>46</sup>

This passage calls into question Salmā Khaḍra’ Jayyusi’s comments on the modern Arab writer’s tendency to adopt a markedly serious tone: “ burlesque and parody, double meaning, the picaresque, the ironic and sarcastic, were not easily adopted in [modern Arabic literature], [it is possible that there has] been some impediment that prevented most writers from finding way to apprehend the comic spirit in literature as they sought to depict human experience at a time of great political and social upheaval.”<sup>47</sup> This novel, including the first part, albeit to varying degrees, is loaded with sarcasm, irony and double meanings compounded by comedy. On a more philosophical level, this passage recalls Hegel’s analysis of the Adam and Eve myth: “The fruit is an outward image, what it really means is that humanity has elevated itself to the knowledge of good and evil”<sup>48</sup>. In this cognition of evil resides absolute knowledge. Khaḍrah’s experience in life has led her to a more pragmatic mode of existence, fighting evil with evil, and this is exactly what Khalīfah wants to pass on to Palestinian women in general: that they should experience life to the full, without holding back for any inherited, traditional social values that can prevent their acquisition of ‘absolute knowledge’ and the liberation of their country.

Polyphonic dialogues circulate meaning in the novel, such as when the woman in the Turkish bath tells her story about the Israeli soldiers, bringing home to the reader the real meaning of occupation:

“A pregnant woman, with her tummy planted in front of her like a mountain, said: ‘My husband has been wanted for the last five years. They ripped the world apart looking for him, and couldn’t find him. I’ve hatched three children! Last time they raided our home, they turned it upside down. They opened every single closet, window and door. They even pulled all the drawers open. In his fury, the officer yelled at me, pointing at my tummy ‘and where is this from!’. I went

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<sup>46</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, pp. 82-86.

<sup>47</sup> Salma Khaḍra Jayyusi (ed), in *Anthology of Modern Palestinian literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Raymond Plant, *Hegel: on Religion and Philosophy* (London: Phoenix, 1997) pp. 43-4.

quiet and didn't know what to say. He kept yelling 'where is this from, woman?'  
One of the other women replied with a sharp voice:  
'from God!'"<sup>49</sup>

The image created in this incident is a comic one, but it is a dark kind of comedy loaded with irony. This background voice in the last line above can be read as the narrator's own voice, giving a deeper philosophical meaning to a story embedded in Islamic belief – Maryam,<sup>50</sup> the woman who became pregnant by God's will – which symbolises the righteousness of their cause.

Another novelistic tool employed here are the songs used by Khalīfah to depict the ironic reality faced by the Palestinians. These songs, which Khalīfah heard as a child growing up in her native village Nablus, intertextualise with her experiences in life, as they are part of Palestinian identity and folklore. As Gramsci says, "what distinguishes a popular song within the context of a nation and its culture is neither its artistic aspect nor its historical origin, but the way in which it conceives the world and life, in contrast with official society."<sup>51</sup> The poetic images that these digressions in the novel invoke are metaphorical and ironic, according to Bakhtin, 'dialogised', "they express the thought of the author since the author agrees with this maxim to a certain extent [...] the author represents this language, carries on a conversation with it, and the conversation penetrates into the interior of this language – image and dialogises it from within."<sup>52</sup> The songs in *'Abbād al-Shams*, including the epigraph by Fadwā Ṭūqān, represent the thoughts of the author, who uses their metaphorical power to convey certain ideas:

"Oh Layla! Where are you?  
Let your eyes witness,  
What has become of me,

For your sake,  
People have beaten their,

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<sup>49</sup> *'Abbād al-Shams*, p. 180.

<sup>50</sup> In the Quran, Merriam was infertile, her husband Zakriā (who was very old) pleaded God to give him a child, and God gave them a boy called Yaḥya.

<sup>51</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From Cultural Writings*. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (eds) (trans) William Boelhower. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985) p. 195.

<sup>52</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 45-7.

Drums around me,

Oh Layla! Where are you,  
So your eyes could witness,  
What has become of me,

Between you and me,  
Are mountains to stop me,  
Mountains your folks have erected,

But what power could hinder my soul,  
From travelling through them,  
At night, and reach you?

And if they ever take you,  
Away from me, in the end,  
You will return to me,

Oh Layla! Where are you? Where are you?  
So your eyes could witness,  
What has become of me."<sup>53</sup>

Here, the name Layla<sup>54</sup> is a reference to the romantic love that Palestinians have for their country. In Arabic, a woman is frequently used as a personification of the land; the subjugation of a woman in Arabic literary texts stands for the subjugation of the country. In addition, the mountains stand for the borders and drums for the bombardment and occupation. The song's narrative tells of a captured woman, sung to by her beloved, who promises that they will be united one day. It is ironic that the women in the Turkish bath sang a similar song earlier on to ward off disunity.

### **New Identities and Challenge in the Context of Occupation**

In this novel, Khalifah raises the predicament of women in the context of a more topical issue, that of the resistance movement, which makes her writings highly controversial. She defends her viewpoint: "I have been accused of being like the Israelis [and] of wanting to undermine the resistance movement since I was raising to the forefront a secondary matter, women."<sup>55</sup> In *'Abbād Shams* she captures the chaos resulting from the lapse between modernity and tradition, the backward and the

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<sup>53</sup> *'Abbād al-Shams*, p. 167.

<sup>54</sup> The famous Arabic beloved of Qais Ibn al-Mulawah; known as *Majnoon Layla*.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Cook's, *Women and the War Story*, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

advanced, and between the village and the city; this transitional period catches her female characters in a trap of mixed desires. She wants recognition for women's fight for survival and emphasises their role in the resistance movement, the changing role of Palestinian woman in society, and, crucially, the importance of women's emancipation and the personal liberation which must proceed in tandem with the liberation of her country.<sup>56</sup>

In Palestine women played a major role in the *intifāḍah* movement, expressing the desire to be socially and politically active and an integral part of society. Palestinian women established the first women's Union in Jerusalem in 1921. Its main concern at that time was to oppose the British mandate and continued Zionist immigration, and many women's groups emerged to pool their efforts, but their main concern was less 'feminist' than a political and social struggle against foreign colonisation of Palestine.<sup>57</sup> Many women's communities and societies were formed subsequently, but their main concern was charitable. In 1978, the WWC was first established and women in the Occupied Territories started to organise themselves in social, political and literary groups. As Cook notes, "Palestinian women writers emphasise that equally indispensable elements of the nationalist revolution are women as actors and feminism as an ideology of radical social change."<sup>58</sup> She cites May Sayeh's view that women are not asking for liberation for themselves alone, but as part of "a revolutionary transformation of society [...] We are living at a time of revolutionary struggle and we are determined to assert the need for the presence of women."<sup>59</sup> This issue is articulated strongly by Khalīfah.

In an attempt to create new images for women Khalīfah does not shy away from writing about the vulgar and loose women who, despite their ethical aberrations, are at times more effective in their societies and more courageous than others like Sa'diyyah and Nuwwār. According to Cook, "The social outcast-revolutionary Khaḍrah poses a

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<sup>56</sup> Palestinian women have learned a lesson from their Algerian counterparts who participated along with men in the liberation of their country but were left with no equal rights and achieved nothing after their country's liberation.

<sup>57</sup> Souad Dajani, "Palestinian Women Under Israeli Occupation: Implications For Development" in *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Judith E. Tucker (ed.) (Washington: George Town University, 1993) p.115.

<sup>58</sup> Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

dilemma: how can a Palestinian woman act independently, fight, survive, *within the community*, and make sure that her actions will continue to count?"<sup>60</sup> Here Khalīfah creates a binary opposition between the two women to highlight the crippling effects of old social conventions on women in the Arab world and to present Khaḍrah as a role model for Sa'diyyah in order to prove that in their political and social situation bravery, even for the vulgar, is important. Khaḍrah and Sa'diyyah are each other's psychological interlocutors; when they open up to each other the reader understands the circumstances behind the construction of their different psyches. The reader sympathises with both characters, allowing the author to construct a unified position for women. Susan Sipple has commented on the necessity of erasing women's rivalry "that limit[s] women and can deplete the power of women's subversion by undermining the possibility of a strong women's community."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Evelyne Accad asserts that:

"The novels written by the Arab and North African male novelists depict these many sides of oppression suffered by women in Arabo-Islamic societies. In depicting the suffering that occurs through the absence of personal freedoms, these writers describe women in various relationships: familial (wife, mother, sister, aunt, grandmother) and illicit (adulterous mistress, concubine, prostitute, slave, servant). The fact that these relationships are almost invariably defined by the nature of a woman's connection with a man indicates the extreme degree to which the social status of Arab woman is both male-centred and male-sanctioned. The condition of women being what it is in these societies, prostitution is only one further level of degradation."<sup>62</sup>

But here Khalīfah produces a text in which a female-centred, rather than male-centred, point of view is articulated, and by adding a layer of meaning she redefines the stereotypes prevalent in Arabic literature, elucidating the woman's significant role in the national struggle.

Examples of Sa'diyyah's identity crisis are frequent, especially after she becomes a working woman. On one hand, she is a desirable woman who was stalked, and later

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>61</sup> Susan Sipple "Witness [to] the Suffering of Women", in *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*. p.140.

<sup>62</sup> Evelyne Accad, in *The Image of Prostitute in Modern Literature*. Pierre L. Hom and Beth Pringle (eds) (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1984) p. 66.

proposed to, by Shaḥadah, yet on the other she is a responsible mother who denied herself all feelings of femininity, and when Shaḥadah uses her first name informally, she answers angrily, saying:

“ First of all, I’m Umm Ḥamadah and not Sa’diyyah. Second, I’m not a woman. I’m like you. I have a business. Third, no one is responsible for me but God and I. Understand?”<sup>63</sup>

Here, Sa’diyyah is attempting to absorb her new identity and independence, which forces her to deny femininity. This reflects many gender-related issues in a part of the world where the female is acknowledged as inferior and in need of guardian. The fact that Sa’diyyah wants to be defined in relation to her son is an embodiment of Third World feminism and its perception of motherhood and individuality. The mother, according to Darrāj,<sup>64</sup> is recognised only through her kinship to the masculine, be it a father, a brother, or even a son, because they form a possible project of martyrdom in the Palestinian political context. It also highlights class difference. In Sa’diyyah’s eyes, Shaḥadah can never measure up to her martyr husband Zuhdī. The force and anger of her repulsion of Shaḥadah confirms her new individuality and identity not only to him, but to herself too. However, she gradually overcomes this confusion of identity by recognising her newly earned freedom, and her role as a mother, a father and her own guardian too:

“She sees the women in the accursed windows looking at her with envy. She feels as though she had become a man, or half a man. So her step became firm...[she] was no longer merely a woman, she was the mother, the father and the miserable woman moving between home and Tel Aviv.”<sup>65</sup>

This point is reinforced by ‘Ādil’s comment that Sa’diyyah is “a strong woman who could meet the challenge of her circumstances and her environment and stand on her own feet.”<sup>66</sup> So Khalīfah attempts to articulate the inherited social values that cripple

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<sup>63</sup> *‘Abbād al-Shams*, p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Faisāl Darrāj. *Bu’s al-Thaqāfah fī al-Mu’assasah al-Filīsīniyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Adāb, 1996) pp. 183-5.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-66.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

her female characters by shedding light on subordinate characters such as Umm Şābir and Umm Taḥsīn, who are eavesdroppers on and gossipers about Sa'diyyah's new way of life.

Moreover, Khalīfah's two female characters are represented as women with high ambitions and tangible objectives. Sa'diyyah wants a house of her own, while Rafīf wants a column in the magazine. Both characters are disappointed with the cruel reality of a political situation that confiscates Sa'diyyah's plot of land, and with gender differences that stand as an obstacle to Rafīf achieving her goal. Ironically, they both replace their worldly dreams with a more spiritual and honourable dream, that of freeing their country. In this they resemble Rosa Burger who, at the end of *Burger's Daughter*, gives up all her worldly dreams in Europe and goes back to South Africa to fight the Apartheid system.

Earlier in this novel however, Rafīf is presented as a revolutionary woman whose role is more rhetorical and didactic than pragmatic: "It's a man's world, a man's magazine and a man's revolution."<sup>67</sup> By giving this character a pure feminist role Khalīfah helps to acknowledge the contradictions that arise from old social rules in Palestine and to elucidate the best ways to effect change. Rafīf acknowledges that "during the crisis we're journalists first and women second while after the crisis we become women first and journalists second."<sup>68</sup> Jung has written of "the need for many people like ourselves, to find a new *Weltanschauung*, or individual social attitude, better suited to see [us] through this transitional period."<sup>69</sup> This point can be further developed in the light of Bāsil's comment on Abū Şābir, and this heteroglossia helps the reader to fully grasp the social norms of the narrative, which conforms to the author's belief that the woman's 'honour' is no less than that of the homeland:

"And abū-Sālim's daughter flung a stone during the demonstration, that split open the officer's head. They chased her from street to street, and from one alley to another. Whenever she was out of their sight, it was as though the earth would split open to reveal her

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>69</sup> Carl Jung, 'The Origins of a Theory of Cultural Attitude', in Joseph L. Henderson, *Shadow And Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology* (Illinois: Chiron Publication, 1990) p.116.

whereabouts so clearly. She's an absolute menace. I just don't know... girls nowadays, seem to have lost their modesty; and have become crude. So, the officer grabbed her arm and said: 'aren't you afraid of being severely beaten? I know what would make you afraid!' she then ripped her school uniform, until her bra was apparent and said: 'do you mean this? Even that, I am not afraid to lose.'

God almighty, forgive us! What a rapacious generation, no capable person can handle. The homeland is one thing, but my son, honour is precious — and we are Arabs. Bāsil commented: 'If the honour of the homeland is lost, any other honour is worthless.'"<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the novel, Khalīfah represents her female characters as multifaceted: she functions in both the interior and exterior domains. Rafīf's suffering as a woman is part of her personal development and growth, while the contradictions that arise from within her self and her society are signs of her continuous search for absolute knowledge. Rafīf is like a character in *The Waves*. As Schulkind remarks "During moments of being, this self is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes an undifferentiated part of the greater whole. Thus, just as the outer limits of personality are blurred and unstable because of the responsiveness of the self to the forces of the present moment, so the boundaries of the inner self are vague and, at moments, non-existent."<sup>71</sup> So when Rafīf faces the contradictions in her relationship with 'Ādil and with the old inherited social values in general, she reveals how contradictory life can be:

"She got him! For he's like all other intellectuals, contradictory, and irresolute. They hold up to others rules, which they themselves do not adhere to. She remembered his attitude in front of the lights: 'you need to apply some restraint', 'And are you going to enforce them?'".

Is the issue of homeland different from that of women? One but stems from the other, and it would be impossible to disassociate them. The issue of women is fundamental to the issue of homeland. 'Oh! How they try to resolve their complexes at my expense, and we all get entangled. The endless loop goes on turning, and us with it in turn.'"<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 'Abbād al-Shams, p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, p. 98.

<sup>72</sup> 'Abbād al-Shams, p. 17.

However, Khalīfah does not ignore the male point of view. Through polyphony, Bāsil and Ṣāliḥ give their opinions and evoke an almost absent female character, Nuwwār. Through this polyphony the author gives women inner worth and vitality as active people in society, as compared with Nuwwār, who lacks a positive role in life. By placing her in this light, Khalīfah encourages women to take on a more active role in society. The reference to the Shah of Iran in this context internalises the idea of hypocrisy prevalent in the al-Karmī's, and through this episode Khalīfah mediates the ideas of idealism and pragmatism, concrete and abstract in society's codes. This can also be correlated with Gordimer's technique of 'objectification', through which characters are represented as objects in the eyes of the 'other':

'I told him once more: in all honesty, I don't understand you Ṣaleḥ. In the name of God, tell me right now, how can a revolutionary like you, fall in love with a delicate girl like Nuwwār? He smiled and asked: 'Why? Isn't she a human being?' I answered sharply: 'And the Shah of Iran is a human being too!' He stared at me for a long while, so I backed off.

'No I didn't mean it. My sister Nuwwār is innocent and is a victim'. He said: 'Then you've just answered my question. You are the lover and not the beloved!'

I said: 'Yes, she's got a lot to offer, but I just don't know!'

'Go on, don't be shy.'

'But she's rigid, and I like vivacious beauty.'

'Rigid? She's never so, Ṣāliḥ.' Beauty then is liveliness, or is it that liveliness is the secret of beauty? No doubt. So we shall inject some liveliness? But how? By whose authority? Theirs or ours? Or is it the authority of onlookers?'<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, the masculine is portrayed realistically, without any idealisation, revealing the characteristic flaws and vulnerabilities which Rogers highlights as a feature of modern women's writing. In this novel 'Ādil's weaknesses are highlighted through his relationship with Raffī, who often feels frustrated and rejected by his indifference to her. She knows that he is after a transitory affair whereas she wants a profound love that will lead to marriage. Her disappointment with him brings her to

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

analyse his flaws, and to try to pinpoint the problem of the educated Arabic man and his attitude to women:

“But freedom requires those who are strong and healthy. The Arab man is still ailing, a living dichotomy. Desires one thing, and executes another...Drawn to the past, yet dreams of the future. Her experience, the experience of her colleagues and *Women's Corner* has taught her well. He is a victim, entirely as a woman is. But his disease is more dangerous, for he is stronger and tyrannical. This is the reality. And she would not be a victim of the victim. But then, there is Solitude.”<sup>74</sup>

Despite the gender role differences inflicted upon women, Khalīfah emphasises that men, like women, are ‘victims’ and Raffīf does not need one. However, this relationship is challenged by Raffīf. She resists him, tries to be his equal, and succeeds. Bouthinah Sha‘bān observes the new, contradictory reality for women, which has left them with even heavier burdens:

“The burden of the past, present and future too, without compensating her for the usual load that an ordinary woman carries, along with the monotony of everyday hard work; to the extent that the revolutionary woman, during her moments of despair, began to envy the ordinary woman, envy her harmonious life and her bodily, as well as mental, comforts. Man has therefore accepted her new benevolence without accepting in return; any fundamental changes to her status nor responsibilities. For he wants her to be a woman and a housekeeper simultaneously; to be aware and oblivious, to see and not notice, to speak and say nothing; each at its own right moment. Moreover, for her to be a solid woman of the revolution who supports men in the battle for liberty then who goes back to the *harem* base, back to covering her head; when the revolution is over. Also, to give up freedom, independence, the future and, authority for men.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> Bouthinah Sha‘bān, *A Hundred Years of Arab Female Novelists* (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ādab, 1999) p. 217.

## The Mother Figure and the Unity of the Oppressed

Khalīfah's novel illustrates the important separation of mothers from daughters that Rogers sees as characteristic of female fiction. The female characters in this novel are either overprotected by the mother, like Nuwwār, or are have difficulty in conforming to the ideologies inherited from the mother, like Rafīf, despite the fact that she is portrayed as a liberal character and that the mother appears only through Rafīf's monologues, in which she tries to identify with her values and ethics. She asks her mother about the relevance of what she has taught her in the past:

“She groaned in appeal: ‘Mother! I told you a thousand times, the finger is up.’ She sobbed in desperation: ‘There is no refuge in the past.’ The present is no sanctuary. There’s nothing but escape, which is a struggle. And she’s caught between this and that.”<sup>76</sup>

Sa'diyyah, on the other hand, does not have a mother-daughter relationship, but the masculine figure of her martyr husband Zuhdī as caretaker and protector of her and her children. With the absence of the mother figure, the heroine is set free to “improve her understanding of the masculine figure.”<sup>77</sup> Through her, the idea of the mother as reproductive emblem is conveyed: Sa'diyyah bears the children who will be the nation's future. Ania Loomba argues that “anti-colonial movements, or feminists on reproduction, have failed to see the national, ethical and radical categories.”<sup>78</sup> She gives the example of the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement: “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.”<sup>79</sup> This point is a metaphor for the transcendence of women in colonial feminism, whereas in Western feminism this notion of women as mothers and reproducers of generations is considered reductive.

Khalīfah produces binary oppositions between the female characters – Nuwwār and Rafīf, Sa'diyyah and Khaḍrah – and highlights the fact that the mother's presence in

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<sup>76</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p.110.

<sup>77</sup> J. M. Rogers', *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>78</sup> Ania Loomba, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

the heroine's life impedes her self-development. Nuwwār, for example, is presented as a fragile and weak person; her love for Ṣāliḥ in the first sequel was a secret revealed only through the intervention of her brother Bāsil. However, in this novel, she decides to leave Ṣāliḥ because she wants a family and cannot wait until he is released from prison. This decision emphasises the difference between Nuwwār and Rafīf, the former being confined to domesticity while the latter is an intellectual, able to question the many inherited values and ideologies passed on by the mother. Both characters illustrate Rogers' view of the mother-daughter relationship in the female novel, reflecting the positive effect of cutting, or at least questioning, that bond. Moreover, when Rafīf turns from the mother to the masculine figure, 'Ādil, she feels disappointed and learns not to rely neither on him nor on any 'other', but only herself. Nuwwār, on the other hand, is presented as a vague and undeveloped person, an inhabitant of the house. A 'persona', Jung states, is "like a mask that presents us as we wish to be seen at our best, but it conceals the emotions, feelings and thoughts which do not fit in with its explicit intention [...] and if habitually ignored, they reach back in time to childhood and farther into the parental and ancestral background of the whole culture. They lose their very language and become ghostly cries and whispers from the past."<sup>80</sup> Nuwwār is presented as someone who lives<sup>81</sup> in the shadow of the past glories of the Karmī family. She cannot let go of the 'aristocratic' persona that she acquired as a child. Through it she became indifferent to everything, sacrificing her feelings and emotions to social customs. Therefore, when Ṣāliḥ's (the heroic figure in the novel) love does not materialise in her life (she cannot marry him because of his imprisonment), she leaves him. The motivation is her desire to live up to the mother's expectations of having a husband and children of her own; and love, at that stage of her life, is of secondary importance.

The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are a nation in distress. Therefore characters in this novel, whether male or female, are similarly oppressed and share the desire for a free country. Women also share another subordinated desire: equality. In *Abbād al-Shams* Khalīfah tries to resolve the equation of women and homeland by

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<sup>80</sup> C.G.Jung, *Shadow and Self*, p. 274.

<sup>81</sup> (The persona 'complex' also affects 'Ādil who is represented as sharing similar characteristics with Nuwwār, and is similarly represented as living in the past glories of the al-Karmī).

suggesting that the liberation of women must precede that of Palestine. As Elizabeth McKee explains, “the battle of the sexes has become part and parcel of the battle for Palestine and, as such, we not only see how women’s struggle becomes symbolic of the nationalist struggle, but how women themselves, as fictional characters, take on a symbolic mantle of the nation in question like al-Shaykh’s Zahrah.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, female characters that belong to different social classes share the same desire. Sa’diyyah, Raffī and Khaḍrah try to liberate themselves in their different ways, but ultimately unite to back the resistance movement in the final scene. The children’s participation in the uprising in this scene homogenises with Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughters*. The reference to the ‘pebbles and clods of earth’, ‘an element of birth’ as Bakhtin defines it, is used as a weapon to signify the authenticity of the Palestinians’ cause:

“Stones, Pebbles, Clods of Earth. Shrapnel. Glass. Women’s screams. Beatings. Stones. Slings. Children climbing up and down the wall.”<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand, the unity of women in the Turkish bath is an example of sisterhood. Despite the fight and the biased tribal tendency, in the end they are united.

Sisterhood is a potent theme in the relationship between Sa’diyyah and Khaḍrah, where the latter plays the role of the guardian and instructor to the former after they meet through Shaḥadah in the bus trip to Tel Aviv. Thereafter, they open up to each other, and Khaḍrah’s guardianship of Sa’diyyah extends to teaching her how to survive in a man’s world: “Come over here, Sa’diyyah and sit down beside me. Come on, you daft thing – you’ve no one else in the world except me.”<sup>84</sup> She teaches her how to physically fend for herself, a skill that Sa’diyyah puts into practice at the end of the novel when she and other women march towards the walls of the schoolyard to release the young men held by the Israelis. When the officer appears she rushes towards him. He beats her but she resists:

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<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth McKee, *op. cit.*, 177.

<sup>83</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 278.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

“clinging to his chest: my son! A second blow. A third. She drew back a few paces and then the attack. She kicked him between the legs with all the hate and bitterness and anger of a pained heart.”<sup>85</sup>

However, the two characters are brought together by their common position as outcasts from the social mainstream. Khaḍrah is rejected from the camp life, whereas Sa’diyyah is marginalised from Nablus society. In the prison cell, Khaḍrah tells Sa’diyyah her tragic story in order to enlighten her about life. After seeing her mother die in misery at an early age, she married a man who abused her physically. Then she got remarried to an old man who gave her love and treated her tenderly, but for whom she had to provide money for food and medicine through her work in prostitution, as well as having to nurse him. The lesson she learned was to be independent. Despite the ethical differences between them, they develop a profound relationship.

Most of the female characters in this novel are in search of something, whether freedom or income. Although the solidarity between Khaḍrah and Sa’diyyah is not based on a sisterhood of class, they are united by their mutual recognition of the threat from patriarchy and occupier: ‘them’ against ‘us’. Their solidarity is reflected in their speech, as well as in the unspoken, the typical ‘dialogism of the oppressed’.<sup>86</sup> Sa’diyyah learns from Khaḍrah how to be a strong and positive woman, to reach out for her goals by transcending the limitations imposed on her by society. The relationship between Sa’diyyah and Rafīf functions along similar lines. When Sa’diyyah is furious at the loss of her land and Rafīf tries to reconcile her to it, Sa’diyyah pushes her little son away and says:

“You too go away, the heart has become rusty and longs for no one. I don’t know what’s the idea of *us* working ourselves out, why? And who for? If everything will be lost at the end; the husband, the son, the plot, the work and the reputation. You say why did God create *us*? So that we become widows? Scandalised? And we give birth to those kids so that the *bastards* waste their blood in the soil!”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Hitchcock, in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, p. 116.

<sup>87</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 273.

In this scene the image of blood being wasted or flowing from the body signifies the external threat to Palestinians. The merging of blood and earth recalls the Bakhtinian image of 'death and birth': "this ambivalence, particularly when it involves the new birth implicit in death, or the resurgence implicit in being toppled, is the characteristic principle of both grotesque realism and carnival itself."<sup>88</sup> However, events unfold to reveal that Rafīf and Sa'diyyah are two sides of one coin; both suffer from the oppressions of the occupier and the exploitation of society. This reinforces the idea of solidarity between women from different social classes and backgrounds.

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Literature is both a reflection of political, social and national issues and a site for power relations between men and women in society; the narrative discourse displays real images of women in a complete environment. Writers in the Arab world therefore play a major role in modifying their social roles by occasionally introducing a bold female character to challenge the strictly patriarchal system which structures behavioural norms. Thus, in *'Abbād al-Shams*, Khaḍrah stands personally and ideologically in opposition to Sa'diyyah, who is sheltered by marriage, and acts as the mediator for her subsequent transformation. *'Abbād al-Shams* focuses on the ideological shifts undergone by Sa'diyyah, who was portrayed earlier in *al-Ṣabbār* as utterly oblivious to the national cause. The many poignant episodes of her life provide a political, social and psychological context for the changes she undergoes on both a personal and national level. The novel follows her mood from its early naivety and indifference to the later anger and vengeance with which she exhorts her son to resist the enemy. Like Gordimer's novels, therefore, *'Abbād al-Shams* brings to light the different layers of the character's consciousness, synthesising their ideological development. Both writers clearly reveal the gradual dissolution of personal / individual into national / collective identities. This in particular demonstrates their alertness and sensitivity to the turbulent changes in their respective countries, while they remain inclined to criticise the consequent reality. Khalīfah, for example,

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<sup>88</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

condemns patriarchal double standards by introducing characters who challenge the homosocial rules. This is one way of rejecting the decaying inherited customs that hamper the collective objective of a free Palestine.

*'Abbād al-Shams* depicts the simmering anger of Palestinians and the increasing allure of the uprising. Khalīfah anticipates its outbreak through the prescient scene in which Sa'diyyah and her son, along with other women and children, start throwing stones at the Israelis. In the work of both writers there is a highly tangible sense of national identity, leading to armed struggle and resistance. In both cases the resulting vision is a period of transition, marked by the chaos, instability and incoherence of the present reality.

Gordimer, in a similar fashion, attempts to remedy her social and political reality as engendered by the corrupt system of Apartheid. The following chapter sees the characters' changing moods and the transition of consciousness from moderation into extremism, or from alienation and confusion into national transcendence and violence. Characters like July stand in personal and political opposition to the Smales, and particularly Maureen, who undergoes an intense psychological and social transition of consciousness before succumbing to her unspecified fate. The backdrop to this transition is racism, identifiable earlier in July's stream of consciousness in remembering how he miraculously escaped a fire when he was a factory worker. The other black workers, locked up by the white landlord, are not so lucky. July's change of attitude and personality is therefore the result of racism, and it takes on a stronger tone and intensity when he is amongst his own people, away from the crippling materialism of the white environment.

## Chapter Four

### *July's People* (1981)

This novel reflects the agony and nightmare of white South Africans who, like other people around the world, anticipate the inevitable revolution and, in their case, the end of the apartheid era. This reflects white consciousness and its speculation over a new political order, a new culture and identity at that point undefined. *July's People* therefore revolves around that apocalyptic moment when the present is taken over by a future that is obscure and unpredictable to white South Africans. The idea behind the novel is based on the anticipation of a violent war that rules out the Apartheid system and replace it with another, and as such it focuses on the period of transition between political orders and cultures. Consequently, all the novel's events are projected into the future, but it should be noted that Gordimer focuses on certain aspects of change, such as the displacement of the whites and the heroine's difficulty with life in a poor village. These issues bring about changes in relationships, like Maureen's relationship with July and his people, or with her husband and children. The novel begins with an epigraph by Antonio Gramsci: "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms." This reflects Nadine Gordimer's ideology of 'morbid symptoms' and the associated economic and psychological changes in the transitional period between one order and another. In *July's People*, Maureen Smales is the main character, like Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*. As in many of her novels, Gordimer writes about a white English-speaking South African woman who represents the liberal ideology that opposes Apartheid, while she also makes the political issue a private one. The novel includes flashbacks to the elite suburbs and the wealthier lifestyle of the middle-class white South Africans before the outbreak of war which takes the Smales family to rural South Africa and July's people. However, Gordimer dwells upon the confusion and struggle of the Smales in their flight from Johannesburg to the bush with their servant July; the displacement from the rich area

to the poor bush is the catalyst for Maureen's hallucinations and her resultant psychological and personal changes.

### **The Displacement of Maureen**

Gordimer dwells on the psychology of the female protagonist, through the dramatic political and social changes that she undergoes, describing the delirium produced by such changes. The story is based on the imagined revolution and violence that erupts in Johannesburg, and focuses on the displacement and alienation of the Smales, who escape death thanks to the benevolence of their servant July. At the same time it focuses on the effect of economics on the identity and role of the characters, on which the writer sheds light through both the husband-wife relationship and the master-servant relationship. Maureen's confusion can be attributed, according to Kristeva, to the post-Freudian knowledge system or perception, which includes delirium:

“ Delirium is a discourse which has...strayed from a presumed reality. The speaking subject is presumed to have known an object, a relationship, an experience that he is henceforth incapable of reconstituting accurately.”<sup>1</sup>

The female writer therefore alludes to symbolism and Bakhtin's carnivalesque and grotesque images that dialogise the different voices in the novel in order to express her premonitions and vent the protagonist's delirium. However, Maureen often escapes delirium through the novel's analepses, which can be explained on the basis of the Freudian *lack*, that according to Kristeva has “within its very being the nonsignifiable, the nonsymbolised.”<sup>2</sup> When Maureen experiences a hallucination and decides to kill the kittens, she is at that point convinced that death is the only way of ending suffering. So when Bam notices the kittens are no longer in the hut and asks her where they are, she tells him coldly that she drowned them in a bucket of water because it was the best thing she could do for them:

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<sup>1</sup> *July's People*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Patricia Yaeger “Afterword”, in Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (eds.) *Feminism*,

“— I used to take them to be spayed. —  
 — Well of course you took them to be spayed. —  
 —Obsessed with the reduction of suffering. It was all right, I  
 suppose [...] not how to accept it, the way people do here. —[...]it  
 was as if she grimaced at him ugly; and yet she was his ‘poor  
 thing’, dishevelled by living like this, obliged to turn her hand to  
 all sort of unpleasant things.— Why didn’t you get one of them to  
 do it?—”<sup>3</sup>

The reference to the ‘spayed kittens’ symbolises the internal condition of white South Africa and thereby that of Maureen, a representative of that culture, and announces the infertility of its ruling system. Her drowning of the kittens signifies her conviction that this is the likely end for the whites. Surprisingly, Bam’s answer to his wife in the above passage contains a trace of racism: ‘them’ and ‘other’ are merely two sides of the same coin. Bam pities his wife, the beautiful, white, clean woman, for doing such a murderous thing, and thinks that she should have asked ‘them’ to do it.

After gaining consciousness during the three-day trip to the bush, Maureen tries to read a work of literature, namely “*The Betrothed*”, but after the dramatic change in their life she finds that reading is irrelevant. She never fully comprehended the horrors of some literature when she was living in Johannesburg before. But when she has seen such horrors herself she thinks there is no need to read about them: literary horrors could never measure up to her real experiences. This integration of a past and present way of thinking in the novel is remarkable. It signifies the appalling fear and horror of displacement in Maureen’s experience:

“ The transport of the novel, the false awareness of being within another time, place and life [...] was not possible [...] she was in another time, place, consciousness; it pressed in upon her and filled her as someone’s breath fills a balloon’s shape. She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination.”<sup>4</sup>

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*Bakhtin and the Dialogic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991) p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> *July’s People*, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

The scene at the beginning of the novel marks the Smales' displacement, which is clear in the changing identities and the shifting power when they escape with July on the bakkie — a small truck— to his village. July tells the Smales to say that it is his car rather than theirs, so that the army patrol do not confiscate it. From that moment the relationship between them becomes strained:

“July broke into a snickering embarrassment at her ignorance of a kind of authority not understood — his; and anyway, he had told them — everybody — about the vehicle.

—Told them what? — She was confident of his wily good sense; he had worked for her for years. Often Bam couldn't follow his broken English, but he and she understood each other well.

—I tell them you give it to me.—”<sup>5</sup>

Although July is trying to maintain his role as the servant to the Smales, his new identity among his people gives him a power that Maureen recognises at the end of the novel:

“Us and them. What he's really asking about: an explosion of roles, that's what the blowing up of the union buildings and the burning of master bedroom is.”<sup>6</sup>

The agony of white South Africans is often reflected through the dialogised scenes that echo the partial heteroglossia and idiosyncrasy of the blacks on the one hand, and Maureen's interior monologue on the other, which sums up the complex political and social situation in South Africa. However, Gordimer perceives the end of the Apartheid system by observing the past, a determinant of their future. Sartre illuminates this further:

“In order for us to 'have' a past, it is necessary that we maintain it in existence by our very project towards the future. [...] It is by means of this project that there is installed the complex system of reference which causes any fragment of my past to inter into an hierarchal, plurivalent organization in which, as in a work of art, each partial structure indicates in different ways, various other partial structures and the total structure.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p13

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

The novel also corresponds to Rogers' theory that women writers "utilizes senses other than the sense of sight, and therefore events may disappear for lack of physical description."<sup>8</sup> This applies to *July's People* in the sense that the description of the Smales' new surroundings, seen through Maureen's eyes, focuses on sensual experience rather than on events, evoking sight, smell, touch, and taste. This is noticeable in Gordimer's description of Maureen's experience of taking a bath:

"Paraffin tins of water heated on one of the cooking-fires. She washed the children, then herself in their dirty water; for the first time in her life she found that she smelled bad between her legs."<sup>9</sup>

Later on, she describes the children in the village and the Smales' child Jina, who becomes accustomed to the villagers' way of life. She approaches her mother innocently, unaware of the dirt that covers her face like a mask:

"Her eyes were crudely blue in the mask of a dirty face. Red earth engraved the joints and knuckle-lines of her little claws and toes and ash furred the invisible white fluff on her blonde legs. Dirt didn't show nearly so bad on black children...licking the dirt off their fingers along with the sausage grease..."<sup>10</sup>

So the novel allows space for the imagination and provokes relative feelings of disgust, colour and taste, as in the scene towards the end when Maureen, as she runs for her life, imagines the smell of 'boiled potatoes',<sup>11</sup> reminding her of a kitchen and house from the white culture. The potato smell is linked in Maureen's imagination with the comfort of home, for which she desperately longs. The use of smell here helps to incorporate and express feelings of displacement, which gives the reader's imagination space to acknowledge the character's different reality. This representation is based on a binary opposition of good and bad...etc, drawing a comparison between the past and present or white and black societies. Nevertheless,

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969) pp. 497- 500.

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Roger's, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> *July's People*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

it takes on a more positive slant when recalling the warmth of the world in which Maureen belongs, the smell of the potatoes in the kitchen.

### **Ambiguities in *July's People***

Feminist critics believe that female writing is the product of the variable positions women occupy between East and West, albeit unified by female cultural marginality. Julia Kristeva is among those critics who argues that female writing is overshadowed by this in such a way as to give it “a psychological and often dissenting, disillusioned or apocalyptic [quality] – something all too easily interpreted as being political.”<sup>12</sup> This is relevant to Gordimer’s *July's People* in the sense that Maureen’s final flight is an escape from the endless political trauma of South Africa, but it can also be interpreted within the purely feminist parameters of women’s psyche and feelings of self-knowledge reminiscent of Evelyne Accad’s<sup>13</sup> view that women live their lives without experiencing full freedom or choice. In this theory, when they gain self-knowledge and freedom through their experiences in life they tend to be confused by this newly earned freedom, and therefore either die or escape in an attempt to resolve the ongoing trauma. This theme has long been recognised by feminist critics of open-ended novels, and is usually associated with the psychological condition of women who undergo such a stifling or oppressive experience that they break into hysteria or delirium. The delirium functions in the textual work as an escape from the plot, or what Virginia Woolf calls ‘eschewing the plots.’<sup>14</sup>

Gordimer eschews the (sub-plot and) plot in two major incidents, at the beginning and the end of the novel. The first occurs when Maureen falls into delirium after the Smales’ flight from the civilised world to the bush. The harsh reality overcomes her, and she cannot comprehend the notion of living in a mud hut. She escapes this situation by recalling her old school days when she lived in the ‘shift boss’s’ house. This idea is confirmed by Rogers: “Focusing on what the heroine anticipates or

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Talking about Polylogue”, in Mary Eaglton (ed.), *Writing Reading and Difference, Feminist Literary Theory: A reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) p. 302.

<sup>13</sup> E. Accad, *Veil of Shame: The Role of Women in the Contemporary Fiction of North Africa And the Arab World* (Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1978) p. 159.

remembers is another convention that insistently turns attention from chronological or climatic narrative events.”<sup>15</sup>

“People in delirium rise and sink, rise and sink, in and out of lucidity. The swaying, shuddering, thudding, flinging stops, and the furniture of life falls into place [...] in the dimness and traced brightness of a tribal hut the equilibrium she regained was that of the room in the shift boss’s house [...] picking them up one by one, she went over the objects of her collection on the bookshelf, the miniature brass coffee pot and tray, the four bone elephants.”<sup>16</sup>

What is so remarkable at this point is Maureen’s focus on their material possessions, a theme which Gordimer uses throughout the novel to outline the whites’ tendency to exist through their possessions and not vice versa.

The other major eschewal of plot takes place when Maureen makes her final leap into the unknown future; she runs spontaneously and there is no conclusive explanation either as to whether the helicopter belonged to the rescuers or to the enemy, or what made her take the decision to run away solitarily and leave her husband and children behind. Gordimer uses the same technique in *Burger’s Daughter*, which depends greatly on the analysis and decoding of the textual world and of the protagonist’s psyche. This technique of ‘multiple possible futures’ is, according to Bakhtin, “not prophecy but uncertain prediction is characteristic of the novel, which speculates in categories of ignorance [...] Main characters in novels can and do become different, and they never exhaust the possibilities they can become and could have become.”<sup>17</sup> This leaves the novel open-ended and stimulates the readers’ imagination to “supply what is not there.”<sup>18</sup>

Gordimer avoids violent conflicts in this novel. For example, when Bam’s gun goes missing, there is no indication as to how it was stolen; the event is passed over and

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<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> *July’s People*, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Creation of Prosaics*. Gary Saul Moson and Caryl Emerson (eds) (California: Stanford University Press, 1990) p. 424.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman In The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) p.155.

the reader infers that it was a conspiracy between Daniel and July. The theft is discovered when the Smales' return from their journey to the chief (despite the fact that July was with them) – there was an indication that July made a signal to someone at the moment they left the hut:

“Maybe July, like Maureen, had taken to looting. July signaled, his arm raised, fingers of the hand folded together in a goose’s head, jabbing: straight on, straight on.”<sup>19</sup>

In an attempt to retrieve it, a verbal battle takes place between Maureen and July, but there is no violent confrontation between Bam and Daniel because they acknowledge his theft only after his departure, when Maureen notices his absence and learns from July that he has left for good. She asks him to bring their gun back. July then challenges the Smales' courage by saying:

“How I must get that gun? Where I’m going find it? You know where is it? You know? Then if you know why you yourself, your husband, you don’t fetch it?—”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that the Smales know who took their gun and despite July’s challenge that they should act upon their knowledge, the plot does not yet develop into action or physical confrontation. The argument between Maureen and July replaces a major sub-plot development that would have taken place in the narrative otherwise.

### **The Contradictions of the Interregnum**

In Gordimer’s essay, “Living in the interregnum”, she points out that “The state of interregnum is a state of Hegel’s disintegrated consciousness, of contradictions [...] the interregnum is not only between two social orders, but between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, to live in the interregnum is to experience the conflicts and the contradictions associated with it on all levels. The non-sequential aspect which Rogers claims to be

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<sup>19</sup> *July's People*, p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Neill “Translating the Present: Language, Knowledge, and Identity in Nadine Gordimer’s *July's People*,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Vol. 1. p. 76.

a pattern in the female novel is beneficial for the structure of *July's People*, in the sense that it contributes to the major narrative plot. The contradictions in the novel are therefore the continuous shifts between present and past tenses that are essential to the circulation of meaning. The novel starts with an event (the revolution) that has already taken place and proceeds from there to analyse its consequences for Maureen and the other characters around her. But at the end of the novel the resolution is ambiguous. Therefore, like *al-Ṣabbār* and *'Abbād al-Shams*, it follows Hegel's dialectical movement of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Thesis refers to the apocalyptic event of which Maureen was conscious after three days of a delirious journey into the bush; antithesis is the struggle and conflict between the abstract and the concrete in Maureen's character; synthesis refers to her final decision to leap into the unknown. The novel follows a sequential order of beginning, climax and end, using a narrative loaded with internal analepsis through which Maureen tries to analyse her life from a different prospective.

Rogers claims that women's writing follows a non-suspenseful pattern, where characters do not simply change but rather go through a process of growth, acquiring insight and the ability to confront their situation.<sup>22</sup> The title of *July's People* discloses the point of view of the narrative or prospective of the novel, that is Maureen who, after the nightmare of the revolution, is saved along with her family by July and taken to his village. There she tries to observe July's family and their way of living in an attempt to survive among them. The intertextuality of Gordimer's novels tends to diminish the element of suspense. To mention but a few, Maureen is similar to Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* in that they both come from a mining town, both belong to the Liberal party and both abandon their loved ones at the end of the novel. In addition, the monologues and lack of actions and events in the novel all accumulate to create a non-suspenseful novel.

However, the novel follows a logical sequence structure of causation of events, to the extent that we are given reasons for the heroine's difficulty in coping with her life. There is much shifting between past and present tenses to give the full picture

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<sup>22</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.30.

of her poignant yearning for her past life. Unlike Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*, who rejects the capitalist materialistic culture, she longs for the comfortable and materialistic life to which she became accustomed in Johannesburg. However, some of the subtexts reduce the element of suspense in the novel, such as when Maureen passes a hut filled with trophies, plaques and medallions that once belonged to a mine worker and reads BOSS BOY on a brass arm-plaque. She remembers her life as the shift boss's girl and recalls the times when she used to meet Lydia, the black woman who used to fetch her from school. She remembers the joy of walking back home with Lydia, how they used to talk, buy chocolate and share a Coke. But there are also dark memories of a photographer who once took a picture of her and Lydia, who out of habit took Maureen's bag and placed it over her head. She was too young to comprehend the fact that he was a journalist and that this photo was meant for a book later published about the country and its policies, "White *herrenvolk* attitudes and life styles."<sup>23</sup> The flashback here helps Maureen to establish causality and meaning for her suffering and confusion. The following paragraph corresponds to *Burger's Daughter*, showing the intertextuality of Gordimer's novels and validating the idea of the female novelist's non-suspenseful writing:

"Did the photographer know what he saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know?"<sup>24</sup>

In both novels Gordimer objectifies the little girl in an attempt to know what others might see in her (as a white), although she tries to be objective in her approach to the events of the narrative by alienating herself from both whites and blacks. Nevertheless, one notices her consistent attempts to elucidate the thin line between ignorance and racism.

Later in the novel, when Maureen and Bam are desperate to fix the radio in order to hear the news, the memory of the suburban malls emerges. Maureen wonders what might be happening there:

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<sup>23</sup> *July's People*, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

“Impossible to imagine what was happening in those suburban malls now, where white families ate ice-cream together on Saturday morning shopping trips, bought T-shirts stamped with their names (‘Victor’ ‘Gina’ ‘Royce’), and looked, learning about foreign parts, at photographic exhibitions whose favoured subject was black township life.”<sup>25</sup>

According to Gerard Genette,<sup>26</sup> the significance of the internal analepsis here, is to acquaint the reader with the life of the protagonist at a certain time and place. Therefore, the break-up of the sequence of events here provides a vision of what white South African life used to be in Johannesburg. It also marks the gap between whites and blacks, the white middle classes and miners who live in the same country as the black villagers yet know nothing about them.

The omniscient narrator is present throughout the novel. He/she tells the story of the Smales family and July’s people with special focus on Maureen’s point of view. This technique is beneficial in many ways: firstly, it describes the outbreak of war in the first part of the novel and the overall chaos in the country with the new reality encompassing the Smales family; secondly, it gives space for other voices in the novel, those of Bam (her husband), July and his people; thirdly, it shifts the focus from the others onto Maureen, who represents conventional English-speaking South Africa, and confronts her with the very different conventions of July’s extended family. The novel is based on description and provides a cultural feedback (heteroglossia):

“The vehicle was a bakkie, a small truck with a three-litre engine, fourteen- inch wheels with heavy duty ten-ply tyres, and a sturdy standard chassis on which the buyer fits a fibreglass canopy with windows, air-vents and foam-padded benches running along either side [...] it was yellow. Bam Smales treated himself to it on his fortieth birthday, to use as a shooting-brake [...] the vehicle was bought for pleasure.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> *July’s People*, p. 6.

However, in this novel, Gordimer follows the same technique of implied subtexts that she used in *Burger's Daughter* to fill in the gaps and ellipses of the narrative. The implied subtexts here make sense of some apparently incomprehensible situations, like July's obstinacy in dealing with Maureen as a friend. The following paragraph highlights the psychological barrier in July's personality:

"More than fifteen years. Yes...the first time was in 1965. but I didn't work for them, then. I worked in that hotel, washing up in the kitchen. I had no papers, that time. All of us in the kitchen had no papers, the owner let us sleep in the store-room he locked us in so nobody could steal and take the food out. That was the place that burned down, afterwards, in the winter their paraffin stove started a fire there, they couldn't get out. God was good to me.—"<sup>28</sup>

The oppression suffered by black people and the racist attitudes of the whites are the reasons behind July's feelings towards the Smales and his persistent references to Maureen as "good madam" and to himself as "your good boy". But he never breaks down the servant / madam dichotomy; he never had warm feelings towards her, despite the fact that she was good to him (she took care of him when he was ill and paid his fine when he was arrested). His bad experience in the hotel sheds light on the chasm between whites and blacks, the latter being unable to comprehend the paradoxical intimacy that the whites have with them. This particular incident explains Maureen's difficulty in absorbing some of his reactions. When she challenges him that his objection to her joining the other women in the field was his fear that she would tell his wife about the town woman, he answers "What you can tell? [...] —That I'm work for you fifteen years. That you satisfy with me."<sup>29</sup> The last sentence signifies July's attitude towards Maureen and the white South Africans because of his past experiences. It also accentuates Gordimer's intertextuality, as this particular point is a persistent problem in *Burger's Daughter* between Rosa and Baasie.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

## The Carnival, Grotesque and Real Life Motifs

Gilbert and Gubar comment on George Eliot's novella "The Lifted Veil" that "It never delivers the terrible secret or sustains the sense of evil that it seems originally to promise [...] to see behind or beyond the veil without revealing himself is an emblem of the 'omniscient' novelist's claim to perceive the consciousness of character without being seen herself and presumably without altering the events that will determine her characters' lives."<sup>30</sup> This observation also applies to *July's People* in the sense that the danger in the novel is imminent on the internal and external level, and also sustained throughout. The heroine is on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but then escapes as the war escalates in the country, but Gordimer withholds any clear revelation of what may have happened to Maureen or to the whites in South Africa. Instead she uses Bakhtin's carnivalesque, Rabelais' real life motifs, symbolism and metaphors in order to convey the premonitions of what the future may hold and how the heroine will cope with it.

A carnival scene symbolises the subversion of authority and the disruption of hierarchical scale.<sup>31</sup> To Bakhtin, carnivalesque encompasses the past and the future: "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed [...] what seems to be valuable about carnival is its awareness of the discontinuity of history, or history as crises."<sup>32</sup> Gordimer uses this technique towards the end of the novel in the *gumba-gumba* scene. At that time the Smales do not know what the occasion is; it is completely new to them, especially to the children. The Dropsical man, the laughter, drinking and vomiting — reminiscent of Rabelais' open square — the loud music from the amplifiers, which in turn looked grotesque in the village environment, are all a new experience. Everyone takes part in the carnival except Maureen and Bam, who are not given any answers to their questions when they enquire about it. Maureen later realises that people in the village were celebrating Daniel's decision

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>30</sup> S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

<sup>31</sup> *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J. A. Cuddon (London: Penguin Books, 1976) p.119

<sup>32</sup> Clair Wills, In *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds) (Manchester: Manchester university Press, 1989) p.133.

to join the war. At this point Gordimer deliberately excludes the couple from the celebration scene, subtly implying the death of one culture and the birth of another:

“Bam asked whether there was a wedding? And added or a meeting? But July was not apart from the leisurely[...] — is not a wedding. — And at the idea of a meeting, he merely laughed. Sometime we having a party. Just because someone he’s ... I don’t know.”<sup>33</sup>

Many images in *July's people* are adapted from *Rabelais and His World*, in the sense that some of Rabelais’ basic motifs are employed: the human body, human clothing, food, drink and drunkenness, sex, death and defecation, as well as the grotesque. This technique materialises the narrative, as Bakhtin reaffirms “All the series selected above serve in Rabelais to destroy the old picture of the world that had been formed in a dying epoch, and to create a new picture [...] In the process of destroying the traditional matrices of objects, phenomena, ideas and words [...] In this complex and contradictory flow of images, Rabelais brings about a restoration of the most ancient object associations.”<sup>34</sup> Gordimer reworks these motifs within the framework of *July's People* and, whereas Rabelais’ images bring about laughter, contradiction and parody; hers produce contradiction, parody and irony. The significance of these motifs is that they create new meanings for the images and the world (the real spatial-temporal world). *July's People* opens with a grotesque scene in which July serves the Smales tea. The contradiction lies in the mud hut and the pink cups, and in July’s obedient attitude, which is so ironic and sarcastic. This is further reinforced by the narrator’s confirmation of the racial and class gap between whites and blacks; the parody of ‘*en suite*’ here brings out the contradiction of life ‘there’ and ‘here’:

“You like to have some cup of tea?— July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind [...] The knock on the door. Seven o’clock [...] master bedrooms *en suit*— the tea tray in black hands smelling of lifebuoy soap.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *July's People*, p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in M. M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and Chronotope in The Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 205.

<sup>35</sup> *July's People*, p. 1.

Later on, there is a feast scene where the Smales are celebrating Bam's shooting of the two piglets and their cooking of the meat. The feast here takes place in their own hut, with their children, and is therefore a private affair symbolising the Smales' renewed happiness at that point:

"Give them the bigger one.—[...] She murmured for his ear alone.— The small one will be more tender.—he took only a side of the smaller pig, and the skin for Victor, neatly headless.[...] The incense of roasting flesh...rose from every cooking-fire. There were dog-fights roused by the mere smell of it. The half-wild, half-craven cats clamoured incessantly on the periphery of Maureen's preparation."<sup>36</sup>

In this novel Gordimer draws images from the grotesque body, which harbours within it metaphor, symbolism, irony, and parody. Since their arrival in the old world, Maureen has been thinking of death as a positive event, even a salvation. When she looks at July's mother she cannot help but think of death as concrete. In this context death symbolises the inevitable extinction of the old ('materialistic') culture and the birth of a new one. In death, Maureen's suffering will come to an end. On another level, this paragraph belongs to the binary of 'grotesque realism' which, according to Bakhtin, is gender related: "'Downward' is earth, an element that swallows up (the grave, the womb) and is at the same time an element of birth, or renaissance [...] it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving."<sup>37</sup>:

"Even death is a purchase. One of Bam's senior partners could afford his at the cost of a private plane — in which he crashed. July's old mother (was she perhaps his grandmother?) would crawl, as Maureen was watching her now, coming home with wood, and grass for her brooms on her head, bent lower and lower towards the earth until finally she sank to it — the only death she could afford."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 155.

<sup>38</sup> *July's People*, p. 65.

At this point Maureen analyses death as if it was a purchase; the sentence has a double meaning. Superficially it states Maureen's condition at that point, contemplating her own death. Convinced that death would bring her salvation, she is no longer afraid of it. In a deeper, gender-related analysis, Gordimer refers to the old culture as 'masculine', dying on a plane, as opposed to the motherly (feminine) earth of July's mother's anticipated death, which encodes the birth of the new culture.

In another scene, Gordimer portrays the body's defecation, which acquires significance through giving meaning to the spatial-temporal world. In other words, it gives life to events, and what seemed abstract in the past is made concrete through such bodily images, which are interwoven with grotesque images of toilet paper used in the absence of a toilet. This particular motif, according to Bakhtin, "creates the most unexpected matrices of objects, phenomena and ideas, which are destructive of hierarchy and materialize the picture of the world and life"<sup>39</sup>:

"Well, a good thing he's acquired the technique. How long d'you think your toilet rolls will last?—It was true that it was difficult to get the children to remember to bury the paper along with the turd; it was disgusting to find shit-smearred scraps blowing about — and being relished by the pigs."<sup>40</sup>

Later on in the novel, after the Smales rejoice in the festive event of eating a piglet, the couple make love, which they had rarely done since their arrival at the hut:

" They made love [...] in the presence of their children breathing close round them and the nightly intimacy of cockroaches, crickets and mice feeling-out the darkness of the hut [...] In the morning he had a moment of hallucinatory horror when he saw the blood of the pig on his penis — then understood it was hers."<sup>41</sup>

The significance of this incident lies in its combination of grotesque realism and feminism: there is an intersection of sexuality and the defecation of the human body, an intersection that may cause a moment of horror, which, according to Kristeva, is

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<sup>39</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 187.

<sup>40</sup> *July's People*, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

related to the maternal, symbolic and semantic realms through which the child goes: “any lapse from the symbolic code may threaten to cast the human subject back into the unmeaning of the semiotic, to the dismay of that subject.”<sup>42</sup> This explains Bam’s moment of horror when his registered boundaries are crossed. However, the blood of the animal, which is later recognised as Maureen’s, are distinguished by Kristeva, on the basis of Bakhtin’s ideas about fluids, “by dividing them into two types, excremental (which includes ‘decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc’) and menstrual; while ‘[n] either tears nor sperm [...] have any polluting value’. Excrement and death stand for an external threat, but menstrual blood represents “the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual)”. Kristeva’s analysis provides a valuable explanation for Bam’s identity confusion at that point. The feast was a sign of the Smales’ temporary renewed happiness, but the essence of Bam’s identity crisis remains.

Later in the novel, the fight between July and Maureen develops into the latter’s attempt to act coquettishly towards the former. This scene is also highly grotesque:

“The incredible tenderness of the evening surrounded them as if mistaken them for lovers. She lurched over and posed herself, a grotesque, against the vehicle’s hood [...] The death’s harpy image she made of herself meant nothing to him, who had never been to motor show complete with provocative girls [...] she laughed and slapped the mudguard vulgarly, as he had done to frighten a beast out of the way.”<sup>43</sup>

The significance of this incident is that it materialises both ideological and cultural differences between Maureen and July. Despite the fact that July is urbanised he does not grasp the semiotic significance of Maureen’s behaviour. The idea that they share a language is tested many times in the novel, and ultimately fails due to July’s unwilling to continue to play the role of the servant. His power increases and she becomes so weak that she wants to seduce him. Reality dawns on her when he does not respond to her moves, as he does not understand the ‘death’s harpy image’ or the showgirls. This behaviour calls into question Fanon’s psychoanalytic assumption of

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<sup>42</sup> Sue Vice, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> *July’s People*, p. 153.

the 'black man's desire of the white woman'. This is further challenged, however, by Ania Loomba who believes that the black man's desire is 'contextualised and historicised' but asymmetrical to the white woman's fantasy of "being raped by a black man is 'in some way the fulfilment of a private dream, of an inner wish'".<sup>44</sup>

### **The Significance of the Chronotope in *July's People***

The setting of *July's People* indicates the sort of events that are associated with pastoral chronotopes. Therefore, space precedes time in the novel: the description of real life motifs fluctuates over time. The Smales' arrival in the bush signals the narrative's 'bypassing' history – there is no alternation of settings in the novel and therefore the main chronotope setting is the village. The chronotope of the narrative is constrained within certain spatial boundaries: the open fields, river, mud hut, the bakkie and the bush. The hut is the chronotopic figure for the Smales' internal affairs and conflicts; it is where most of Maureen's monologues and the daily rituals of the family's life take place. Maureen is portrayed as constantly living in crisis, or what Bakhtin calls the 'threshold' element that sets her at odds with the world around her. She feels alienated from the women in the village, and time and space in the village is an agricultural time-space of collecting the greens, cooking the mealie-meal, and thatching the huts, etc. She is conscious of her own displacement and that of her family, the primitive environment that she is forced to inhabit and the bleak future ahead.

On the other hand, the bakkie is *July's People's* chronotopic figure of movement; both the Smales' flight to the village and their crucial visit to the chief who would authorise their stay in the village are rides in it which are a metaphor for survival. This idea can be explained with reference to Bakhtin's adventure novel and to the characters who "are reduced to *enforced movement through space* (escape, persecution, quests)."<sup>45</sup> The significance of this chronotope, according to Bakhtin, is that "the character is forced to become 'a new unprecedented type of human being.'"

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<sup>44</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idiom*. John Drakakis (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 162.

The character in these kinds of novel ‘emerges *along with the world* and [...] reflects the historical emergence of the world itself.’<sup>46</sup> This corresponds to the Smales’ first flight in the bakkie, where they have become refugees in July’s village; in the second, they need a crucial endorsement from the chief to stay there, signifying the transition of power from whites to blacks. In the following passage, however, the chief addresses the Smales in a friendly manner, confessing to them his own worries about the eruption of war in the village:

“The government it’s going give me guns [...] Before, the white people are not letting us buy gun. Even me, I’m the chief, even my father and his father — you know? — we not having guns. When those Soweto and Russias, what- you- call-it come, you shoot with us. You help us.”<sup>47</sup>

The open fields signify the idyllic chronotope of gathering and socialising. As with the open square, spatial description precedes time and is fused in the narrative. However, the destruction of the idyll is clear in the novel, as it focuses on the differences between the provincial and urban world. Maureen reflects on July: “His familiar head, newly shaved by a villager who barbered under a tree.”<sup>48</sup> There is clear sarcasm in this monologue, focusing negatively on the backwardness of July’s village. Similarly, the sense of time is meaningless in a place whose only sense of timing is dawn and sunset. Michael Neil analyses the ironic significance of Bam’s checking on his watch and Maureen’s feelings of “not knowing where she was, in time, in the order of a day as she had always known it.”<sup>49</sup> Pointing out that the Smales’ “sense of temporal dislocation is only intensified by echoes of their old life whose wrenched context makes Bam “disjointed by ...contrasting perceptions of habit and strangeness”<sup>50</sup> The cycle of the chronotope, linked to Rousseau, symbolises the meaningless rotation of provincial life, which runs parallel to Bakhtin’s observation:

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<sup>45</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 222

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>47</sup> *July’s People*, p. 119.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

“Cyclicality makes itself felt with particular force, therefore the beginnings of growth and the perpetual renewal of life are weakened, separated from the progressive forces of history and even opposed to them; thus growth, in this context, makes life a senseless running in-place at one historical point, at one historical development.”<sup>51</sup>

Significantly, the idyllic chronotope represents Martha’s cyclical life and her implied unhappiness and sarcasm associated with July’s presence in her life:

“For that season, although she worked and lived among the others as usual, the woman was not within the same stage of the cycle maintained for all by imperatives that outdid the authority of nature. The sun rises, the moon sets; the money must come, the man must go.”<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, the river functions as a spatial metaphor for the village’s marginal and ambiguous status. Throughout the novel, spatial boundaries are emphasised by the narrator’s voice:

“Beyond the clearing — the settlements of huts, livestock kraals, and the stumped and burned-off patches which were the lands — the buttock-fold in the trees indicated the river and that was the end of measured distance.”<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, Maureen’s crossing of the river at the end of the novel metaphorically signifies her departure from one life into another, unknown one, and the breaking of all her ideological and spatial limitations; by crossing the river she abandons the impingent of ‘master bedroom’ and ‘back there’. She also breaks the psychological fear of getting to ‘the other side’ of the river. Maureen is presented “‘moving’ into the water like some member of a baptismal sect to be born again,”<sup>54</sup> in a spatial description that is also a metaphor for her rebirth. Because the spatial description is so controversial at the end it stirs up many clashing images: the worldly image of ‘Grimm and Disney’ and ‘the smell of the boiled potatoes promises a kitchen’, as

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<sup>51</sup> M. .M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 230.

<sup>52</sup> *July’s People*, p. 83.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

opposed to the description of the plane: 'She can hear the laboured muttering putter very clearly in the attentive silence of the bush around and ahead: the engine not switched off but idling, there', and 'she can still hear the beat, beyond those trees and those, and she runs towards it. She runs.' The strong language and the hint that the helicopter might belong to the enemies leave the novel open to many contradictory interpretations.

The radio, on the other hand, is a chronotopic figure; it marks the Smales' occasional temporal connection with the material world when they occasionally try to tune in to the station to hear fragments of news. In the following passage they hear Afrikaans voices employing a code of vague references to a base near Johannesburg, and they stay connected to this station for while before losing it. Through such incidents Gordimer represents a universe of discourse, where different ideologies, languages, dialects are manifested through the different characters and perspectives that relate to the heroine's world:

"They found themselves listening to what could only be MARNET, the military Area Radio Network, that had been developed originally to supplement vulnerable telephone communications on the border in the Namibian war, and lately extended to the whole country."<sup>55</sup>

### **Authority of Possessions**

In her essay "The Interregnum of Ownership in *July's People*", Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that when Gordimer takes the Smales into rural South Africa, "marooned in an alien culture, the identities of the white liberals disintegrate, their morality and their language rendered impotent before the returned gaze of the black servant [...] every painful phase of the disintegration of white consciousness is built around the struggle for an object."<sup>56</sup> The novel focuses on the economic changes, the displacement of the Smales and their feeling of dispossession. As such, it is loaded with materialistic objects and references the master bedroom, keys, gun, bakkie,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Bruce King, *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*. (London: The Macmillan, 1993) p. 108.

racing car, water-tank, primos and the radio, which are vaguely placed in the bush. The controversy resides not so much in the objects which are brought into the poor surroundings of July's village as in the possessiveness of the Smales and their children. The novel is full of arguments between Maureen and Bam, on the hand, and Maureen and July on the other, over the keys of the bakkie. The keys and the gun are metaphors of power and authority in South African culture and, with their loss, the Smales' identity is weakened. This is symbolic of the transference of power from white to black authority. However, the sense of possession is accentuated when Bam fixes the water-tank in the village and his son Victor automatically assumes that it belongs to them rather than the villagers. When he sees others using it, he shouts:

“Everybody's taking water! They've found it comes out the tap! I told them they're going to get hell, but they don't understand. Come quick, dad! [...] —But it's their water, Victor. It's for everybody [...]— Ow, dad, it's ours, it's ours! —”<sup>57</sup>

The narrator portrays the happiness of the Smales children when Bam first brings the bakkie home; there is a clear suggestion that the whites are obsessed with consumerism:

“They stood around it indulgently, wife and family, the children excited, as it seemed nothing else could excite them, by a new possession. Nothing made them so happy as buying things; they had no interest in feeding rabbits.”<sup>58</sup>

In this passage, there is an unambiguous contrast between the urban and rural society. In the former, people find pleasure in buying and possessing objects, whereas in the latter, they find it in much simpler and natural ways. The happiness of having possessions in the Smales family is due to the fact that the only link they have with South Africa is a materialist one — the only reason that is keeping the Smales in South Africa is their investments. They had thought of leaving the country before the war, but had not been financially ready. Their roots were elsewhere, however, so that if they stayed they might end up like ‘white pariah dogs in a black

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<sup>57</sup> *July's People*, p. 62.

continent'. New possessions gave them a sense of attachment to the country, recalling Sartre's observation that "the totality of my possession reflects the totality of my being. I am what I have [...] thus what fundamentally we desire to appropriate in an object is its being and it is the world."<sup>59</sup> On a deeper psychological level, it can be reduced to the object-relation theory, the interaction between the self and the external world: "This structuring is 'projected' outwards and 'introjected' inwards which form the pattern of a self's dealing with the world, including other people. Projection is a process whereby states of feeling and unconscious wishes are expelled from the self and attributed to another person or thing"<sup>60</sup> The role of the 'ego' here is to filter the objects to satisfy the 'id', which explains the compulsive buying.

Throughout the novel, Maureen is portrayed as shattered by her displacement. When she looks at her hut, she cannot help but think of her 'master bedroom'. This symbolises her and Bam's disintegrated identities. Meanwhile, the novel reveals the significance for July of gaining possessions; he becomes more powerful and authoritative, although his identity remains unstable. In the following passage he is portrayed ironically:

"He leaned his back against the wheel of the bakkie. Pride, comfort of possession was making him forget by whose losses possession had come about."<sup>61</sup>

This can be compared to Maureen's realisation of the effects of the revolution on them: "An explosion of roles, that's what the blowing up of the union buildings and the burning of master bedrooms is"<sup>62</sup> This explosion of roles is evident in an earlier incident when July discusses with his family the Smales' undesirable presence in the village: "If I say go, they must go. If I say they can stay...so they stay"<sup>63</sup> With his

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 591-597.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1984) p.80.

<sup>61</sup> *July's People*, p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

wife and mother he plays the patriarchal role, whereas with the Smales he practices his newly acquired powers of authority.

Moreover, some objects brought from the other world to the village clearly have no value there, like the trophies and the medals that Maureen notices in one of the abandoned huts. This incident has a double meaning; firstly, it shows that values and people differ in the two worlds. Those who belong to the old world have a different value in this agricultural community. For example, Bam, who was a well-known architect in Johannesburg, is valued only for his skills at fixing the water-tank, killing the pigs and so on. Secondly, it signifies the 'BOSS BOY' 'paradoxical pride of servitude'<sup>64</sup>; this pride is linked to an identity built around being a worker in the new world, earning money for one's people and status for being a good 'boy'. This can be said of July, who acknowledges himself as 'your good boy'.

When July's authority grows, his control over the Smales and their possessions starts to irritate the couple, particularly Maureen. This change in roles and authority among the main three characters dominates the textual world of *July's People*. Many subtexts are produced by the struggle between Maureen and July, the most significant being the continuous arguments over the keys of the bakkie and the theft of Bam's gun:

"There was the moment to ask him for the keys. But it was let pass. They stood in the midday sun and watched, over at the deserted dwelling-place, the yellow bakkie being reversed, bucking forward, leaping suddenly backwards again; kicking to a stop. July was at the wheel. His friend was teaching him to drive."<sup>65</sup>

In this passage there is boiling frustration on the part of the Smales, and when Maureen tries to intimidate July by suggesting that someone may catch him because he is driving without a license, he laughs at her and points out that there is no longer any need to fear the white police. When she reminds him that the bakkie should be hidden so no one would know that they were in the bush, July replies: "The bakkie?

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<sup>64</sup> This term was used by Michael Neill, in "Translating The Present: Language, Knowledge, and Identity in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*", p. 89.

You know I'm tell them. I get it from you in town. The bakkie it's mine. Well, what can they say?"<sup>66</sup> This song and dance routine between Maureen and July, as Gordimer calls it, continually escalate until it reaches a point of fierce confrontation when Maureen sarcastically hands him the keys, saying 'your keys'.<sup>67</sup> July then refuses to take the keys and answers her "You don't like I must keep the keys. Isn't it? I can see all the time, you don't like that."<sup>68</sup>

## Master and Slave

Racism lingers throughout the novel. There are instances when 'them' and 'they' are used in reference to the blacks as the 'others', or when differentiating between the husband 'My Jim' and the servant 'Our Jim', or between the 'Shift Boss' and 'Boss Boy', or 'July' whose name echoes that of Crusoe's 'Friday', and whose real name is later revealed as 'Mwawate' – another instance of intertextuality with *Burger's Daughter* in which Baasie's real name is also revealed later in the novel as 'Zwelinzima'. What this implies is that the blacks lived with the whites but had to adapt to the 'master's' culture and way of life, while the whites did not know anything about the 'servant's' background or culture, even to the extent of giving 'them' simpler names. This can be attributed to the whites' intentional ignorance of the 'others', not wanting to see the ugliness of the 'other's' poor reality. For example, July does not reciprocate friendly gestures. With the reversal of roles, he is particularly represented as lost between 'master' and 'servant' categories. In other words, he wants to hold on to the whites' authority because his servitude to the Smales gives him authority amongst his own people. Paradoxically, he is unwilling to continue playing the role of servant for the Smales but wants them to pay his salary:

"The master he think for me. But you, you don't think about me, I'm a big man, I know for myself what I must do. I'm not thinking all the time for your things, your dog, your cat. —  
— *The master*. Bam's not your master [...]

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<sup>65</sup> *July's People*, p. 57.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

— You not going pay me, this month? —<sup>69</sup>

The argument continues with a clear elucidation of July's confused identity and situation. This confusion reaches a point where July confesses that he wants some help to get rid of the 'pass book' — which the Smales had to sign every month — which along with the 'post office savings book' and 'the building society saving book' shaped his urban identity and existence in the colonial world:

“He thought of the pass-book itself as finished. Rid of it, he drove the yellow bakkie with nothing in his pocket. But he had not actually destroyed it. He needed someone — he didn't yet know who — to tell him: burn it, let it swell in the river, their signatures washing away.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Reversal of Roles and New Identity**

In this novel Gordimer sheds light on images of women in rural South Africa, such as July's mother, or his wife, who has an important position in the family. Women there play a major role in the absence of their husbands and gain an authoritative position within the family, as Bozzoli explains: “For those women left behind in the rural areas, the departure of men in increasingly large numbers could, depending on the region and the circumstances, lead to strengthening of the female position within the domestic sphere [...] out of this is emerging the concept of a more self-sufficient female world.”<sup>71</sup> This is true in the sense that Martha is conveyed as someone in charge of her family; she has a strong personality. When July brings the Smales to the village she says in an affirmative manner “Why do they come here? Why to us?”<sup>72</sup> Throughout the novel she cannot absorb the idea that July will be around for a long period and this anguish is associated with her concern about another pregnancy. She reflects on the structure of her married life, with July sending her money every month and his biannual visit. In the passage below Gordimer articulates her communication difficulties:

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.137.

<sup>71</sup> Belinda Bozzoli, “Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies. In *The Journal of Southern African*

“ July’s wife spoke to July of what she was thinking. She was not used to having him present to communicate with directly; there was always the long wait for his answering letter, a time during which she said to herself in different ways what it was she had wanted and tried to tell him in her letters [...] now her man was in her hut, she was giving him his food, he was there to look at her when she said something [...] he came home every two years and each time, after he had gone, she gave birth to another child [...] but now he had brought his white people, he had come to her after less than two years and already she had not bled this month”<sup>73</sup>

This communication gap underlines the identity crisis of July, who has the same problem with Maureen, which proves that he belongs neither to urban society nor to the villagers. Conversely, Martha and the mother, are presented as capable of retaining their stable identities despite the changes occurring in South Africa and in the people around them.

The author is conforming to Rogers’ idea of the tendency of modern women writers to portray the masculine without any idealisation, to see it as vulnerable and full of characteristic flaws.<sup>74</sup> For example, Maureen cannot accept her husband’s new image as helpless and dependent upon July and his people, rather than Bam Smales the architect to whom she was married. Nor is Bam able to identify his wife as the shift boss’s daughter or the ballet dance teacher; they become anonymous to one another. To Maureen he is ‘a man without a vehicle’, while ‘she had gone on a long trip and left him behind in the master bedroom.’<sup>75</sup> She goes through an intense life experience, and she realises that everything they do is necessarily relative to their new environment:

“ We understand the sacred power and rights of sexual love as formulated in master bedrooms, and motels with false names in the register. Here, the sacred power and rights of sexual love are as formulated in a wife’s hut, and a backyard room in a city. The balance between desire and duty is—has to be—maintained quite

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*Studies*. Vol. 9. No 2. April 1983. (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1983) p.162.

<sup>72</sup> *July’ People*, p. 18.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>74</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>75</sup> *July’ People*, p. 98.

differently in accordance with the differences in the lover's place in the economy."<sup>76</sup>

Here Gordimer reduces everything to economical terms, a Marxist feature that was also conspicuous in the textual world of *Burger's Daughter*. The significance of this passage is its disclosure of the tremendous changes within Maureen's life, yet also her persistent resentment to what had become of her life. However, Maureen's monologue, as well as the narrator's voice, elucidates the couple's troubled sexual relationship and awkward feelings in the absence of materialistic objects like the grooming and bathing products, in the sense that a considerable part of the textual world is devoted to describing her brittle nails, shabby trousers, body hair and perfumes which covered their naturally bad smell ...etc:

"There was no nail-file; often she sat examining her broken nails, taking the rind of dirt from under them, as she did now, with a piece of fine wire, a thorn, whatever presented itself in the dust around her."<sup>77</sup>

In this respect Gordimer arguably conforms to Gilbert and Gubar's idea of a modern representation of women, which calls for 'killing the aesthetic ideal' that limits the female existence in the narrative world through the angel image created in their writings.<sup>78</sup> However, this concrete representation of the female gives the female role credibility in the novel. Maureen's change of physical appearance is one of the elements that affect her psychological condition and consequently the couple's feeling of castrated sexuality:

"She pulled the shirt over her head and shook it. To lie dawn was to become a trampoline for fleas. —What're you making a fuss about. — The baring of breasts was not an intimacy but a castration of his sexuality and hers; she stood like a man stripped in a factory shower or a woman in the ablution block of an institution [...] he would never have believed that pale hot neck under long hair when she was young could become her father's neck."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *op.cit.*, p.17.

<sup>79</sup> *July's People*, pp. 89-90.

Throughout the novel, Maureen is represented as the only character to be strongly affected by this displacement and to be unable to find a new identity. Bam, by contrast, has some technical skills which can be exploited for the welfare of the villagers: he fixes the water tank, provides meat and catches fish...etc. Maureen has nothing to do in the village, and even her previous skill as an interpreter for Bam and July fails her in their new environment. For example, when July is disrespectful to Maureen and shocks her, she reflects upon their relationship:

“I’ve got nothing to do, to pass the time. — But they could assume comprehension between them only if she kept away from even the most commonplace of abstractions; his was the English learned in kitchens, factories and mines. It was based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings. — I’ve got no work. —”<sup>80</sup>

In this incident Gordimer foregrounds the role of language in widening the gap between whites and blacks in South Africa. She attributes all the problems between the Smales and July’s people to the persistent linguistic problem between the two. On a deeper level, she hints at Maureen’s boredom and vacuity which prompt her to view everything in a negative light. However, the continuous verbal war between Maureen and July is indicative of the cultural gap between the whites and the blacks, which is Gordimer’s main objective in the novel. Judie Newman points out that “Structurally Gordimer implicitly signals the need to cede interpretive control, to deconstruct the authority of the white ‘teller’ in economic and literary terms [...] in their new economic context, however, her understanding founders, together with her distinction between abstract and concrete.”<sup>81</sup>

Gordimer highlights the white female’s inner fear of war and all the associated chaos, horrors and displacement that affect the character’s moral values and may cause her aberration. The following incident however shows Bam’s astonishment

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>81</sup> Judie Newman, *Nadine Gordimer* (London: Routledge, 1988) pp. 89-90.

when he discovers that Maureen has stolen a large quantity of malaria pills from the pharmacy:

“ How many packets have we got left?—  
— Six I think.—  
— Good god. Such a lot of pills!— His voice became low, murmuring, elliptical. This was the form of intimacy that had taken place of love-talk between them.— Mmh?...did you expect we'd be staying a long time?—  
— Well, will we?—  
—Where'd you get such a supply? Surely we didn't have them in the bathroom cupboard?—  
—I looted. From the pharmacy. After they attacked the shops.—”<sup>82</sup>

It is worth noting that this incident is juxtaposed to Maureen's discovery that July's has stolen some of their possessions, which occurs when she arrives in the village and sees many of her former belongings there. It is as if the writer foresees the change of values as a result of the different social and economic context:

“ There were other gadgets, noticed in use about the settlement, she privately recognised as belonging to her: a small knife-grinder that had been in the mine house kitchen before her own, a pair of scissors in the form of a stork [...] these things were once hers, back there; he must have filched them long ago.”<sup>83</sup>

Here, Gordimer gives an ontological depth to Maureen's experience of displacement and her confusion at July's thefts as she recalls the times when July found cents on the floor of their home and would put them on Bam's bedside table, or when he had access to the liquor cupboard but never stole anything. Maureen reaches the conclusion that “honesty is how much you know about anybody, that's all.”<sup>84</sup> This incident implies that July is no different to the whites of South Africa in terms of identity being defined through possessions. He therefore finds pleasure in stealing things from the new world and transposing them to the old world.

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<sup>82</sup> *July's People*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

It is noticeable too that Gordimer allows considerable narrative space to evaluate the female characters' physical appearance, another instance of intertextuality with *Burger's Daughter*, in which there is a strong comparison between Rosa and Clare to reflect the hostile feelings of one towards the other. Here, the hostility is mutual between Maureen and Martha, but whereas Rosa ridicules Clare in *Burger's Daughter*, Martha takes the lead in ridiculing Maureen. This scene, however, incorporates socio-heteroglossia (the black women's perspective) and highlights the fact that these women had never been exposed to white culture. Although Maureen used to send presents to July's children and his wife and they brought woven bags in return, they still knew nothing of each other's world. This reflects the narrator's point of view, which allows the native black woman an imaginary superiority over the previously inexperienced white. However, through this scene, Gordimer through this episode asserts her postcolonial tendency: "racist and sexist discourses are related, they often did not go beyond asserting that black and/colonised women were doubly oppressed [...] the most important effect of conjoining postcolonial and feminist psychoanalysis may well be to clear a space for black women as subjects in both discourses":<sup>85</sup>

" — The face — I don't know... not a nice, pretty face. I always thought they had beautiful dresses. And the hair, it's so funny and ugly. What do they do to make it like that, dark bits and light bits. Like the tail of a dirty sheep. No. I didn't think she'd be like that, a rich white woman."<sup>86</sup>

The recurrent encounters with July mark a deterioration in Maureen's character as July confronts her with the ugly reality that she, as a member of the white ruling class (oppressors), always wanted to avoid. When an argument develops into a confession and July accuses her of never trusting him when they were in Johannesburg, he crosses the boundaries that had enabled the sensitive relationship between them to survive the last fifteen years of Apartheid. They had known each other so well that their relationship had been a harmonious one, but now that the

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<sup>85</sup> Ania Loomba, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>86</sup> *July's People*, p. 22.

circumstances had changed and the 'roles exploded', these boundaries are blurred and they use that same knowledge against each other:

"What you going to say? Hay? What you can say? You tell everybody you trust your good boy. You are a good madam, you got a good boy. — Myself, I'm not say you're not a good madam — but you don't say you trust for me.— It was a command.— You walk behind. You looking. You asking me I must take all you books out and clean while you are away. You frightened I'm not working enough for you?"<sup>87</sup>

In shock and disbelief, Maureen tells him that he no longer works for her. Nevertheless, July will not accept this decision and insists on being paid as usual. Maureen then asks him a direct question: "If all you can think about is what happened back there, what about Ellen?"<sup>88</sup> The name of Ellen, his town woman, falls on him like a lash, and he answers coldly that she went to Botswana. Sartre comments on this relationship between master and servant:

"The 'master,' the 'feudal lord,' the 'bourgeoisie,' the 'capitalist' all appear not only as powerful people who command but in addition and above all as *Thirds*; that is, as those who are outside the oppressed community and *for whom* this community exists. It is therefore *for* them and *in their freedom* that the reality of the oppressed class is going to exist [...] this means that I discover the 'Us' in which I am integrated or 'the class' *outside*, in the look of the Third, and it is this collective alienation which I assume when saying 'Us.'"<sup>89</sup>

This is relevant in the sense that July subconsciously becomes 'alien' to the Smales, and especially to Maureen, with whom he has direct contact; his recognition of them as the 'third' was intensified by living with his own people, who are different, and are regarded, especially by Maureen, as different. Therefore, his loyalty to the Smales falters, as when he helps Daniel to steal the gun. His loyalty is projected towards his own people who represent the 'Us' against the 'Third'.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

However, Maureen's relationship with the male in this novel can be viewed through the lens of Gilbert and Gubar observation that "Using silence as a means of manipulation, passivity as a tactic to gain power, submission as a means of attaining the only control available to them, the heroines seem to submit as they get what they both want and need."<sup>90</sup> This applies to Maureen in the sense that she occasionally uses silence with Bam to manipulate him, so that he will assume the male role of taking responsibility and providing for the family:

"They sat in the vehicle. He heard in her silence an old expectation---didn't apply anymore---that he would ask the man to give account of his actions."<sup>91</sup>

By contrast, July is never susceptible to any of these above mentioned manipulations because to Maureen he was recognised as the 'other', but later, when he has gained the upper hand, she acts submissively in a final attempt to control him as she senses the extent of his newly acquired power: 'the death's harpy image.'<sup>92</sup>

When Maureen shows some interest in working with the other women in the village, July forbids her for fear that she will tell his wife Martha about Ellen (his town woman). Maureen confronts him again about this fear:

"What you can tell?— His anger struck him in the eyes.  
— That I'm work for you fifteen years. That you satisfy with me.—"<sup>93</sup>

This is the first time that Maureen is intimidated by a man; neither 'the shift boss', with his muscular body, nor her husband the architect, has ever made her so scared. Later on in the same chapter he continues his threats, saying "Yesterday night someone's come."<sup>94</sup> July was implying that the black revolutionaries had come to look for the whites. Barbara Temple-Thurston comments on the cat imagery between July and Maureen: "July's covetousness of the bakkie has alerted Maureen to a fundamental threat. She feels trapped and responds in an instinctive animal way,

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<sup>90</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *op. cit.*, p.163.

<sup>91</sup> *July's People*, p. 108.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

the animal qualities being feline; she becomes tense, alert, independent, predatory and cruel. July, too, senses the battle.”<sup>95</sup>

Later in the novel, Gordimer implicitly hints at the possibility of a plane being sent to rescue the Americans and Europeans in South Africa. Bam tells Maureen that some years ago there was a report of a U.S aircraft sent to rescue their citizens. This incident gives Maureen, more than any other character in the novel, the hope of seeing an airplane, although she discusses with Bam the fact that they were neither Americans nor Europeans, “but whites if that is considered being a European for the Americans.”<sup>96</sup> So when the airplane is heard hovering in the sky at the end of the novel, it is less surprising as an incident in itself than for Maureen’s reaction to it: she immediately thinks that it could be the Americans and she risks her life in the hope of being rescued. Arguably, her reaction can be attributed to her response to a subconscious conviction, which Rogers<sup>97</sup> claims is an element that distinguishes female writers from male ones. However, Gordimer uses loaded language to give the impression that Maureen may be heading to her doom. The last line of the novel carries the implication of danger vis-à-vis Maureen’s situation: “she can still hear the beat, beyond those trees and those, and she runs towards it. She runs.”<sup>98</sup>

Nancy Bailey regards this flight as “an abrogation of the duties of motherhood, and an attempted ‘return to the illusion of identity created by the world of privilege and possession.’”<sup>99</sup> Others, like John Cooke, interpret it as the failure of Maureen “to make a transition into the world of the veld.”<sup>100</sup> There is no definite explanation of what might have been the real reason for that flight, or what her fate might have been, but it can be interpreted on the basis of Gordimer’s comment that she believes in “‘root solutions’ and is herself a ‘radical.’”<sup>101</sup> So it can be interpreted as a hallucinatory moment that made her react instinctively like ‘a solitary animal’ to the roaring sound of the plane, a hypothesis that corresponds to Michael Neill’s

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<sup>95</sup> Barbara Temple-Thurston, “Madam and Boy: A Relationship of Shame in Gordimer’s *July’s People*”,

*WLWE*, 28 (1988) p. 53.

<sup>96</sup> *July’s People*, p. 126

<sup>97</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>98</sup> *July’s People*, p. 160.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Michael Neill, “Translating the Present”, p. 74.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

interpretation of it as an act of 'psychic annihilation'. The hallucination is the result of her suppression and vulnerability evident throughout the novel, as she reveals that she is on the edge of a nervous breakdown. This passage is relevant to her last, solitary flight:

"She was someone handling her being like an electrical appliance she has discovered can fling one apart at the wrong touch. Not fear, but knowledge that the shock, the drop beneath the feet, happens to the self alone, and can be avoided only alone."<sup>102</sup>

The last scene, where Maureen crosses the river, can be seen in the light of Gordimer's view that:

"We whites have been brought up on so many lies [...] Whites have developed a totally unreal idea of how they ought to live, of their right to go on living in that country. Consequently, they must undergo a long process of shedding illusions in order fully to understand the basis for staying in South Africa [...] it's hard to peel yourself like an onion, without producing a lot of tears in the process."<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, the shedding of illusions can be attributed to Rogers' concept of the female's growth process during which she acquires insight and the ability to confront even "her death with courage and calm as a result of gaining a sense of herself as separate from those she loves."<sup>104</sup> This may sound contradictory to hallucination, but they are two sides of a single coin. Her suppressions are expressed through that moment of 'hallucination'; it charges her with the courage to confront her fears in the first place and puts an end to her suffering, whatever the results may be. Another clear indication that Maureen is heading for her death comes in the last, harmonious image of her running: 'pulling off her shoes balances and jumps from boulder to boulder'.<sup>105</sup> This image encapsulates her life as a ballet dancer back in Johannesburg. She is portrayed as crossing the river with 'balance', while hearing

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>102</sup> *July's People*, p. 41.

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Michael Neill, "Translating the Present", p. 57.

<sup>104</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.138.

<sup>105</sup> *July' People*, p. 159.

the sound of drums and the muttering of the plane which resembles the music that accompanied her dancing. This corresponds to the poet Rilke's view that "the end of each man resembles his life because all his individual life has been a preparation for this end."<sup>106</sup>

### **The Distant Mother and the Hurdle of Sisterhood in South Africa**

Female writers, according to Rogers, tend to separate the daughter from the mother in their novels: "Married or aged the heroine nonetheless continues to separate from the 'mother' and turn to the 'father.' Not only does she separate from a lover or mate who attempts to possess or control her as her mother has, but, on an interior level, she also eschews mothering instincts [...] she yearns for the 'world of authority and exploration and freedom. The world of men [...] she wants to be saved from 'feminine' domesticity, from 'the mother'."<sup>107</sup> This applies to Gordimer's heroines, who are cut off from any bond with the mother – as is the case with Maureen (who recalls her father more than her mother) – or who have a weak bond, as with Rosa in *Burger's Daughter*. Maureen only recalls her mother when she differentiated between the father 'My Jim' and the house servant 'Our Jim.' In this novel Maureen drifts away from her husband and children; the gap between her and the children is articulated through the language and habits that the children acquire in their new surroundings. Throughout the novel, Maureen seems remote from her children, unlike Bam, who assumes the maternal role in her place:

"The children had fallen asleep where they lay. He gently, ostentatiously disentangled them from the positions of conflict within which they had been overcome."<sup>108</sup>

Bam's tenderness and responsibility towards his children is remarkable here, signifying the exchange of roles between husband and the wife, who is slowly drifting away from them all. Bam thereby conforms to Sartre's 'facticity' (of the birth) that decides to be responsible, to go to war and fight, in contrast with the one

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<sup>106</sup> Cited in Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

<sup>107</sup> J. M. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p.137.

<sup>108</sup> *July's People*, p. 47.

who raises the question 'Why was I born' and chooses to commit suicide or escape it. According to Sartre, raising this sort of question constitutes proof that we are not free beings: "Thus facticity is everywhere but inapprehensible; I never encounter anything except my responsibility [...] But... most of the time we flee anguish with bad faith."<sup>109</sup>

Earlier in the novel, when Maureen was on the edge of collapse due to her inability to cope with the old world, she reflects upon her children and senses that they might blend with the new culture. And indeed, this has always been emphasised by Gordimer in her novels: in *Burger's Daughter*; she emphasises that the new generation will find it easier to live together:

"The children had stood obstinately before her, squinting into the sun through wild hair, when she forbade them to go swimming in the river, and she could hear their squeals as they jumped like frogs from boulder to boulder in the brown water with children who belonged here, whose bodies were immune to water-borne diseases whose names no one here knew. Maybe the three had become immune, too."<sup>110</sup>

In this monologue the distance between Maureen and the children is growing, signifying the merging together of the white children with the blacks. Here Gordimer employs Bakhtin's novelistic pathos that evokes feelings of moral and class differences (disease and brown water), which represent the super-consciousness of the character and reveal the vulnerability of the people (including her children) in the rural areas of Africa to serious diseases like malaria. Maureen is alienated in this situation to the extent that even her children ignore her; she is also passive, a symbol of an invalid culture that no longer has any significance in this world.

Simultaneously, Gordimer challenges the idea of sisterhood through both the racial and class differences and the language gap. The relationships between Maureen and July's mother and wife struggle and, in the absence of a common language, semiotic

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<sup>109</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

<sup>110</sup> *July's People*, p. 138.

language takes over. When Maureen joins the other women in the fields, she reveals her legs, provoking laughter:

“July’s unsmiling wife was laughing; looking straight at those white legs: she did not turn away when Maureen caught her at it. Laughing: why shouldn’t she? July’s wife with those great hams outbalancing the rest of her—Maureen laughed back at her, at her small pretty tight-drawn face whose blackness was a closed quality acting upon it from within rather than a matter of pigment. Why should the white woman be ashamed to be seen in her weakness, blemishes, as she saw the other woman’s?”<sup>111</sup>

Maureen’s question sums up the feeling of isolation inflicted upon her due to colour and class differences. Martha is not ashamed to ‘objectify’ Maureen and laugh at her, mobilising a gaze which, according to Sartre, affects the ‘bond of unreflective consciousness and the ego’,<sup>112</sup> which is a being in this world and which the ‘others’ have made alien to the object of their gaze. In other words, Martha’s gaze alienates Maureen, who laughs back at her, but Martha cannot be ridiculed or alienated because she is among her own people. However, through the abundant use of gestures and non-linguistic dialogues in *July’s People*, Gordimer carefully delineates the predicament of ‘non-English speaking’ people in rural South Africa. Through such situations, she attempts to dialogise the different perspectives in the novel, that of Martha, the mother, the chief, July, and the children in relation to the Smales.

The feeling of sisterhood is shattered in this novel, in the sense that all the women in the village alienate Maureen, who is compared by the narrator to ‘an overseer’. A coloniser confronted with the weakness of the decadent system she represents, she comes face to face for the first time in her life with what Fanon defines as ‘scapegoat complex’<sup>113</sup>, the reversal of roles from being a superior white coloniser to an inferior dependent:

“At first the women in the fields ignored her, or greeted her with the squinting unfocused smile of those who have their attention

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<sup>111</sup> *July’s People*, p.92.

<sup>112</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, 261.

<sup>113</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p. 183.

fixed on the ground. One or two—the younger ones—perhaps remarked on her to each other as they would of someone come to remark upon them—a photographer, an overseer.”<sup>114</sup>

Earlier on, a feeling of sisterhood could be seen in Maureen’s fury over July’s abandonment of Ellen, his town woman, who is much like him, urbanised and working as an office cleaner. Maureen sympathises with Ellen for many reasons. She was a single mother who used to help July with his personal cleaning, spoke English, and was in control of her life; feelings of sisterhood are easily established with Ellen because she shares with Maureen some aspects of modern existence:

“Once had put a hand under her breasts with the gesture with which women declare themselves in conscious control of their female destiny:—It’s all finished—I’m sterilized at the clinic.—”<sup>115</sup>

Paradoxically, Maureen and Martha cannot develop a friendly relationship. Although Maureen is able to communicate with Martha in *Africana*, there remains an obstinate barrier of unfamiliarity to each other’s ideology and way of life. Despite the fact that Maureen joins them in the fields and tries to learn from them about the different types of grasses, this relationship is clouded with reluctance. At one point Maureen feels like helping Martha, but something holds her back:

“She went to his hut [...] Martha was bathing the baby boy in a basin set on a box. Flashing tears of pure anger he appealed to the one—anyone—who had arrived to rescue him from soap and water [...] There was a moment when Maureen could have got on her hunkers beside Martha and helped hold the baby’s head while it’s hair was washed.”<sup>116</sup>

Both women are intimidated by July, who tries throughout the novel to keep the two women apart as he plays the patriarchal role with Martha and his mother. A lack of reciprocity dominates the textual world, and Maureen’s alienation among July and

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<sup>114</sup> *July’s People*, p. 91.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

his people is tangible throughout the novel. This is reduced by Ania Loomba to colonialism, which has intensified July's patriarchal feeling of control over his home, and in which women are 'emblems of their culture and nationality.'<sup>117</sup>

However, a developing sense of collective identity between the children is noticeable: Gina and the little black boy Nyiko enjoy a world of childish games. Gina seems to be part of the new culture and future – just as in *Burger's Daughter*, where Rosa sees the future in the children. Gina speaks their language and does not want to be separated from her friend. When the Smales visit the chief, Gina wants Nyiko to come with them, but her feelings towards the boy have a certain resonance of her past penchant for possessions:

“She took him of right, as a substitute, yelled in his own language, which she was learning in the form of ‘private talk’ between Nyiko and herself. He’s my friend, mine!”<sup>118</sup>

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*July's People* sees the rise of the blacks against the whites in South Africa and the inevitable bloodshed that results from it. It depicts an imaginary revolution against Apartheid and the predictable issue of the return of black South Africa. The novel revolves around the blacks' growing antagonism towards whites, which goes hand in hand with their heightened sense of national identity. Gordimer maintains her impartiality throughout; rather than attempting to vindicate the white South Africans and the Apartheid system, she criticises her own people by continually clarifying the fine line between ignorance and racism over which many of her white protagonists cross. She also sheds light on the people's general disposition: the black shift from submission to antagonism and the white shift from ignorance to anxiety, evident in Maureen's hysterical outbursts, which recalls those of Nuzhah in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*. These mad doubles or hysterics signify a fundamental change in their political and social systems, or what Cixous defines as anticipating “the culture to come.” Most notably, Gordimer highlights the whites' anticipation of war and the blacks'

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<sup>117</sup> Ania Loomba, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>118</sup> *July's People*, p. 106.

simmering anger and increasing nationalist fervour, evinced by their disregard for the Smales and the use of their own language, through which Gordimer symbolises the actual handover of South Africa.

The woman's body act as a signifier of the world in the novels of both writers. For example, Maureen is a metaphor for the dying system, and the absence of everyday material goods provides a context for her struggle on the personal, psychological and political levels. The issue of the 'master bedroom' and the 'mud hut' haunt her throughout the novel; unable to cope with the new reality of the crude black lifestyle and their ever-increasing domination, she takes a leap into the unknown. Through this character in particular and the Smales in general Gordimer internalises the idea of land and economy, which lies at the heart of the Marxist ideology. She scrutinises Maureen's character in the old world, in the absence of an economic structure that binds her to the usual surroundings of urbanity. Maureen feels displaced and constantly on the verge of a nervous breakdown throughout the novel, striving to absorb the harsh nature of July's world, and her struggle to cope reflects the nature of white South African existence in the black continent.

Similarly, Sa'diyyah in the previous novel was portrayed as a metaphor for the 'subjugated land'. She is the signifier of Palestine; her diffident personality is a archetype of the majority of Palestinian women, whose passivity impedes the cause. Khalifah's criticism of this character is therefore projected towards Palestinian women in general, for whom she aspires to bring a change in thought. She tries to achieve this by adopting some western modernist ideas, in contrast to the obstructive old conventions that cripple both their own development and the collective desire of a free Palestine. However, these ideas nevertheless occasionally take on a didactic tone, for example when Rafif in the previous novel uses overt Marxist language, which sets her apart from Gordimer's more subtle artistry. Similarly, Nuzhah is a metaphor of the subjugated land and also the signifier of the Palestinian situation. She is in total confusion and cannot comprehend the idea of martyrdom; on the contrary, she abhors the *intifāḍah* for devouring Palestinians like a ghou. Through

this character, Khalīfah criticises the ideology of the *intifāḍah* and illuminates the fact that for some Palestinians it is super-imposed and distorting. On a deeper level, one can tie Khalīfah's representation of the *intifāḍah* to the class distinctions at the heart of the Marxist critique, that is, exploiting the proletariat for the good of the bourgeois, in this case the leaders of the various Palestinian militia groups.

Both writers, then, detail the shift in national consciousness from moderation to extremism, while tackling the issues of the heterogeneous societies and the prospect of inevitable conflict. Literature here provides both a mirror to reality and an alternative historical discourse that incorporates real-life characters acting out actual desires emblematic of the whole nation. In both settings, therefore, the text provides an interpretive dialectic that historicises a given moment, underlines the barrenness and moral bankruptcy of an exclusivist political system, and foresees a future of liberation.

## Chapter Six

### *Bāb al-Sāḥah (The Door to the Courtyard) 1990*

Like *‘Abbād al-Shams* this novel revolves around three female characters, Nuzhah, Samar and Lady Zakiyyah. The characterisation is similar to that in the previous novel; there is the prostitute Nuzhah, the intellectual Samar and Lady Zakiyyah the religious midwife, who takes the place of Sa’dyyiah the businesswoman in *‘Abbād al-Shams*. While the external conflict escalates between Israelis and Palestinians there is another, intense and internal, conflict which is highlighted through the story of Ḥusām who takes refuge in the local house of prostitution and treason, the house of Sakīnah. The conflict arises from this controversial and ironic plot, and builds through the assembling of a collection of characters who belong to the extremes of society. This framework, however, gives space for debate concerning various social and ideological issues, for example, the importance of the role of women in the *intifāḍah*, and the imposition of stifling patriarchal restrictions on them. Simultaneously, Khalifah attempts to resolve the equation of *‘irḍ* (honour connected with women’s chastity) and *Karāmah* (honour related to dignity) by elucidating the Israelis’ exploitation of the Palestinians’ fear for the women’s *‘irḍ*, as opposed to their seized land. Cooke observes, “A brother is more concerned to kill his sister who has been forced into ‘prostitution’ than he is to recognize her contribution to the struggle.”<sup>1</sup>

The novel starts with a dedication to the *fidā’iyyīn* who are depicted as transcendent, and to those who are dead, as well as to the living. This transcendence however is further explored through the utopian love of Ḥusām for his Saḥāb<sup>2</sup>:

“To him whether close or far,  
who aspires to the altitudes.”<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the novel, Ḥusām is preoccupied with his love for Saḥāb, present in the novel through his stream of consciousness, and addressed as a symbol of both love and inspiration. He became a *fidā’ie* shortly after he first met her, when he was only a boy. She was older, a teacher, but he fell in love with her, and she was the catalyst for

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam Cooke. *Women And The War Story*. (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996) p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Saḥāb means clouds.

<sup>3</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 5.

his early maturity. He belongs to a middle class family whose siblings went to schools and universities and later became successful architects and doctors. He, however, is different. He believes that he should bring about a change for his people. His love for Saḥāb elevates him as a person; he is depicted as constantly transcending physical pain and worldly affairs. As in her other novels, Khalīfah makes the private public, focusing on the personal agony and suffering of her characters to elucidate the pain of the nation as a whole. She also articulates the issue of women in Palestine, caught in a national struggle in which they cannot but be greatly involved, and are denied freedom of mobility and action by both the patriarchal figures of their fathers and brothers on the one hand, and of the Israelis on the other. Despite the changes that are taking place in Palestine, women are caught in this stagnant mode of existence.

### **The Writer's Mad Double**

Khalīfah attempts to redefine the socially-inscribed binary oppositions by elucidating the significance of the female character's actual participation in the *intifāḍah*. She destabilises certain inherited values and conventional attitudes, as she did in her previous novel, when she introduced Khaḍrah (the prostitute) as a role model for other more honourable, passive, female characters. In this novel the same point is further explored by the introduction of Nuzhah (the prostitute) as a foil to Samar (the intellectual), and in opposition to Lady Zakiyyah who contrasts with Umm 'Azzām. Through the redefinition of the binary opposition of passive and active, Khalīfah redefines their social values. The conservative and cautious attitude of the majority of women is the reason for their failure, and Khalīfah emphasises the importance for women of self-assertion in bringing about a change in their social status. The binary opposition however, is shown to be chaotically realised, which emphasises the (transitional) nature of the period in which Palestinians are living, in which certain aspects of life lapse, analogous to Gramsci's 'morbid symptoms'.

Nuzhah is the strongest and most assertive protagonist in the novel, the consciousness of the author is revealed through this character, who in this novel acts as her double. This is another instance of intertextuality for in *'Abbād al-Shams*, Khaḍrah is the author's double. However, Nuzhah is presented as clever and decisive. She agrees to Ḥusām and the women seeking refuge in her house and assists the two women in the

demolition of the huge door built by the Israelis in the courtyard, which totally isolates their town and prevents light entering their neighbourhood. Nuzhah, however, is the antithesis of Samar in attitude, background and level of education. What brings them together is Samar's curiosity to learn about the conditions of Nuzhah's life. She approaches her as a research student, and the developments of the novel takes place in Nuzhah's house in which Samar is trapped in for nine days. Here, the binary opposition of active and passive characters, of Nuzhah and Samar, assists through their differences into relief. Nuzhah's rebellious nature is revealed as only an outlet for her repression, released through moments of hallucination and madness. Through this doubling, Khalifah rearticulates 'self definitions' that are imposed on women by a patriarchal culture. As Gilbert and Gubar's comment:

"Madwoman emerges over and over again from the mirrors women hold up both to their own natures and to their own visions of nature. Even the most apparently conservative and decorous women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all the patriarchal structures which both their authors and their author's submissive heroines seem to accept as inevitable. Of course, by projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women."<sup>4</sup>

The heroism of the first demolition of the door to the courtyard, carried out by the three women Samar, Lady Zakiyyah and Nuzhah is not recognised by Samar's brother, the patriarchal figure in her life. To the contrary, she is blamed and beaten by him for her absence from the house for nine days. She feels so crushed by her brother's abuse that she does not resist him as she does the Israeli soldiers. She does not cry or utter a word, but she feels shameful,<sup>5</sup> aware of, for example, her weak position in the family, despite her level of education, and awareness and participation in the *intifāḍah*. In addition, the controversial events involving Samar serve to inform the reader of the meaninglessness of patriarchal protection in such political circumstances. Therefore the monolithic unity of the three women and their achievements in the real world of struggle and resistance to the enemy prove to be vital and more important than any marginal issue i.e. a woman's reputation. Khalifah skilfully illustrates this lapse, or change, in the Palestinian reality:

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<sup>4</sup> S.Gilbert and S.Gubar, *The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1979) pp. 77-78.

<sup>5</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 136.

“However, reality changes. At times not slowly, but in bounds and leaps like a cat. The *intifāḍah* has shaken the dust off of us, and shook the earth without a warning. ‘No to the *intifāḍah*!’ The men were surprised to see the *intifāḍah* seeking women right in the middle of their own homes. No, to going out and getting entangled and degraded! The mess came right to their bedrooms, so the women grabbed it by the arms, screaming and yelling, as they exchanged swear words and blows with the soldiers in their nightgowns and messy hair. And so they took to the streets haphazardly, without any planning, hitting and fighting. For the sake of our religion, the revolution, sleep is forbidden.”<sup>6</sup>

And sleep is forbidden, these words echo the alertness of people and their readiness to sacrifice everything for the sake of Palestine. Khalīfah here articulates the enthusiasm of Palestinian women who assist in the *intifāḍah*, and who are aware of the fast pace of change in all fields of life, but are still considered to require the guardianship of their brothers and fathers. On the other hand, Nuzhah is presented as the daughter of Sakīnah; a woman of bad reputation who had turned her house into a prostitution post, and who was accused, and later killed, for being a collaborator with the Israelis. Left alone, Nuzhah is freer than any other female character in the novel, and when sanctioned by other female characters, she puts this freedom to good use by assisting the *intifāḍah*, although she is driven by revenge, rather than by a desire to resist the enemy.

On one hand, all the female characters participate in one way or another in the *intifāḍah*. They are involved in the events that are taking place around them, but the emphasis is on their inner-self development rather than the action taking place in the public arena. Khalīfah in this novel corresponds to a certain extent to Rogers’ notion, that women writers dwell on the inner, rather than the outer, world of the heroine. On the other hand, Lady Zakiyyah and Samar are working women, the first being a midwife who has witnessed the birth of Samar, Ḥusām, Nuzhah and many others in Nablus: they call her ‘the mother of all’. She is depicted as a woman of depth and piety, who became a midwife after her separation from her husband. She has struggled to educate herself and become what she is now, bringing up her children at the same time. Samar is a working-woman who is depicted as struggling on the personal level. She is shown as a weak person in relation to her family members, and is also a victim

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<sup>6</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 135.

of a class society. The reader is frequently reminded that she is the baker's daughter. Nuzhah is depicted as an outcast from society; she dreams of leaving the country and settling in America. The narrative technique therefore, is based on the alternation of the first and third person, the 'she' or 'he' of the omniscient narrator which peeks into the inner world of the female characters and of Ḥusām, and at the outer world revolving around them. Nuzhah's monologues represent not only her innermost feelings but also this character's entire social backdrop, transmitting what others say about her, the gossip and scandals that shaped her existence. The memory of her mother, who was the target of society's rumours since their arrival in Nablus, and Nuzhah's rejection of society's double standards explains the reasons that lead to her rebellious attitude. This notion corresponds to Virginia Woolf's notion of the forces at play in autobiographical writing "By such invisible presence that the 'subject of this memoir' is tugged this way and that everyday of his life; it is they that keep him in position. Consider what immense force society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and from class to class; well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of memoir."<sup>7</sup> It is through monologues, that many times in the novel Nuzhah vents her anger:

"Nuzhah was humming while she was stirring the soup. Blessings. What blessings? After her mother is gone, what blessings are there? And were there any blessings left, since Ahmad left? And, this supposedly very kind woman, what has she done to prove her kindness? It was too much for her to even return morning greetings, and now she occupies her home as her nephew did! Above all that, she is arrogant and sour. What a situation to be in! They eat your food, Nuzhah, and gossip about you—she told her self. And the pearls of wisdom she bestows! God help us! It is foul up above us, and underneath us, yet we complain of the bad smell. Yet she takes her rosary and does her prayers! Dares to complain about the way I look, and what I wear."

She continues to mumble about this paradoxical situation:

"Poor you Nuzhah! all what remains now, is for them to make you cover your head, and put on a long skirt for praying. They forgot to whom they are speaking and where they are staying. A whorehouse, why don't they just say it out right? Is my place, where *you* are staying, a whorehouse? What about the food you are eating, is it bought with pimping money? What about this very soup, is it from

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being; a collection of Autobiographical Writing*. Jeanne Schulkind (ed). (London: Harcourt, 1985) p. 80.

whoring too? Lady Zakiyyah, who was sitting at the head of the table, said, as she tasted the food: -Mm! Your soup is delicious Nuzhah, thank you. Nuzhah smiled, and did not comment: it's a whoresoup Hajjh, whoresoup!"<sup>8</sup>

The narrative voice alternates with the first person of the 'I' which reflects the character's involvement in the *intifāḍah*, and the problems that arise from its context. For example, the curfew which takes place during Samar's secret visit to Nuzhah and leads to her entrapment there for nine days, along with Lady Zakiyyah and Ḥusām, gives space for political, philosophical, and psychological analysis. The dialectic operating between the characters', and the narrators' comments reflects their innermost feelings of alienation and bewilderment. As in the case of Nuzhah, this represents her struggle on the human level as an outcast and reveals loneliness. Moreover, it highlights Ḥusām's feelings of love for Saḥāb; depicted as one-sided, a symbolic representation of his love for the land and his role as a *fidāie* as an example of self renunciation and transcendence:

"Ḥusām felt his numb leg and remembered the cell where he was imprisoned. There, he sat in that casket and thought about everything except his body. 'Take off your body! This is lesson number one' Sameḥ said: 'take it off like one takes off ones clothes'. He read the piece of paper, tore it up to pieces and placed it in his mouth, swallowed it and it now rests in his belly. It is easy to write words and it is easy to swallow them: 'take off your body! He didn't, so they did it for him. They beat him until his bones were bruised. His arms were cuffed behind his back. Automated cuffs that clamped at the slightest movement in any bone. His first lesson was at *Far'ah* prison. What a great prison. Everything about it was great, including the bones. There wasn't a bone in him that hasn't received any blows. Whenever he moved, the cuffs got tighter. He didn't make the same mistake, at the *Janine* prison. He learnt to control his nose, to hold his breath longer and, to think about everything except his body."<sup>9</sup>

The novel dwells as the quotation suggests on the inner, rather than the outer; the inner world of sharing their experience in life. For example, Nuzhah's experience in the *land day*; when she used to march among other students in denunciation of the Israeli occupation, and her mischievous tendency in school, which gained her the

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<sup>8</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

name 'savage'. The novel also dwells—to a limited extent—on the outer world of the heroine; her role in backing the *intifāḍah*, it also reveals the writer's ability to convey the reality of such a matrix; the difficulty of surviving in the absence of water, electricity, medicines and at times, shelter. This is further highlighted by Bouthina Sha'bān " War novels by female writers[...]have demonstrated that women are just as capable as men are of writing about war, albeit from a different perspective. Where male writers essentially included scenes of battles, conflict, blood and weaponry; women writers elected to explore the human effect of wars, the internal scaring it inflicts on people's psyche, their morals, and at times, the difficulty of coping during times of war away from battle grounds. How did women cope with deficiency of water, absence of electricity and lack of medicines? How did they provide help and support to children and their elders; and how did they manage to bury their loved ones while being under siege? It is only logical for women to write about the effects of war away from battlegrounds, for it is how they coped with war. Furthermore, as they are not warriors themselves, they are not able to write about war as fighters do."<sup>10</sup>

Lady Zakiyyah is also represented as participating in the *intifāḍah* as a nurse delivering babies and tending the wounded. On the other hand, Samar is represented as a victim of the patriarchy who nonetheless struggles to get over these peripheral obstacles imposed on her; she is able to see the full picture of freedom for her country. Moreover, Khalīfah also sheds light on the problem of collaborators who live within their society; she depicts the scene of the *al-Sāḥah* where Sakīnah's body was displayed after her assassination by someone who, it is hinted, is a *fidāie*. There were rumours about her involvement not only in prostitution, but also in treason. Therefore she was killed and her body displayed in a public place as an example for others:

" And then the *intifāḍah* started, so sound sleep ended. Fear started to fall, like autumn leaves. Mountains, olive trees, and valleys were aflame. People took to the streets and doping no longer had a market. Spying went underground and was met by the knives of the youth. The stone yard, which was known then as *Bāb al-Sāḥah*; was transformed into slaughter rounds, where agents were clamped to hooks like sheep. They dubbed it *el-Sāḥah el-Ḥamrā*- 'the Red Yard'. There, on the stairs of the mosque in the middle of the yard,

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<sup>10</sup> Bouthina Sha'bān, *A Hundred Years of Arab Female Novelists*. (My trans) (Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1999) p. 19.

Sakīnah was found with a knife planted in her chest.”<sup>11</sup>

The representation of the Palestinians’ reality through the narrator’s voice focuses on the sensual experience rather on the events of the story evoking sight, smells, touch and taste. This is clear in the narrator’s description of Ḥusām’s thirst and hunger, which he, by force of will, dismisses repeatedly in the novel. The significance of this representation is that it conveys the transcendence of the *fidā’iyyīn* over worldly needs and sensuality. On the other hand, the comfort and warmth of the home and stability is frequently evoked through the character of Nuzhah, depicted as dispensing and sharing coffee with others. In addition, Lady Zakiyyah is portrayed enjoying, as do many women of her age, Hubble-bubble as usual. The significance of these representations is their emphasises on the binary opposition of man and woman; the first belonging to the outside world and the dominant culture of patriarchy, the second, belonging to the confinement of the house and to the subculture. It signifies their different roles in life, women’s segregation and separateness. Towards the end of the novel, description of different smells of coffee, spices, vegetables, *Falafel*, *Zalabiah*, and meats, takes on a stronger pulse, signifying a nostalgia for the homeland as well as the bodily needs and the continuity of life’s daily routine under the difficult living conditions of curfew and the collective deaths of Palestinians’.

### **Ambiguity and the Open-Ending of *Bāb al-Sāḥah***

Taking into account the fact that it was written in 1990, and that the *intifāḍah* had started in 1987, there was a longing for a resolution and a guarantee that would protect them and assure them the right to exist, this resulted in the Oslo agreement which took place in 1993 and was followed by Oslo 2 in 1995. However, such resolution never developed into a tangible reality, and Palestinians became doubtful of the ‘other’s’ intentions, thus, Khalīfah sheds light on the culminating anxiety and anger of Palestinians, giving at the same time a visionary story of what is to take place as a result of the continuous Zionist aggressions. For example, Khalīfah explores her anticipation of future events through Saḥāb who is presented as an imaginative beloved of Ḥusām. In his poems and through his daydreams, he addresses her as a

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

symbol of maternity and land. She in turn refuses to be a mere symbol, revealing to him her reality as a woman. However, her presence is felt only through the narrator or through Ḥusām, and is referred to in the third person. The significance of her presence in the novel is that she serves as an inspiration and an incentive for Ḥusām's becoming a *fidāie*, and, on a deeper level, she embodies the land of Palestine promised the right to exist through many political conferences something which has never crystallised as tangible reality. In his third poem, she is no longer depicted as the mother, or as a symbol of land, but as a feeling. Ḥusām thought, "If the symbol is lost, I will be lost too? What is left? [...] In wartime feeling can be conquered by death."<sup>12</sup> This can be interpreted as suggesting that the surrender to emotion can lead to the loss of a symbolic Palestine, the noble cause of retaining their rights to the land and their noble existence as *fidā'iyīn*.

The courtyard incidents, the killing of the traitors, the Israeli's erection of the door, and the many deaths of *fidā'iyīn* reported in the novel, signify the determination of Palestinians who are willing to die for the sake of their country. In the *fidā'iyīn*'s view, *intifāḍah* is the alternative solution for Palestinians who have lost faith in any kind of justice that grants them the return of their homeland. The *fidā'iyīn* started as part of a number of different resistance movements but have united around the single flag of the *intifāḍah*. Therefore what Khalīfah anticipates here is the continuation of the Palestinians' struggle until a fair and just solution is reached. It is surprising therefore, to see that the anticipated *intifāḍah*, is still the only Palestinian national voice of rejection of the Israelis' atrocities and occupation. The ululations of women upon receiving the news of the death of a *fidāie* or of any Palestinian, echo the reality of those people who are aware that they are facing a major challenge: that against the continued Israeli expansionism and the construction of further settlements which will lead to the annihilation of Palestinians. Said observes the power of Zionism as following "It is a programme of slow and steady acquisition that has been more efficient and competent than anything the Palestinians have been able to put up against[...]. The problem is that any attempt to provide a critique of Zionism is faced, particularly nowadays, with the charge that it is anti-Semitism in disguise."<sup>13</sup> Thus,

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<sup>12</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homes: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. On Palestinian Identity: A conversation with Edward Said. (London: Granta Books, 1991) p. 181.

the ululations are registered as signs outside the language; it is the sound of their poignant reality that intends to transcend their humane feeling of shock or deep sadness. The author's double, Nuzhah, becomes a mad double, echoing the Palestinians' bitter reality and their subconscious pain. When Nuzhah loses her brother at the end of the novel she hallucinates, seeing Palestine as a 'ghoul' lustily devouring all Palestinians. This was her answer to Ḥusām, who had sent her a letter containing the words, "The precious blood is for Palestine."<sup>14</sup> This letter reflects the general mood that effected relatives and their friends. This is marked by a profound faith that can never be deterred by any offences carried on by the Israeli occupier to the nobility of their cause. However, Nuzhah's reaction runs against the narrative logic of unity around the monolithic ideology of the *intifāḍah*, nevertheless it provides a dialectic to resolve the contradictions and confusion of such an ideology. Hegel observes that "truth or reality consisted in the unification of contradictory elements: and these elements representing partial aspects of truth, were to be related not only as contradictory but also as logical contraries."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, when earlier on in the novel Samar carries on a statistical survey about women, she is faced with difficulty in a narrative which develops to prove that such "social statistics have no equation; nor can they match any clear or definite trends."<sup>16</sup> This point can be explained as an instance of the 'morbid symptoms' that are exhibited in the interregnum period of history in which Palestinians are caught.

Rogers' argues that female novelists avoid plot climaxes by causing the heroine to faint. This ties in with Virginia Woolf's idea of "eschewing the plots."<sup>17</sup> This technique, is used by Khalīfah through the character of Nuzhah, relating intertextually to *Abbād al-Shams*'s Sa'diyyah, when at the end of the book she hallucinates, and is lost in time and space as a result of her son's detention by the Israeli soldiers. In this novel however, Nuzhah the target for her brother's intended revenge, escapes the town of Nablus and the reader is given knowledge of her, as still alive, through stories of her being seen wandering around looking for a way to earn her living:

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<sup>14</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Douglas, 'The Meaning of Myth' in *A.S.A. Monographs 5, The Structural Study of Myth*. Edmund Leach (ed.). (London: Tavistock Publications, 1968) p. 93..

<sup>16</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Room*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1929) p. 85.

“ They looked for Nuzhah everywhere. Samar went searching for her, looking into every possible detail that was on earth: in other people’s homes, between neighbourhoods, in alleyways, at the onion market and, in the district of Yasmin and Qoriun. She searched in caves, among the olive vines, in the town hall park. In the ravines, in neighbouring villages, and in Sailāt el Daher at her grandmothers’. Her grandmother was dead and, she was told: ‘she had gone a long time ago. Her bones, poor woman, have by now turned into dust’. Someone said: ‘I saw Nuzhah picking the vines with other peasant women’. Another said: ‘I saw her looking for a bite to eat, and a room to stay in’. And, another said: ‘ I saw her standing in a long line queuing up at the supermarket for money, soap and some flour’. This woman said this, and that man said that, until she gave up.”<sup>18</sup>

Khalīfah uses Bakhtin’s dialogised polyphony, where marginal characters in the novelistic world appear only to help in the search for Nuzhah. In the sense that one feels, that the search was huge, and crowds participated in it. This state of escape, however, ends when she is found by Samar. Soon after she faces another tragic event, the death of her brother, who reveals that he has forgiven her as he lies dying in her lap. She then, becomes delirious and, lost in time, space and words, starts to throw olives and soil at other women farmers refusing the idea of martyrdom and the women’s celebration of it.<sup>19</sup> The significance of this technique is that it dialogises the climax, giving it a stronger unlimited resonance in the reader’s mind. It also highlights the Palestinians’ frustration over the loss of their loved ones. She later overcomes this feeling of rejection and makes the point, at the end of the novel, that she is only against the collective deaths which are taking place in the name of martyrdom. Therefore, Nuzhah is not refusing the sacrifices Palestinians are making, but only the idea that they are massacred (like sheep)<sup>20</sup> without a strategic plan to avoid major losses of men. This is clear in her reference to Palestine as a (gūlah- ghoul):

“Nuzhah stood at the centre of the yard, with a frozen look on her face. There were soldiers at the border point; there were women in the yard, and young men who were still sculpting out the rock ever so slowly; with hoes, saws, and fire irons. She whispered in awe: ‘What’s the fuss about? This is all for the sake of a ghoul?’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.221.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Similarly, Samar being the victim of her brother's physical attacks is horrified by the thought and is taken over by a mood of escapism. She goes up to the roof of her house and starts contemplating the city, life and nature. She feels transcendent through her achievement, and that of the other two women, of their heroic action in demolishing the door, but then a bitter feeling of shock and failure overcomes her at the thought of being savagely beaten by her brother. She thinks "there is nothing left but horror from descending to the ground."<sup>22</sup> Here, Khalīfah contrasts the Palestinian women's engagement in the national struggle on the one hand, with the men's backward and limiting thought of shame, honour, and protection that lead to the women's confinement. The opposition of 'transcending' in reference to the *fidā'iyīn* and the 'descending' in reference to the suppressive patriarchy is significant in this respect.

The novel does not follow a dialectic sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. In fact, characters like Ḥusām and the *fedā'yyīn*, Lady Zakiyyah and Samar exist synthetically with their political inheritance i.e. they are united in resisting the occupier from the beginning to the end of the novel. Characters like Nuzhah, however, can be construed as going through Hegel's dialectic thesis, antithesis and synthesis. With the first term referring to the political and social reality into which she was born, the antithesis provided by her denial of that reality, and her acceptance of that reality representing synthesis. The novel follows a chronologically sequential order moving from a beginning, in which the protagonist, Nuzhah recognise her problem, to a climax when she experiences ideological confusion, and a conclusion in which she reaches a partial resolution of her political and social problems. The novel starts with Ḥusām's leg injury and his hiding from the Israeli soldiers in Nuzhah's house, where other female characters join them by a mere coincidence when Samar urges Lady Zakiyyah to go with her to Nuzhah's house, to ask her few questions as part of her social study assignment. Their entrapment in that house and their involvement in the destruction of the huge cemented door of the courtyard, marks the climax of the novel's events, while Aḥmad's martyr's death and Ḥusām's escape from the enemy and his taking refuge in a mountain cave, marks the novel's closure.

Khalīfah's use of flash-backs, indicator for Rogers of the non-sequential nature of women's writing, is minimal. The motive for their existence is motivational and to do with characters. For example, to give a logical reason for Aḥmad's abandonment of

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

his sister, Nuzhah stands by the window and starts remembering the past when she was a loose woman having an affair with 'Āṣim al- Marbūṭ. She used to dream, along with Aḥmad, of leaving Palestine for America, where they would board the 'Love Boat' when she marries 'Āṣim. The latter however was exploiting her in some illegal manner and when she was jailed as a result, he turned his back on her. Aḥmad was young at that time and used to ask her "Is it true that he is going to take us there?" She would answer, "Yes, Yes" " Are we going to board the Love Boat?" She would assure him then that he would "And we will see Michael Jackson and Madonna?."23 He used to hide in a corner of the house and see her loose behaviour, and all the disgusting things that took place in their house. She ended up in prison, and later Aḥmad left the house, Nuzhah never saw him again; he became a *fidāie*.

Moreover, Khalīfah uses dialogism and polyphony to fill in the gaps and provide the reader with social perceptions of the region. For example, Lady Zakiyyah thinks, along with the narrator, about Samar. Bakhtin recognises this technique in his definition of " an autonomous character (as) one which is able to reply to the 'author': by the very construction of the novel, the author speaks not *about* a character but *with* him."24 The significance of this technique is that it explains the social backdrop of a given character to the reader. Samar is depicted as a pretty, educated working woman whose father is a baker and who will not measure up to Ḥusām's family, should they decide to marry:

"At midday, Samar, Um Ṣādiq- the street bread vendor's daughter, walked in carrying a kilo of rusks and a packet of *shrak*- flat round bread. Lady Zakiyyah like Samar and secretly desires her for her nephew Ḥusām; for she is pretty, 'cute', a graduate of Najah university and has a salaried job securely paid in Shekels. She feared that if circumstances were to change, when Allah pacified the minds—although she doubts that it would happen—,Ḥusām's parents might not welcome a baker's daughter into their family."25

The pattern of non-linearity in women's fiction is constructive at times and serves as a social or political feedback. For example, when Lady Zakiyyah remembers her personal struggle: her separation from her husband, how she went to her brother and

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>24</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*. (Manchester: Manchester university Press, 1997) p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 17.

he offered her the humble place in which she now lives, and how she became a midwife to earn her living and independence. The personal story of Lady Zakiyyah is an instance of flashback which functions as a backdrop to many situations which revive painful memories, and is not as the writer's intended focus. Khalifah, however, raises the level of excitement in the novel by introducing Nuzhah, whose presence in the novel yields a novelistic space for philosophical, ideological, ethical and religious differences, and for debates which bring the characters more closely back to their origins. Moreover, the novel opens with the murder of Sakinah; many speculations and suspicious hints point at the *fidā'iyyīn* responsibility for her assassination. The house and its occupants also raise many suspicions in the reader's mind. The reference to 'Āṣim al- Marbūṭ and Nuzhah's involvement with him raise more questions regarding his identity:

“ ‘He took advantage of you, you fool’, a Jewish prostitute had told her, and another, and another. So did all women, female politicians, the Israeli prostitutes, even the walls and the bars, the interrogator, and the prison guard, but she did not confess a word. So why did they beat her up, but not touch him? And killed her mother, but did not kill him? Why did he refute everything, and Aḥmad has disappeared too and has never returned.”<sup>26</sup>

Such hints raise questions in the reader's mind. They are dialogised, in the sense that the reader is impelled to justify the writer's avoidance of a more explicit information about his identity. Khalifah however, also increases the level of suspense by referring to 'Āṣim later in the novel as someone who broke the law but was never subjected to any trial or punishment because of his status.<sup>27</sup>

### **Spatial Confinement: a Metaphor of a Nation in Crisis**

*Bāb al-Sāḥah* tackles political, social and feminist issues and Khalifah relies on the literary techniques of polyphony, heteroglossia, irony and the inclusion of songs which further define Palestinian identity. The underlying ideology of *Bāb al-Sāḥah* is that of Islam, and it is emphasised through the character of Lady Zakiyyah, a pious woman, reiterating at hard moments throughout the novel the names of Islamic,

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<sup>26</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 149.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

Christian and Jewish messengers.

The settings of *Bāb al-Sāḥah* are diverse, each having a certain significance in the novel, *al-Saḥah*, Sakīnah's house, Lady Zakiyyah's flat, Samar's home, her father's bakery shop and the open fields of groves, all contribute to materialise time in the space of the novel. Time and space intersect in the novel, giving life to events through the chronotopes of the 'town', 'threshold', and the 'road'. The chronotopic space of *Bāb al-Sāḥah* marks the Palestinians' fight for freedom, their fight against the occupiers on the one hand, and their strategy of purifying the Palestinian society on the other. For example, the novel is marked by the assassination of Sakīnah, who is found later, strung up, in the courtyard. This is also their symbol of national struggle and when the Israelis try to block it by the erection of the huge door; it becomes a metaphorical stopping of life's blood. It is resisted. The attempts to demolish it are continuous.

Sakīnah's house is the chronotopic space of her daughter's seclusion from society; Nuzhah is aware of her alienation, and society's rejection of her. She dreams of the day when she can leave the neighbourhood that treats her like an outcast. This alienation, however, ends when Ḥusām takes refuge in her house and one by one the women come to her house. Therefore it becomes the chronotopic space of rescue and protection. Along with Lady Zakiyyah and Samar, they undertake the project of demolishing the door. From the kitchen, they prepare the ingredients that will dissolve the cement, a mixture of sugar and water, and they use the garden hose, in which they have made holes, and in, the middle of the night, connect it with another similar one leading from Lady Zakiyyah's house to the door of the courtyard. The kitchen and the homely ingredients it supplies becomes the chronotopic symbol of the women's national unity. Similarly, the garden is the chronotopic symbol of their participation in the *intifāḍah*. The significance of the house chronotope and the kitchen symbol is its emphatically female imagery of 'enclosure and escape', which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, signify "the writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits (an) alien and incomprehensible place."<sup>28</sup> This notion is true, in the sense that the character's reality is beyond comprehension, life for Palestinians is characterised by destruction, oppression and obscurity that overshadows the writer's

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<sup>28</sup> S. Gilbert & S. Gubar, *The Madwoman In The Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 84.

consciousness and the way she perceives the world. House connotations are generally one of refuge, here, however, it is a place of resistance. But the spatial chronotope of the house relates to the domestic imagery which, according to Gilbert and Gubar, reflects the 'innermost being'<sup>29</sup> of the character, her internal conflicts, or what Bakhtin calls the 'threshold' element. Nuzhah is constantly revealed as living in crisis. She is at odds with her self and the world around her; the monologues and the dialogues that take place between her and other characters in the house reflect their ideological, religious and ethical differences. As the writer's mad double, Nuzhah is given more textual space to express the writer's own stifled consciousness. The significance of the dialogues is their ability to elucidate the jumbled binary oppositions of good/bad, forward/backward and passive/active. For example, Nuzhah's praise for action and bravery in this novel, and the liberty awarded some women in moving around the city, in contrast with the men's confinement in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, signify the demolition of the old hierarchies, and prophesy the imminent birth of a new world or reality. On a deeper level, the image of the house as it turns to a nursing home from a house of prostitution, through Nuzhah's nursing of Ḥusām along with his aunt, signifies the birth of a new reality. Moreover, the novel has some resonance with the Rabelaisian, through the matrix of death and eroticism (a transcending and descending), exemplified in the martyrs' death of Palestinians existing in opposition to the work agreed on in Sakīna's house of prostitution. The significance of such a matrix is that it fleshes out space through time and creates a sense of a whole life tragically moving forward.

The death occurs towards the end of the novel, where Nuzhah ridicules the idea of martyrdom and the conception of life and death held by Palestinians. She is later revealed to object to the idea of mass killing, and calls for well-planned strategies by the *fidā'iyyīn* to eliminate their human losses. The function of this matrix, according to Bakhtin is "to destroy the established hierarchy of values via the creation of new matrices of words, objects and phenomena. He restructures the picture of the world, materializes it and fleshes it out."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the spatial chronotope of Samar's home serves as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, a point at which gender issues are discussed. There, Samar is alienated by definitions of her sexuality and is made aware

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

of her inadequacy by male members of her family; she is constantly threatened and is subjected to verbal and physical abuse.<sup>31</sup> After her nine day disappearance in Nuzhah's house, and despite the fact that she is a woman with a great sense of nationalism, she is subjected to a beating by elder brother. Khalīfah in this scene uses Bakhtin's language of the pathos to delineate the ironic and poignant reality of women in Palestine. In the description of Samar beating and her not making any attempt to reciprocate, the description of her swollen temples, messy hair, the blue marks and her feeling of dizziness and disgust accumulate to give an image of the inscription of patriarchal cruelty on the female body. The images provoke a bitter feeling of disgust and humiliation. Khalīfah uses concrete terms, swollen, blue marks to articulate Samar's suffering. This episode moreover, echoes Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Firstly, Samar is depicted as living in circumstances that are out of her control, similar to that of *Raskolnikov* who is also powerless to alter the world. Secondly, the onlookers; her younger brother and mother who watch the beating serve to 'carnivalise' the scene, provoking her depression and gloom. Patriarchal 'power' is also questioned when her elder brother acts in a cowardly manner and seeks his sister's protection from an Israeli soldier search for men in their area. The controversy that arises from juxtaposing these two incidents is worth noting. It emphasises Khalīfah's point that the 'male' in Palestine is victimised, and the woman doubly victimised and oppressed. After the beating, Samar feels ashamed and crushed, a feeling which increases when she hears the call for prayer. This offers another instance of intertextuality with *'Abbād al-Shams*, where Sa'adyiah is depicted experiencing the same gloom and depression on hearing the prayer call. The prayer call becomes the chronotopic symbol of Samar's sadness and her frustration over her own weakness and passivity before her brother's repeated assaults. The symbol of the prayer call and the mosque however, can be interpreted as pointing to the defeated integrity of Muslims in Palestine who, along with other Muslims around the world, have lost the second holy *kiblah* in Jerusalem through Israeli occupation. However, another related symbol is used to hint at the possibility of future victory, when Samar and Nuzhah peek through the window and see the *Sheikh* going up to the roof of the mosque, holding his rosary beads, a reminder to Samar of other beads held by Lady Zakiyyah. This episode presents a transcendent image of the *sheikh*, implying a future

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<sup>31</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah.*, pp.136-7.

when Muslims will regain their holy *kiblah*. On the other hand, Lady Zakiyyah's glorification of all messengers can be interpreted as a premonition of unity between Arabs of all religions including Jews. Moreover, the image of Lady Zakiyyah's prayers and her glorification in the novel is given an ironic edge — it takes place in Sakīnah's house.

The school yard is the spatial chronotope of the 'open square', the locus of action, which marks the occupier's constant oppression. Frequently all males of the age of thirteen and over are gathered together as part of the aggressive Israeli routine of discovering *fidā'iyyīn*. It marks the Israeli reaction to any *fidāie* operation, and this time the initial demolition of the door. Moreover, the olive groves also serve as the chronotope of the 'open square'; there Aḥmad is killed by the Israeli soldiers in front of Nuzhah who works as an olive picker on the farms. She bends over him, his head on her lap. He is wearing a cotton shirt printed with a drawing of an olive and the map of Palestine. There is a bullet in the middle of the map. The image materialises a 'real life' incident as the tragic killing of Aḥmad, and, at the same time, it gives textual space to render concrete the effects on her, and also on the other women of his death. Their ululations express his martyrdom. This reaction is strongly rejected by Nuzhah who, in a delirium, throws piles of olives at the other women and curses Palestine for taking all their loved ones. Here, other women farmers serve as Bakhtin's 'on lookers' who 'carnivalise' a scene and it is 'they' who act as provocateurs for the developments that follow. Despite Nuzhah's rejection of their belief in martyrdom, she nevertheless feels grateful for the warmth of their feelings towards her. Her position as the sister of a martyr grants her social and political reengagement. When, at the end of the novel, she inquires about the reasons for the chaos she witnesses, and, is told that they are trying to reach and demolish the door of the courtyard and to burn the Israeli flag, her response is to lead other women to the door of the courtyard through the secret door. Igniting the dynamite bottle and burning the flag she is motivated by revenge for her brother, the personal rather than the political. This incident however, sheds light on the reasons for Palestinian resistance and *intifāḍah*: it is aggravated by two factors, firstly, the cause, secondly, revenge for those killed by the Israelis:

"Nuzhah stood in front of the Hessian sack and started scooping and

spattering the women with olives, while lashing out at them and screaming madly:

-God damn you Palestine! Goddamn whoever created you. Damn your soil, your land, your sky, and whoever says I am from Palestine. You, Palestine! You took away mothers, fathers, brothers, land, and honour and, did not save anything. What is left, Palestine? Neither a living being nor a beloved. Neither a friend nor a relative. They are all gone; all trampled on, all miserable and scorched, all stripped away. Go on! Out! Get out!

She went on scooping, lashing out and spattering. The women backed away, dumbfounded, clapping their hands in sorrow and saying: poor woman, she's gone mad! Only *He* can give strength, only *He* can make amends."<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the novel spatial boundaries are emphasised by the narrator's voice, Palestinians are constrained within their cities i.e. Nablus. Therefore, the notion of the 'cave' where Ḥusām seeks refuge at the end of the novel, serves as the spatial metaphor for danger and ambiguity. His escape to the 'cave' serves also as a metaphor for his departure from one life into another, unknown, one. By this departure he transcends the physical, emotional and spatial limitations of firstly being disabled and dependent on others, of secondly, longing for Saḥāb's love (Palestine), and thirdly, of being hunted by the Israelis. He breaks the spatial limitations of occupation by taking refuge in the unknown. The 'cave', of course, is a metaphor — as Freud points out — for the mother's womb and for the tomb "A female place of enclosure, a house of earth, secret and often sacred. To this shrine the initiate comes to hear the voices of darkness, the wisdom of inwardness"<sup>33</sup> The controversial aspect of this situation lies in the fact that it is the man's confinement to the 'cave' and not the woman's which in this context signifies the deconstruction of old hierarchies relating to women and the emergence of new ones. Therefore, Ḥusām's departure at the end of the novel gives rise to a number of valid interpretations, his rebirth and rescue by the militia, which he belongs to, or, the possibility of his impending capture. This relates intertextually to *July's People*, where Maureen's flight at the end of the novel is left open, therefore, giving rise to many possible interpretations.

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<sup>32</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, pp. 210-11.

<sup>33</sup> S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

## Racism and Oppression

Racism and oppression are two persistent backdrops to the events in the novel i.e. the authority of the oppressors to build, demolish, kill, interrogate, imprison, torture and move freely in the Palestinians' territories are a routine part of Palestinian life. Khalīfah attempts in this novel to shed light on the *intifāḍah* and the *fidā'īyyīn* normal members of society who volunteer to join the resistance movement. The *fidā'īyyīn* are the focus of this novel: they are the product of a national and public attitude which deeply believes that 'as a nation' they have exhausted all diplomatic efforts to resolve their dilemma peacefully. They have no hope in the future. Sartre's states "since the past is no more, since it has melted away into nothingness, if the *memory* continues to exist, it must be by virtue of a present modification of our being; for example, this will be an imprint at present stamped on a group of cerebral cells. Thus everything is present: the body, the present perception, and the past as a present impression on the body—all is actuality."<sup>34</sup> In other words, the *fidā'īyyīn* see the present through their past and, because of their daily oppression, they are reminded of it, therefore, their present perception is rooted in the past, a past which brought them nothing but disappointment and despair, of ever having a country or of leading a normal life. So when they revolt against the Israelis, they are not only expressing their disagreement, but are also endangering their lives. However, there is a resonance with the idea of the Diaspora in this novel, and with Palestinians who are scattered in many countries around the world, an intended consequence of Israeli oppression and humiliation. Khalīfah gives this point what Bakhtin defines as a "sideward glance"<sup>35</sup>, through a polyphonic dispute between Umm 'Azzām and Abū 'Azzām over their sons who left their country to achieve little but personal success.

Khalīfah, however, avoids adopting a self-pitying attitude and highlights the difficult conditions under which Palestinians live, for example, through the character of Ḥusām the *fidā'īyyīn*' innermost feelings, their personal sacrifices and their transcendence over worldly needs are represented. Moreover, she points to the difficulty of Lady Zakiyyah's mission, moving around the city to assist pregnant women in childbirth. This is not an easy task in Nablus, with the Israeli soldiers stopping her and checking

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<sup>34</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Hazel E. Barnes (trans.) (London: Routledge, 1943) p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> Louise Yelin, in *Feminism, Bakhtin And The Dialogic*, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

her little bag in the most humiliating way.<sup>36</sup> The soldiers' use of the Arabic language reveals the linguistic gap between the oppressors and the oppressed, "the play on words [...] pronounced differently by the oppressors and the oppressed — hints at the political impotence of Palestinians living in Israel when it equates being counted in the state census with castration. It is impotence in the face of a dominant political structure which feeds and nourishes confusion in the lives of Palestinians living in Israel"<sup>37</sup> as however Akram Khaṭer writes. This oppression is followed by resistance and tragic events that are described in a double discourse by Lady Zakiyyah and the narrator, in the incident in which Ḥusām arrives bringing his friend with him, both *fidā'iyyīn*, in the middle of the night, starved like stray cats, to eat some bread. He returned few days later with the same friend. Now badly injured, he died in her arms and Ḥusām, despite mourning the loss of his friend, whistled in the dark and at the signal friends took and buried him. His mother knew nothing of his death.

### Irony and Folkloric Images

Khalīfah in this novel uses humour as a tactic. This, according to Bakhtin, "remained outside official falsifications [...] for the various indirect linguistic expression of laughter: irony, parody, humour, the joke, various types of comic and so forth. There is no aspect of language that cannot be used in a figurative sense. In all these approaches, the *point of view* contained within the word is subject to reinterpretation [...]. A relocation of the levels of language occurs — the making of what is normally not associated and the distancing of what normally is, a destruction of the familiar and the creation of new matrices, a destruction of linguistic norms for language and thought."<sup>38</sup> Through the character of Nuzhah, Khalīfah attempts to change social and political thinking, Nuzhah is a transgressional character and different from other female characters in the novel, this is used positively to point to change, and to errors. This is another example of intertextual reference to *'Abbād al-Shams*, where Khaḍrah is a prostitute and a social outcast created to change public thinking. In *Bāb al-Sāḥah* Khalīfah attempts through this character and her irony and humour to establish new

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<sup>36</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> Akram Khaṭer, Emile Ḥabībī: The Mirror of Irony in Palestinian Literature. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, xxiv, p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> M.M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Micheal Holquist (ed.) Caryl Emerson (trans). (Austin: University of Texas, 1981) pp. 236-7.

matrices in life, which (as discussed in the previous chapters) is a sign of a new world being born and an older one dying:

“She ran her eyes over the black skirt and white blouse Nuzhah was wearing and said with relief:  
-Aha! My dear daughter, now what you’re wearing is reasonable.  
Nuzhah stared at her, before smiling:  
-What do you mean *reasonable*?  
-I mean it’s prim and proper.  
Nuzhah’s smile got wider:  
So shall I always dress this way?  
-My dear daughter, is there anything more sound than being prim?  
(She let out a sigh) *Allah* is praised! I’d better get up and do the evening prayer. Do you have a long skirt and a prayer carpet?  
Nuzhah turned around and whispered cynically:  
-No, but I’ve got castanets and a belly dancing costume!”<sup>39</sup>

A parallel to the notion of the transformation in Nuzhah’s aberration from the social mainstream can also be observed in American literature of the thirties which saw women’s transgression as way of rejecting the strict morality demanded of them. Susan Sipple states “These stories expose the ways society attempted to control women by controlling their bodies [...] they reveal the ways Depression-era transient women came to use their bodies as transgressive representations against the culture that forced them into the position of the underclass.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, Khalīfah—through such images—pinpoints the errors of the patriarchal society and the injustices imposed on women.

Like Khalīfah’s other novels, *Bāb al-Sāḥah* gives a little textual space to folkloric songs that confirm the Palestinian identity. Unlike the other songs Khalīfah uses, the song in this novel has not been passed down but is of the moment i.e. it is not a song that Khalīfah heard as a child, but rather a dialogised discourse that express the people’s determination and will in confronting all kinds of oppression. This notion can be further analysed through Bakhtin’s statement “Novelistic discourse has a lengthy prehistory, going back centuries, even thousands of years. It was formed and matured in the genres of familiar speech found in conversational folk language and also in

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<sup>39</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 119.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Sipple, “Witness [to] the Suffering of Women”, in *Feminism, Bakhtin And The Dialogic*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

certain folkloric and low literary genres. During its germination and early development, the novelistic word reflected primordial struggle between tribes, peoples, cultures and languages—it is still full of echoes of this ancient struggle. In essence, this discourse always developed on the boundary line between cultures and languages. The prehistory of novelistic discourse is of great interest and not without its own special drama.”<sup>41</sup> The songs here represent the non- narrative voice of the narrator that overtly rejects the oppression carried out by the Israelis. Folkloric songs, however, are used by Khalīfah to confirm the persistent conflict and oppressions on the one hand, and to acknowledge the cultural dilemma of Palestinians on the other:

“C’mon children  
Chorus after me!

Let’s tear down the gate  
Let’s tear it!

Our land is free  
Over our shoulders, let’s carry it!

C’mon children  
Rejoice!

Our country is a bride  
Let’s parade it!”<sup>42</sup>

The song portrays Palestine as a bride to be soon wedded. The significance of this image is that it again emphasises the image of the woman as a metaphor for a land, which is subjugated. The imagery of the bride suggests a new reality.

## **Women & war**

Susan Sipple states that:

“ Femininity is nothing more than a social construct; it can be manipulated, used to a woman’s advantage, put on and taken off at will. Her existence and actions show with glaring accuracy the inability of the system to create a stable, coherent view of itself [...] these women are equated with immorality, sexual promiscuity, and powerlessness. Yet their very existence challenges the system and

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<sup>41</sup> Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 129.

gives them some degree of power, for their bodies and their actions suggest the failure which society wants to keep hidden.”<sup>43</sup>

Through such characters Khalīfah points out the society’s violence, hypocrisy, and despair. Nuzhah who has promiscuous relationships with VIPs like ‘Āṣim al-Marbūṭ, Abū ‘Azzām and many others, is an example of the failure of patriarchal society. The controversy lies in Nuzhah’s beauty (her nickname is the savage, *al-Kāsrāh*) equated with transgression, an equation which is sanctioned by patriarchal society, which approves, as long as it remains hidden. Another Arab writer Assia Djebar comments “In [my] country, newly freed Algeria, there are three categories of women: the cloistered wives of the harem, the prostitutes, and the heroines of the war, the fighting women. Men are afraid of the latter two categories but especially of the heroines of war, with whom they do not know how to act.”<sup>44</sup> The society especially in the Arab World is confused when dealing with intellectuals like Samar, Raffī (in *‘Abbād al-Shams*) or Lady Zakiyyah; they threaten the patriarchal system which recognises them as belonging to a ‘subculture’ rather than to the dominant culture of the male.

Therefore, *Bāb al-Sāḥah* focuses on two major issues, that of the *fidā’iyyīn* and that of women’s positive role in the *intifaḍah*. Women in this novel are of two types, strong and assertive like Nuzhah and Lady Zakiyyah or less strong and active like Samar who suffers patriarchal oppression. Through this character, Khalīfah points out society’s marginalisation of women. This corresponds to Dr. Bouthinah Sha‘abān’s explanation “ Saḥar Khalīfah’s female characters have suffered since her first novel from society’s misunderstanding, but have come a long way in the past two novels. But this novel broaches a more delicate issue that of the controversy between the female’s new revolutionary being; as perceived and experienced by herself on the one hand and, her social being as perceived and encouraged by society on the other. She is therefore caught in this reluctance and swing of desires between achieving her individualism and that of society.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the oppositional binaries of active and passive characters in this novel are highlighted in order to deconstruct existing social binaries. For example, Nuzhah (the prostitute) is the most assertive character in the novel and through this character’s development, Khalīfah reinscribes new oppositions

<sup>43</sup> Susan Sipple in *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Dialogic*. Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry (eds.) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Evelyne Accad, “The Prostitute in Arab and North African Fiction”, in *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature*, P.L. Horn and M. B. Pringle (eds.) (New York: Ungar, 1984) p.71.

<sup>45</sup> Bouthinah Sha‘abān, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

that are more advantageous to women and to society as a whole. This complies with Darrāj's <sup>46</sup> view that the Palestinian identity at this point of history is defined in relation to the majority of Palestinians who sacrifice their personal desires for the general cause of freeing their country.

Samar however acts as her psychological interlocutor. Nuzhah opens up to her and tells her her story: how, as a girl of fifteen years old, her mother married her off to an old man, from whom she ran away to elope with a hairdresser, who left her two months later. She then decided to leave 'Amān and go back to Ghaza. When Samar asks, "why did you elope with him? Nuzhah answers, "I liked him. He was a trendy hairdresser, spoke with a Lebanese accent and wore a bracelet. I was young and wanted to love and be loved" "Did you think about it?" Nuzhah answers " I never did. That's how I am: I never fear anything, since my schooldays boys used to call me 'the savage'...etc."<sup>47</sup> After the death of her mother, and in an attempt to earn a decent living, she works in Samar's family bakery, and then in *studio Zīzī*, in both places she is subjected to harassment. Earlier on in the novel, she was involved with 'Āṣim al-Marbūṭ, and gets involved with him in an illegal matter (which is vaguely hinted at in the novel), and on an assignment she is incarcerated and he escapes " Lost among Israeli women criminals and Arab women politicians. Yet she was neither a Jewish prostitute nor was she an Arab politician."<sup>48</sup> Nuzhah's failure to find a decent job is reduced to the male recognition of her as an object of desire, labelled as a prostitute's daughter. As Miriam Cooke explains "Despite all that the women have achieved, the men cannot see them except as transgressing bodies. It is not that the women in *Bāb al-Sāḥah* are any less strong and assertive than Khalīfah's other women protagonists, it is just that the transformation in the social context has not taken place."<sup>49</sup> This character however, is alienated from society, and is aware of the reason for society's oppression. She comprehends that society demands that she have more control over herself. Nevertheless, one sympathises with this character for many reasons: she is presented as the victim of a mother who pushed her into the path of prostitution, on the one hand, and, the victim of a masculine hypocrisy which exploits her body and simultaneously rejects her existence as a person, on the other. After her mother's

<sup>46</sup> Faiṣal Darrāj. "Derāsah Fī Rīwāyat Saḥar Khalīfah: Qawl al-Rewāyah Wa Aqwāl al-Waqi'." In *Shoūn Falasṭīnyah*. (March): 1981, p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148-9.

<sup>49</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) p. 212.

death she ends up alone in her big house, trapped socially and physically, a woman with whom nobody wants to deal despite her attempts at social reengagement. As Sipple asserts, "For this woman the right to control her own body is the right to make alliance and to end the alienation that imprisons her. Without that right, she is trapped. If there is no one else to turn to and if woman does, then they must adhere to the rules. Or they will never survive."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, her attempts to adhere to the rules have failed because society never redeemed her. Nuzhah has become a victim of the conflict between her persona and shadow<sup>51</sup>. The opposite of that persona is her shadow, and if Nuzhah acts in an indecent way, it is because she is covering up what she used to be with her shadow of shame. This explains the many occasions in which Nuzhah's dialogues and monologues are stained with bitterness. Her alienation has made her symbolically and literally 'savage', like a solitary animal confined to her prison. Most of the time she is depicted as 'embroidering'. Khalīfah skilfully constructs an image of a woman confined to the house and 'embroidering' most of the time, an image that is used in reference to Nuzhah, to articulate her feelings of alienation.

Nuzhah's recklessness is represented as an inborn characteristic, but her powerful personality bears out Rogers' emphasis on the importance of the growth of the inner masculinity of the female through separation from the mother, attended by a turning toward a masculine figure, be it a father, lover or mate.<sup>52</sup> She is presented as a female who develops self-confidence and autonomy because of her relationships with the male, unlike Samar who is controlled by her brothers, and has no relationships that could lead her towards an encounter with the wilder world. The juxtaposition of the two young female characters brings with it differences on all levels. For example, the first time Samar falls in love it is with Ḥusām at the end of the novel just before his escape to the mountains, whereas, Nuzhah reaches an emotional maturity not wanting even to recognise their love at that time when life seems to be going through a never ending cycle of death, horrors and escape. Simultaneously, through this character Khalīfah represents the duality of 'life' and 'death'. When, later in the novel, Ḥusām discloses his love to her, it is because love in this context stands for 'life' and he is in

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<sup>50</sup> Susan Sipple in *Feminism, Bakhtin And The Dialogic. Op. cit.*, p.145.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph L. Henderson, *Shadow and Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology*. (Illinois: Chiron Publication, 1990) p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Rogers', pp. 137-154.

danger, hunted by the Israelis. The morbid atmosphere of the 'cave' where Ḥusām has taken refuge is countered by the hope of life through their love. This notion corresponds to Henderson's statement "If we realise that for [Castrop] at this point life equals love, it becomes clear that the conflict should be expressed as a conflict between love and death transcending the immediate sexual goal."<sup>53</sup> The death and life myth according to Lévi-Stauss are contradictory and are related to the collective, culture or community, in other words, the death or survival of that community.<sup>54</sup>

Samar is portrayed as overprotected by her family because of gender issues, therefore she is lacking in personal experience hence her insistence on interviewing Nuzhah which illustrates her inquisitive tendency on the one hand, and Nuzhah's longer experience of life, on the other. She nevertheless exhibits some heroic characteristics in her defiance of Israeli aggression. Compared to her brothers, Samar is a rational and wise person, whereas her brothers are presented as idle, and lacking courage and wisdom. This comparison enables Khalīfah to give what Bakhtin calls a 'sideways glance' at some examples of male aggression and perverse behaviour. Her brothers are portrayed as idle 'they don't move their hands in the house unless it is to eat or to play cards'.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, their aggressive behaviour to Samar is juxtaposed to the incident when her brother Ṣadiq asks for her help, an incident which conforms to Rogers' point concerning women writers tendency to depict the male not as superior, but as an equal, shedding light on his weaknesses:

"A patrol squad came by and, the soldiers provoked every passer by. Ṣadiq turned around fumbling his pocket. Where was his I.D? was it in his top pocket? Was it in the bottom one? His trousers? The vest? She looked at him, and as if by miracle — glory to God — his looks were no longer aggressive. He no longer cared about standing at the centre of the market, and no longer strutted like a stud. All he longed for now was his safety. She looked at him again, anxiously he asked her:

-Samar, my sister! Did you see my I.D?

At first, she smiled at his misfortune, then she smiled with sadness; and then tenderly, before saying with deliberateness:

-Don't worry, I will stand next to you, in front of you and, they won't see you.

Sure enough, she stood next to him. The soldiers passed by and

<sup>53</sup> Joseph L.Henderson, "The Drama of Love and Death" in *Shadow and Self*, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>54</sup> K.O.L.Burridge, 'Lévi-Stauss and Myth'. In *A.S.A. Monographs 5*, op. cit., pp. 91-8.

<sup>55</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 131.

overlooked him.”<sup>56</sup>

Gilbert’s observes the power gained by women in Britain during the World War, and she cites Nina Macdonald’s statement “All the world is topsy-turvy/ since the war began”<sup>57</sup> in other words, women took on the daily works that are usually conducted by men. This notion applies equally in the case of Palestinian’s reality; women are doing men’s work but are denied the recognition they deserve by men. Saying this, one cannot dismiss the truthfulness of the words “ the world is topsy-turvy” which echoes the situation of Palestinians as portrayed by Khalīfah in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*. Women are portrayed as no longer restricted to the subservient work assigned to them by the patriarchy and are impelled to do other work, the mistresses become nurses, women students *fidā’iyyāt*, mid-wives attend the wounded and supporters of their own families in the absence of the man. Therefore all women are portrayed as exploring to some extent the *No Man’s Land*.

Through the character of Lady Zakiyyah, Khalīfah offers a new image of Palestinian women; capable of coping with difficulties of their lives. She overcomes the difficult situation of being divorced and without qualifications to enable her to work, and learns to be a respectable midwife in her native town, Nablus. Khalīfah offers another binary opposition between her and that of Umm ‘Azzām, who is a passive, uneducated, suppressed character. Lady Zakiyyah is contrasted to the silent, dependent, fearful and disturbed Umm ‘Azzām. This opposition can be observed through the incident when Umm ‘Azzām runs away from her husband and comes to Lady Zakiyyah, and begs her to let her live and work, even as a servant, in her home. Shocked by this unforeseen event, Lady Zakiyyah remembers the day when she herself went to Abū ‘Azzām and asked him for help, being newly divorced and not knowing what to do at that point of her life, and he offered her a small neglected flat in a relatively poor area. Through flash backs, the reader is allowed to understand more about Umm ‘Azzām’s character. She typifies the hypocrisy of pretending to be happy and content with her life, husband and children but who at the same time suffering from her husband’s ill treatment, bad temper and abuse. Khalīfah foregrounds the difference between a wise and a realistic woman like Lady Zakiyyah

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>57</sup> Sandra. M. Gilbert, “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War” in *Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) p. 200.

and weak and passive one like umm ‘Azzām. They were both unhappy in their marriages but the first was able to get over it and gain control, whereas the other spends most of her life submitting to degradation from men before finally deciding to leave the house when she is old and unable even to support herself. Lady Zakiyyah remembers the way Umm ‘Azzām received her on that day; still beautiful then, she looked at her accusingly on account of the divorce. This highlights the woman’s ability to transcend the limitations of a hypocritical society and the confinement of the home, and it marks the existence of a tendency to deconstruct the angel image in Arabic novels. The irony and humour of the situation here, is that despite umm ‘Azzām’s life time confinement to the home, she escapes her house at the end, for Lady Zakiyyah’s but ends up in Sakīnah’s house the house of prostitution. This irony is heightened when she notices a chandelier in Sakīnah’s house identical to the one in her own, which was a present from Abū ‘Azzām for his mistress, “ she looked up at the ceiling and speechlessly commented ‘ this chandelier is like the one I have’ Samar shook her head without saying a word, and silence filled the place, and it became stifling.”<sup>58</sup> It is ironic that while Ḥusām’s father is depicted as strict and a miser, here the other side of his personality is revealed as a good client of Sakīnah, and one who bought them a chandelier similar to his own. The image of Umm ‘Azzām is further emphasised here, as a woman who is a prisoner in her house. She does not know anything about the outer world, not even the fact that this is a house of bad reputation; she is also presented as stupid in her inability to understand.

However, women in this novel play a vital role in the *intifāḍah*. They prove repeatedly that they are strong, determined and shrewd when it comes to being part of the national struggle. When the three women collaborate to destroy the door to the courtyard it is because they believe deeply that violence can only be resolved with violence. This is a point that corresponds to Cooke’s statement “When violence is thus deemed justified and its cause and proponents have become widely credible, the seeds of power have been sown. To transform violence into power, the individual action must gain the support of a group that will give it authority [...]. Violence should not be mistaken for anything but an instrumentality toward the goal of transforming itself into power or the means for maintaining power.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, women in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*

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<sup>58</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> M. Cooke, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

show bravery and heroism, playing a crucial role in the *intifāḍah*, a fact which is repeatedly denied by the patriarchal authority exemplified in Ḥusām, Aḥmad and Samar's brothers. Khalīfah attempts to foreground the sexism of their society, which denies them the right to take part in the national struggle, an issue that troubles many intellectual Palestinian women who believe that national and social struggles are interdependent on each other. Khalīfah uses many oppositions in this novel i.e. good and bad, active and passive, claustrophobic and confined as against agoraphobic and escapist (the house, the kitchen, the caves vs. the farm, the mountains, the city).

### **The Dark Mother and the Notion of Sisterhood**

The novel starts with the death of Nuzhah's mother, an event which marks a change in Nuzhah's character. She abandons the badly reputed life of her mother and chooses instead to have a committed relationship with 'Āṣim al-Marbūṭ who betrays her in the end. This significantly conforms to Rogers' theory which suggests three components to the heroine's development (self, mother, father i.e. a masculine figure).<sup>60</sup> This pattern therefore, gives the heroine space to develop her identity and individuality. Her mother's death assists her in separating from the 'mother', who had great control over her, in the sense that she is the one who exposed her to the world of prostitution as well as of collaboration with the Israelis. She replaces the 'mother' with the 'father' figure of 'Āṣim al-Marbūṭ, becoming a victim of his exploitation, but later develops a stronger sense of identity learning to befriend honourable people like Ḥusām, Lady Zakiyyah and Samar. Samar's mother on the other hand, is represented as a preserver of the patriarchal authority—another instance of intertextuality where the mother of Nuwwār in *'Abbād al-Shams* as a representative of patriarchy. After the nine days entrapment in Nuzhah's house, Samar returns home and she faces the mother who retorts, "You go for nine days and you don't even call or send a message [...] what would your brothers say? What am I going to say to Sādiq or 'Umar?"<sup>61</sup> Her mother started whining, and was on the brink of collapse when Samar told her the whole truth and that she was at Sakīnah's house all that time, being under the same roof with Ḥusām and Nuzhah. Thus, the mother's anxiety is not fear for her daughter as much as from the father and brothers.

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<sup>60</sup> Rogers', *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>61</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah.*, p. 132.

Earlier on in the novel a young man dies and Lady Zakiyyah tells his mother the news. The significance of this incident is that it marks the honourable status of Lady Zakiyyah as a mother to all:

“The young man died in her arms and Ḥusām started sobbing in the dark. He stood up on the roof, let out a whistle, swiftly they came out, like jinn in the night. They carried him off in a moment, before his mother could find out. And when she bore her the bad news, she screamed in anguish, like a mad woman:

-He is not my son alone. He’s my son and your son, you pulled him out, remember?

Then she remembered. By God that’s right! It was she who cut his umbilical cord and, it was she who bore the good news of his birth and, it was she who carried him in her own arms on the day of his circumcision. And today it was she who wiped away his tears. Suddenly she remembered his watery eyes and, the odours of his sweat. He had died while dreaming of a hot bath and they buried him in his sweat; his hair smelling of stables and the straw that was caught in it.”<sup>62</sup>

This scene is polyphonic as it represents a social and political backdrop to characters and events in the novel. Moreover, the shocked mother’s words to Lady Zakiyyah convey and dialogise the reality of the marginal oppressed. The images provoked by this scene are highly dialogic, intermingling feelings are heightened for instance pity, self-realisation, sadness and grief. Khalīfah’s use of ‘double-voicedness’ dialogue also helps to enact meaning in the text. For example, the narrator intervenes to express the thoughts and memories of Lady Zakiyyah. This technique, according to Bakhtin gives space for dialogism “Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context.”<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, Lady Zakiyyah is represented as the surrogate mother of both Samar and Nuzhah; she is portrayed as the opposite of both Sakīnah and Um Ṣadiq in both ideological and psychological terms. Lady Zakiyyah compensates for all the emotions and positive attitudes they lack in their mother. She nurtures both girls emotionally and spiritually and introduces them to her world of calm and good faith. Nuzhah in particular, develops an intimate bond with Lady Zakiyyah who reminds her of her own grandmother Umm ‘Abdallah who similarly used to smoke the Hubble-bubble and tell them stories. Nuzhah develops a sense of security in the presence of

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Diane Price Herndl, in *Feminism Bakhtin And The Dialogic*. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

Lady Zakiyyah, and she opens up to her and, tells her of her innermost worries, such as her fear of 'loneliness'. This marks another point of intertextuality with '*Abbād al-Shams*, in which Rafif worries about 'loneliness'. Moreover, just like Katya and Cathy in Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Lady Zakiyyah is Sakīnah's opposite or double. "She echoes the idealised mother or fantasy or family romance, the mother that the female subject of classical psychoanalytic theory has never known."<sup>64</sup>

Like '*Abbād al-Shams* most of the characters in this novel, whether male or female, share a collective desire for a free Palestine. But women share another collective desire, that of equality and recognition, Nina Auerbach states " Union among women....is one of the unacknowledged fruits of war"<sup>65</sup> Women during the confusion of any war and the absence of many men, are free from the restrictions of their patriarchal societies on the one hand and their men on the second, and therefore, they have a chance not only to unite during the Israeli incursions to back their men and the *intifāḍah* strongly but also to replace men whether in the farms, or the shops. This gives women the chance in general to win the place she aims for in society. This fact is given a textual space in the novel: the three women unite firstly to guard their men from the Israeli soldiers, secondly, to nurse the wounded, and thirdly to retaliate against Israeli aggression. When Lady Zakiyyah ignores Nuzhah, who tries to greet her, it is because of her bad reputation, but when she finds out that Ḥusām is taking refuge in her house and, that she is nursing him, she redeems Nuzhah and starts a fresh relationship with her. Therefore, Ḥusām ends up being looked after by three women. The place of prostitution once in collaboration with the Israelis transformed into a place of heroic national action, when the three women collaborate to demolish the door:

"The alley awoke to the sound of heavy thumping. The neighbours peered behind glass windows and curtain slits. They saw two long canes, one extending from Lady Zakiyyah's house and, the other from Nuzhah's farm. With every blow, the cement used crumbled like flour. Within few minutes, nothing remained from the blockage but the cage bars. The youth gushed to the neighbours', pushing the gate down to the ground, until it toppled. And so shouts of joy echoed in the alleyways, as the women started ululating."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Louise Yelin, *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998) *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in S. M. Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart", *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>66</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 128.

This incident foregrounds duty to the nation undertaken wilfully by women. Nevertheless, they are refused the recognition they deserve as the equals of men in society. Dr. Bouthina Sha'bān highlights this notion arguing that Khalīfah investigates the role of women in the *intifāḍah* and in the resistance in the occupied territories. She sees women "as truly the backbone of confrontation with the enemy: where men are forced to run away or hide after each operation, women remain to confront the daily atrocities of the occupation. Within this frame, she discusses the social definition of honour, betrayal, love and resolve, and presents a realistic image of current life, instead of resorting to clichés and contemplation—which were the usual approach for a period of time."<sup>67</sup> Palestinian women are impelled by their condition to be more united in order to face the aggressions of the occupier. The notion of unity is clear in the character of Lady Zakiyyah whose profession allows her to know people's secrets including those of the *fidāies*, but she retains her reticence. Dr Sha'bān observes that Lady Zakiyyah is a wise woman because she is the 'compass and consciousness of society.'<sup>68</sup>

The solidarity of Nuzhah and Samar is not based on a sisterhood of class, yet they unite because of their mutual recognition of the threat from patriarchy and occupier. Their solidarity is registered in their speech as well as in the unspoken, which according to Bakhtin is typical 'dialogism of the oppressed.'<sup>69</sup> When Samar interrogates Nuzhah earlier on in the novel, Ḥusām — who is hiding at that point from Samar — recognises the difference between the two and feels protective towards Samar. The dialogue between the two women can be analysed as unequal, Nuzhah's comments threaten the official ideology and the language of patriarchy as exemplified in Ḥusām's presence and his ability to overhear the dialogue, while Samar's attitude sanctions the official.<sup>70</sup> This attitude is challenged by Nuzhah who believes that the people of Nablus have abandoned the aim of freeing the country, and have engaged themselves in tale-telling and gossip.

A feeling of sisterhood is evident in Samar who is reluctant to reciprocate Ḥusām's

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<sup>67</sup> Bouthina Sha'bān, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Hitchcock, in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>70</sup> Based on Susan Kehde, "Voices from the Margin: Bag Ladies and Others" in *Feminism, Bakhtin and the Novel*, *op. cit.*, p.35.

love, believing that she is betraying her bond with Saḥāb, whom she regularly meets at the committee among the other intellectuals:

“She is a sister for me like Nuzhah and other women [...] and we say suppression is not a thing for men only but for women too; they eat them and ditch their bones to the pariah dogs. We women don’t learn lessons from others; always stepping over other’s boundaries. If I know my boundary I wouldn’t fall in love with you, you’re hers and not mine.”<sup>71</sup>

Later on in the novel, on an implicit level, when Nuzhah escapes fearing the revenge of her brother, and Samar finds her, the latter is overwhelmed with joy; the significance of this incident is that it highlights the fact that Nuzhah is running away from her doomed killing by Aḥmad. Despite her love for him, she fears him, which signifies an issue specific to her gender as a woman only able to be felt by other women like Ḥajjh and Samar. The following passage renders many social codes which serve to circulate the meaning of familial revenge under a more complex code, that of occupation. Khalīfah, through this incident, highlights the problem of the female who faces a double oppression:

“ She went there and found her among the shepherds and peasant women, ploughing and picking olives. The land still showed signs of the harvest, piles of hay and sacks of produce were everywhere. She approached her quietly and gently whispered:  
-‘Nuzhah, I beg you don’t run away. Let me see you even if it is for an hour, let us explain things to each other and, go back to the village hand in hand’.  
Her face was dusky and scorched, reflecting the colours of the setting sun. She gathered the end of the hessian sack and, in a broken, hoarse voice said:  
-You abandoned me, and sold me out. If it were not for the Ḥajjh, I would have been dead.”<sup>72</sup>

The significance of this passage is that it dialogises not only the social, but also the geographic, codes of the characters, the symbol of the olives and the land in this context signifies the importance of a free homeland against the irrelevance of gender related issues. Nuzhah at this point is angry with Samar who, instead of warning her

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<sup>71</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥāh*, pp. 191-2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

about Aḥmad's arrival in Nablus and his intention of killing her, is indulging herself in Ḥusām's love. This is a love that stands in opposition to the official culture and one which will be condemned by her strict family, and therefore she assimilates Nuzhah in her little rebellion against society. This point focuses the change in Samar's personality, her way of thinking; she is no longer obedient to the official culture of patriarchy because she is aware of her individuality and her emotional needs.

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In *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, Khalīfah attempts not only to reveal the social and political changes in Palestine but also to accelerate a cultural change, for people in general and women in particular. This change features in the novelistic world through the introduction of women who belong to the margins of society, such as the prostitutes who turn out to be good characters due to being freer than other women. Such a characterisation helped to show the real dilemma of life in Palestine, in contrast to the usual clichés. Such images, and the depiction of war, give the writer the chance to move away from the closed spaces of the past and confirm the changing dynamic in the Arab world, particularly in Palestine. The main protagonist in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, Nuzhah – a prostitute – undergoes tremendous personal and ideological shifts. The novel therefore focuses on the interaction of her personal and national identities; the gradual dissolving of the former into the latter marks a point of commonality with Gordimer's Rosa. These female protagonists – Rosa, Sa'diyyah, Nuzhah – navigate the tortuous phases of alienation and confusion before succumbing to the instinct for violence as the sole remaining answer to their deplorable political situation.

At the same time, *Bāb al-Sāḥah* brings to light the true extent of the stalemate in Palestine, underlined yet further by Ḥusām's symbolic recourse to an unspecified cave at the end, just as Maureen leaps into the unknown in *July's People*. Such symbolic and ambiguous endings suggest that Khalīfah and Gordimer's visions of the future remains opaque and uncertain, unable to fully break the deadlock that suffocates both Palestinians and black South Africans. On a deeper level, one can see that both writers are raising questions over the super-imposed ideologies of the *intifāḍah* and the Liberal Communist Party, and are pondering their credibility as the only answers to

their miserable realities. That said, one must be aware of the corruption prevalent in the different political wings of the *intifāḍah*, to which the novelist appears to refer

Ḥusām in *Bāb al-Sāḥah* is very much like Baasie, or July and Usāmah in the previous novels: he stands in opposition to Nuzhah both personally and politically, and makes her conscious of her political and social obligations. His presence in the novel, as well as that of Lady Zakiyyah and Samar, provides a context for an ideological and ethical perplexity to resolve itself in Nuzhah. Ḥusām's letter to her at the end marks a decisive moment for her on the psychological and ideological level, with which the reader can sympathise. On reading it she undergoes an intense assessment of her changed attitude and decides to revolt, but then submits to serving the cause in the final scene.

The invocation of violence in this scene marks the transition of national consciousness from moderation to extremism, as it embraces people from all strata under the monolithic aegis of the *intifāḍah*. The inclusion of people such as Nuzhah signifies a national unity and consent to the *intifāḍah* as the final resort for Palestinians. Both novelists therefore invoke violence to point out their resentment to the decaying systems, and in Gordimer's case to foretell the return of black South Africa. This idea, as we saw in the previous novel, is underpinned by the use of certain literary techniques that emphasise the dichotomy of 'self' and 'other', attaching a sense of culture to the whites and crudity to the blacks. The grotesque scenes in *July's People* clearly signify the backwardness of July's village and the whites' inability to survive there. This point in particular marks the distinction between natives and settlers; the latter's existence is based on the economy rather than the land. This point also applies to Khalīfah's novels, particularly *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, in which of Ḥusām and Aḥmad share a symbolic attachment to the land, the former escaping to the cave and the latter dying in the fields.

## Conclusion

### *The Transition of National Consciousness*

This thesis seeks to establish the various aspects of women's writing — such as the inner world of the female, eschewal of plots, non-sequential and non-suspenseful patterns, the female imagination, women's individuality, the mother/daughter relationship and sisterhood — through the work of two women novelists, Saḥar Khalīfah and Nadine Gordimer. It attempts to explore to what extent these aspects construct a position for the reader from which a new reality may be envisaged and to what extent this position is stable. Both writers convey a 'limbo' situation through the contradictions, miseries and injustices of sterile social systems. This situation forces the protagonist into a predicament that resonates on personal, social and political levels. They materialise visions of the future as foreseen by the novelists and the light of their society's current contradictions. The strategy of 'eschewing the plot', for example, yields a text which references the 'morbid symptoms' that reside in political and social systems at a specific historical moment. Likewise, the intersection of gender and language functions as a female body determinant in this study. Gordimer links the sensuality of the body to the potential means of political liberation, or a "future when bodies are their own signs as opposed to being caught in the signifying systems of a state which considered the individual to be completely classifiable by bodily features."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the mirror imagery in *Burger's Daughter* "symbolizes the white South Africans' valorization of themselves as the only politically and morally sound culture and their disregard for the welfare of other races",<sup>2</sup> thus politicising the female body. Critiquing the situation in South Africa and the West Bank through this framework enables Gordimer and Khalīfah respectively to highlight the decaying systems of Apartheid and Zionism. These determinants contrive in their different ways to convey 'visions of transition', which incorporate the sexual, the textual, and the narrowly political. This can be divided into two stages: alienation and confusion, and violence and national transcendence.

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<sup>1</sup> Judie Newman "Jump Starts: Nadine Gordimer After Apartheid", in *Apartheid Narratives*. Nahem Yousaf (ed.) (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001) p.114.

<sup>2</sup> Abdul JanMohamed, "The degeneration of the Great South African lie." In *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) p. 99.

## **Alienation and Confusion**

Khalīfah's *al-Ṣabbār* is a realistic representation of the West bank life in 1978, shedding light on the social and political changes at that time: the despair of people in the West Bank after the defeat in 1967. The sequel *'Abbād al-Shams* (1980) depicts their pessimistic mood, with despair increasing mixed with intolerance. Similarly, *Burger's Daughter* illuminates the corruption of the Apartheid system and the ongoing exploitation of black people. Through the character of Rosa, Gordimer sees the inevitable death of this system and the desperate longing of liberal whites and blacks for its destruction. This point in particular indicates the congruence between Khalīfah and Gordimer.

Khalīfah engages her characters with gender and class related issues, violence and bloodshed. This is clear in Usāmah's outrage at Palestinians working in Israel in the first part. Ṣiddiq reaffirms:

“Usāmah seems to have little understanding of the actual conditions of life under occupation. A sworn activist who believes in the magic efficacy of violence to set history aright [...] his logic, like that of the rejectionist view on the Palestinian national scene, is incorrigibly idealistic and ultimately suicidal.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Palestinians reject Usāmah's attitude, accepting the intellectual's call for moderation. Nevertheless, due to the lack of political resolution, these moderate voices have fallen away. Usāmah's violence is the outcome of his exile and alienation, which is expressive of the Palestinians' lack of a meaningful political entity and their miserable social and economic reality. On the other hand, Gordimer engages her characters with vanity, escapism and guilt. Through Rosa, Gordimer questions the existential issues of identity and humanity and using silence (in the donkey incident) to engage with history. Silence, to quote Rushdie, is the “ancient language of defeat”.<sup>4</sup> It reflects her identity crisis as a white in South Africa, and represents the internalised oppression and violence in that society, which has been extended to the animal. This literary structure exposes the character to different social and political realities, such

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<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad Ṣiddiq, “The Fiction of Sahar Khalīfah: Between Defiance and Deliverance”. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Vintage, 1995) p. 89.

as racism, and is destructive of the current reality as it sheds light on the superimposed power of the whites and the subjugation of the blacks. This anti-Apartheid approach marks a distinct post-colonial tendency in Gordimer.

The *Buildungsroman* presented a convenient structure to explore the ideas of alienation and 'objectification' in Rosa, whilst revealing the feminist tendencies, or lack of them, in the writer. For example, Rosa's decision to flee the reality of Apartheid is compounded by different dramatic episodes, and her decision to return and unite with her history is facilitated by other such episodes. This undermines Luce Irigaray's theory of the 'Divine Woman', in which she argues that women lack a god in their image:

"Our goal has always come to us women from outside: from man, child, city. We have failed to place our goal *inside as well as outside ourselves*, failed to love, failed to *will* ourselves and one another. Because this can only be a divine project. God conceives and loves himself. That part of God has always been denied us. Thus we women have become weak, formless, insecure, aggressive, devoted to the other because unaware of ourselves, submissive to the other because we were unable to establish our own order."<sup>5</sup>

Rosa's self-objectification and identity crisis prevent her from stopping the maltreatment of the animal. The end of her journey to Europe, however, liberates her from this feeling of 'objectification' as well as the political burden of her 'place'. It can be argued that Rosa re-engages with a 'male' cause, which conforms to Irigaray's theory, but this very notion is justified by the fact that Rosa returns to South Africa to support two ideologies: the liberal revolution represented by Lionel Burger and the social and feminist revolution represented by Rosa Burger and other women in the novel. However, Gordimer does not sympathise with the white female in South Africa, but treats her as peculiar to the situation in which she is caught. Alienating Rosa is part of Gordimer's strategy of articulating the white female's inability to see the ugliness of things in them or around them. It is through Rosa that she articulates the white's ignorance and inability to see the blacks as subjects in their own right rather than as extensions of their own subjectivity. Her search for identity throughout

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<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes And Genealogies*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1987) p. 81.

the novel is part of her personal development; this enables her to acknowledge the correct values for self and society. She develops a critical consciousness of her reality, becoming so alienated from self and society that she opts to escape. Gordimer mediates her protagonist's growth and alienation through different individuals and symbolic episodes: Lionel, Baasie, Conrad, Katya and Clare form theses and antitheses in her consciousness and enrich her personal development in their own ways. Gordimer attempts to shed the disillusionment of the contradictory South African reality through the protagonist's conflicting desires, which mirror her own desire to flee. Thus she reflects the struggle in her protagonists' consciousness between the obligation to fight Apartheid and the desire to leave South Africa. Abdul JanMohamed confirms this point:

"The subjective and objective narrative in Gordimer's fiction reflects the burden of contradictions generated by the Manichean South African environment. In a society replete with contradictions the Gordimerian self, hating apartheid culture, living in the sparse black-and-white society, yet unable to change social institutions to suite its own values and beliefs, is repeatedly forced to retreat from the divisive society in order to examine its own consciousness, values, and priorities."<sup>6</sup>

Gordimer uses the technique of 'abjection', as when Rosa is represented as 'vomiting', emptying out her colonial attitude. There are similarities between the writers here too, as Khalifah has 'Adil also vomiting after recognising his error of working in Israel. Kristeva labels this as 'abjection', a way of registering shame. Self-realisation gives Rosa the incentive to re-engage with the political task of liberating South Africa and of taking up her old work as a physiotherapist in a hospital. Her personal, and therefore political, suffering ends when she reassumes what she sees as her responsibilities as part of a multiethnic community. Similarly, at the end of Khalifah's *al-Ṣabbār*, 'Adil abandons the dialysis machine, the symbol of his father's bourgeois position and control, an act that conclusively demonstrates his re-engagement with social and political responsibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> Abdul JanMohamed, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

'*Abbād al-Shams* explores the double-standards and ethical anomalies of Palestinian society and the occupier's oppression. Intolerance escalates, as is clearly seen when Sa'diyyah, despite her widowhood, struggles to acquire a plot of land and nourishes her dream of having her own house, which is later confiscated. Hope is therefore replaced by anger, and Sa'diyyah fights the Israeli soldier among the crowds of angry, pebble-throwing Palestinians. This prescient incident anticipates the *intifāḍah* of 1987 and its revolutionary ideology. It also contrasts with the marginal and disorganised resistance groups impinging on the textual world of *al-Ṣabbār* through characters such as Usāmah and Abū al-'Izz. Their revolution at the end of *Abbād al-Shams* illustrates Fanon's statement: "It is utopian to expect the Negro or the Arab to exert the effort of embedding abstract values into his outlook on the world when he has barely enough food to keep alive."<sup>7</sup> This reflects the situation of many Palestinians at that historical moment, when both morality and the economy have crumbled amid a general feeling of endless oppression.

Khalīfah associates the female body with confinement, for it is subjected to the patriarchal figures of the family and the physical abuse of the occupiers in *al-Ṣabbār*. This linking of textual and sexual politics fits with Foucault's theory which places the body at the centre of explanations of women's oppression as a historically and culturally specific entity.<sup>8</sup> The screams of the girl in the small room on the border, as well as other scenes when Sa'diyyah and Umm Ṣābir are confined to the house, show the body as the site of power/knowledge relations transmitted through discourse. Foucault equates power with repression and links it with sexuality embedded in discourse: "The omnipresence of power relations has some important implications for the conceptualisation of political changes and revolutions [...] power relations enter into the very constitution of the fields of knowledge."<sup>9</sup> So on the one hand the oppression of the girl (a metaphor for land) signifies the political hierarchy in which the Israelis are given supremacy and control over Palestinians in general, and on the other the women's confinement to the house emphasises a patriarchal, social

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<sup>7</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Translated by Charles Markmann. (New York: Grove Press, 1967) p.95.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Athar Hussain, "Foucault's History of Sexuality", in *m/f: a feminist journal*. (London: , 1981) Nos 5 & 6. p. 173.

hierarchy, a point through which Khalīfah attempts to solve the equation of *‘ird* vs. *Karāmah*. Rushdie comments on honour in relation to violence in the third world: “We who have grown up on a diet of honour and shame can still grasp [...] that men will sacrifice their dearest love on the implacable altars of their pride [...] Shamelessness shame: the roots of violence.”<sup>10</sup>

Another example of Foucault’s body/power/knowledge in discourse is the woman who shares a taxi with Usāmah on the way to Nablus. She embodies the voice of wisdom, mocking him and admonishing him that things are not as ‘barren’ as they seem. A further example is Nuwwār’s friend Līnah, who is depicted as working for a resistance movement. Despite the differences between the Second World War and the *intifāḍah*, these instances also reflect Gilbert’s idea that “war with its deathly parody of sexuality, somehow suggested a female conquest? Because wives, mothers, and sweethearts were safe on the home front.”<sup>11</sup> Palestinian women participated in the resistance movement on many levels, private and public. They suffered not only the effects of a distant war but also those of tyranny on their occupied soil. It empowered them and gave them a competence in their newly earned freedom. Through such examples, Khalīfah foregrounds women’s vital role in the resistance movement and the psychological and economic weaknesses of the male in such circumstances. This reversal of the male/female dualism in the context of occupation is similar to Cooke’s binary scheme of gender and war, front and home front, a redefinition of women’s space in the patriarchal order: “Unlike convents and monasteries, as well as boys’ and girls’ schools, the front and home front have not usually been analysed as gendered spaces [...] women occupied spaces that had little if any direct access to the spaces of power that the men in general occupied.”<sup>12</sup> The images of men like Abū Ṣābir being unable to provide for the family demonstrates men’s weakness, and his sense of defeat is experienced by ‘Adil, Usāmah, Abū al-‘Izz and many others. This internalises the idea of instability associated with change and transformation, and affects women’s political, economic and social position in the hierarchal order.

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<sup>10</sup> Rushdie, *Shame*, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert, Gilbert, Sandra “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War.” In *Behind The Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Women And The War Story* (California: University of California Press, 1996) p. 14.

Internal monologues and intimate dialogues express the writers' insistence on using the discourse of the female body as signifier of the world. For example, in *'Abbād al-Shams*, Sa'diyyah reveals her anxieties about the future and her anger towards patriarchal society, which denies her freedom of mobility, through her monologues and long conversations with Khaḍrah, as does Raffī, who addresses either her friend or mother. Similarly, through the imagined addressee, Rosa expresses her confusion and denial of her political inheritance. The existence of characters like Conrad, Katya and Baasie allow her to articulate her innermost worries and emotions. Through these psychological insights, the writer makes the public private, linking psychology with history. Gordimer comments on *Burger's Daughter*, "the point of departure is history rather than psychology [or] the psychology of history."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in this novel the monologues provide a double discourse and a space for the reader to experience the 'morbid symptoms' that can lead to bloodshed. This is reaffirmed by Bader:

"The morbid symptoms in the interregnum were diagnosed earlier in *Burger's Daughter*. The ideological conflict in the novel between the regime and different liberation movements, and the possibilities of either going towards a radical communist revolution or a holocaust or ethnic cleansing were all morbid symptoms of the interregnum."<sup>14</sup>

This is evident when Rosa admonishes herself after her dispute with Baasie: "A war in South Africa will doubtless bring about enormous human suffering. It may also, in its initial stages, see a line-up in which the main antagonists fall broadly into racial camps, and this would add a further tragic dimension to the conflict."<sup>15</sup> In this way the internal monologues help to shed light on the characters' prevailing mood.

Violence comes to prominence towards the end of *al-Ṣabbār* and continues to escalate in *'Abbād al-Shams*, compounded by various contrasting scenes. Khalīfah describes the deteriorating situation as the number of settlements increases:

"Camps were set up on a hill, it was inhabited by piteous and peaceful people, who prayed every day. They lined up in huge

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<sup>13</sup> "A conversation with Nadine Gordimer", in *Salmagundi*. A Quarterly of the Humanities & Social Sciences. Published by Skidmore College. p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Yousef Bader, *Liberalism in Gordimer*. PhD thesis, SOAS.2001. p. 164.

<sup>15</sup> *Burger's Daughter*, p. 329.

numbers grateful to god who granted them the return of the glories of Israel from the meddlesome people of the Middle East. The farmer's little boy hit them with a pebble, and it fell on the *yarmulke* of one of them, he pulled his gun and killed a boy. And went back to his prayers."<sup>16</sup>

The Israelis allow themselves the right to have a home and to worship their god while denying the Palestinians the right to exist and worship their god. This aggressive and contradictory situation impinges directly on the Palestinian consciousness and produces a marked change in attitude. This is the paradoxical situation which both writers attempt to foreground: the split between black/white and Israeli/Arab behind which lies the idea of racism, ethnicity, chaos and the spectre of war.

Gordimer registers the collective desire for change in the Communist Party through Rosa, whose mute observations and silences in the first part of the novel are the author's way of deconstructing Western feminist ideas embodied by female characters like Clare or Katya. For example, her valorisation of the female character's physical beauty and her objectification as the 'other', which resonates with patriarchal texts, sets it apart from feminist writing. Here Gordimer gives the physical issue another dimension, that of criticising the political. The two objectified women represent the two political systems observed by Rosa at the time, the Communist Party and the imperialist system, in a mentally exhausting attempt to settle into a life under a favourable political system. In *Burger's Daughter*, therefore, the call for revolution against Apartheid is internalised through Gordimer's deconstruction of the decaying values inherent in it as well as scepticism of the white Communist Party. This scepticism is present in the protagonist's questioning of the credibility of her father's party and her attempt to understand the split within the Communist Party by attending its many private meetings. As a result, Rosa develops a contempt for the party representatives, which is expressed through her criticism of Clare as a passive follower. Her observation of Katya echoes that of Clare, resulting in the equation of form/substance, or inward/outward, and highlighting her doubts over European imperialism as well as the South African colonialism. Her inquisitive tendency and defection to France lend a psychological dimension to the unbearable transitional

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<sup>16</sup> *Abbād al-Shams*, p. 258.

period undergone by South Africa as a country. Her flight recalls the Rushdie's migrants, who "have floated upwards from history, from memory, from time."<sup>17</sup> The 'sideward glance' that Gordimer gives to the *piéd noir* and the racist attitude of the French towards the Algerian workers impels Rosa to question the European imperialist system further, noting the similarities with Apartheid. This liberal approach to the different human relationships and cross-cultural interactions, according to Yousef Bader,<sup>18</sup> creates an 'intimacy' in Gordimer's work that is usually absent in colonial novels. This distinguishing feature sets her among the moderate authors in post-colonial discourse. Similarly, Khalīfah uses the 'sideward glance' to explore the supremacy of whites over coloured in *'Abbād al-Shams*, when Bāsil looks at the Israeli soldiers and thinks "a white face, a white face and a black heart."<sup>19</sup> This supremacy is recognised by Said as rooted in the imperialist history of the Europeans.<sup>20</sup>

The thesis also examines both writers' literary terrains. Khalīfah proves to be a feminist through her fictional representations of the Palestinian reality. The use of the 'mad double' in the cases of Khaḍrah in *'Abbād al-Shams* and Nuzhah in *Bāb al Sāḥah* challenges patriarchal double standards and lends a new perspective to the female's role in society, especially during the *intifāḍah*. Khalīfah, in contrast to Gordimer, reveals her rejection of the old values that are no longer beneficial for women's emancipation and involvement in the outside world. Through the mad double and the passive/active characterisation the writer attempts to construct a new position for Palestinian women as part of a general vision of the future, one that incorporates modernisation alongside the maintenance of good traditions. This marks Khalīfah's modernist tendency, as she attempts to deconstruct backward cultural values in the light of modern Western ideals. She also deconstructs phallogocentric discourse, as in *al-Ṣabbār*, to point out the errors of the homosocial order which demands that women be confined to the house and segregated from the other sex and its external domain. This strategy implies a breakdown of the old social and political

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<sup>17</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Shame*, p. 87.

<sup>18</sup> Yousef Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> *'Abbād al-Shams*, p. 277.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993) p. 253.

mores; symbolically suggested in the destruction of the Karmī house by the Israelis towards the end of the novel. *'Abbād al-Shams* marks the beginning of a new and challenging role for women, who are at times compelled to go out and work due to the changing circumstances in the West Bank. As a feminist armed with a strong belief in the uselessness of oppressive old customs and conventions, Khalīfah attempts to transform social and political life in Palestine. Nevertheless, the fact that Nuwwār abandons her love for Şaleḥ and announces her willingness to marry for the sake of marriage runs against the novel's narrative theme of renewal and change for women, and accords with the Third World image of women as wives, mothers and nurturers of a new generation. Irigaray states:

“Their absolute need is not for the [...] phallus but for the chance to be born to themselves, to find autonomy, to be free to walk, walk away and walk back, however it pleases them. The need for the phallus that has been attributed to women is a posterior justification for the obligation laid on women to become legal wives and mothers.”<sup>21</sup>

Khalīfah relegates Nuwwār to a peripheral role in the narrative. By accepting of the rules of 'matriarchy', she is delineated as a symbol of a traditional society that valorises the idealised figure of wife and mother. This equation of transitional social and political visions in Khalīfah's novels acts as a prelude to the events of her subsequent novel *Bāb al-Saḥah*, in which the *intifāḍah* is officially pronounced Palestine's national movement.

Gordimer exposes the reality of the privileged whites in South Africa by making Rosa query the ideology of Apartheid. In *Burger's Daughter* she depends on the many subtexts to achieve her literary aims. Clingman asserts that they are “the sub-text of a coming revolution that, even if it was impossible to foresee exactly, is perhaps the controlling force, the real 'subject', of this fiction that determines its deepest addressee.”<sup>22</sup> The subtexts in this novel point to the sterility of the present and express the historical 'unconscious' of what the writer wants to say or avoid saying. They are the result of romanticism and realism – the realism of exposing the flaws of Apartheid

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<sup>21</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes And Genealogies*, p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986) p. 217.

(or occupation), and what is desired in its place.<sup>23</sup> For example, Rosa's dismissal of the incident in Paris, when she is robbed by a black man, is indicative of the whites' general feeling of guilt towards the blacks. Similarly, Khalīfah employs subtexts to express the national 'unconscious', exposing Sa'diyyah to the outside world in *'Abbād al-Shams*, and giving her space to interact with the ideology of the *fida'yyīn* when she meets them for the first time in the curfew. Khaḍrah and the *fida'yyīn* raise questions in her mind, and instigate in her a new level of attentiveness to the national cause. Her national identity is particularly shaped by the confiscation of her land and the abuse of her son by the Israeli soldiers in front of her eyes. Through her Khalīfah reveals the misery of an oppressed nation that is 'coming back' through revolution.

### **Violence and National Transcendence**

The second stage of the transition depicts violence both in South Africa and the West Bank, the only difference being that it is illusory in one and real in the other. *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, for example, revolves around the idea of *fida'yyīn* and their ability to transcend physical and emotional difficulties on the one hand, and the solidarity and transcendence of Palestinians in general on the other. Here Khalīfah chooses one setting only: the house previously used for prostitution. This signals her insistence on making the public private, foregrounding the role of women in the *intifāḍah*, and representing the transformation of social hierarchies by deconstructing the binary structure of society. Ethical and nationalist values are challenged by the strong presence of a woman like Nuzhah as a central figure. Khalīfah gives her an opportunity for social re-engagement when her house becomes shelter for Ḥusām, Samar, Lady Zakiyyah and Umm 'Azzām. Meanwhile, the author challenges the repressive homosocial order by creating a comedy of errors, such as the appearance of Umm 'Azzām in Nuzhah's house and the similarity of the chandelier there to her own, which proves Abū 'Azzām's infidelity. At other times she resorts to black comedy, as when Samar is beaten by her brother who then hides like a coward from the Israeli soldiers. Khalīfah uses the female body to articulate the double oppression imposed on

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

women in that part of the world and to direct them toward a social and political transformation.

Khalīfah's vision of political transitions is tinged with despair and hopelessness. Ḥusām, the symbol of the *intifāḍah*, is imprisoned in the house throughout the novel. This imprisonment foretells the current political stalemate, which developed long after the publication of the novel in 1990, while his broken leg symbolises the traumatised Palestinian cause. In addition, when he is able to move, he escapes to the mountains and hides in the caves, again a reference to the condition of Palestinians. The novel is left open-ended and Ḥusām's fate remains unknown, except for a letter to Nuzhah after the death of her brother Aḥmad in which he tells her of "the precious blood for Palestine", signifying the continuation of the *intifāḍah*. This end sees a homological connection with *July's People*: when Maureen escapes the reader is left to speculate whether she was rescued by the Americans or captured by the enemies. In both novels, the writers construct multiple subtexts to engage the reader with the various possible outcomes. But in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, Nuzhah's outrage on reading the letter runs against the logic of the narrative, the objective of which is a collective desire for the liberation of Palestine. This paradoxical situation highlights the problem that, for some, the *intifāḍah* is superimposed, and it also demonstrates the change within Nuzhah who subsequently resolves to join others in the struggle.

Abdul JanMohamed<sup>24</sup> observes that in *July's People* Gordimer continues to explore the white South African consciousness, examining the Manichean logic of this imaginary apocalyptic setting. She avoids the actual war and focuses on revealing the consciousness of characters, and the continuous struggle between master and slave. This theory seems correct, as Gordimer focuses on the relationship between the Smales and July, as well as that between the Smales themselves, whom she depicts as impotent in the old world, growing apart from each other in the absence of the economy that sustained them. In the apocalyptic new reality, they realise their confused and distorted identities. Maureen develops an individuality and selfhood that enables her to run away from her husband, whom she no longer recognises. Gordimer

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<sup>24</sup> Abdul JanMohamed, *op. cit.*, pp.139-40.

addresses her own agony as a white caught in the ambivalent feelings of the privileged liberal woman suffering guilt and confusion of identity. This point is emphasised through Maureen who, despite being a South African, has never seen the old world of July's people, and it is from that point that her nightmare begins, as does that of white South Africans in general. Through the different representations of the old world, Gordimer attempts to formalise a social structure of the imminent reality, which as experienced by Maureen is a disturbing one. Here, Gordimer envisages a revolution, something primitive and unknown, that may erupt at any time within the Apartheid system. She uses the woman's body to draw out her political, psychological and economic perspectives. The imaginary world of the Smales family living in the primitive mud hut, as opposed to the luxury life of the 'master's bedroom' in the new world, highlights the importance of the economy in the white's reality, a point which Gordimer makes strongly in both novels. The significance of subjecting the Smales to nature and the 'land', which represents black people and their culture, signifies the 'return of the repressed'. This point marks Gordimer's alienation from the inevitable reversal of roles, as well as her affiliation with it. Through this one can perceive her 'unconscious', which desires equality and justice, and her ambivalence towards the unknown. Nevertheless, Gordimer's binary structured narrative emphasises the idea of 'natural fertility' as opposed to 'economy'. Irigaray confirms this opposition when she states:

"A fertile earth and a valuable commodity are not the same thing. Not infrequently these two productions are opposed economically, and the second is preferred to the first. But when the goddesses of cosmic fertility were suppressed to found so-called rich societies, certain problems arose. Every time man or men seek to build an economic order at the expense of the earth, that order becomes sterile, repressive, and destructive."<sup>25</sup>

This justifies Gordimer's interest in foregrounding this binary opposition which further emphasises the importance of the idea of a 'homeland' in *July's People*, in which the Smales are referred to as 'white pariah dogs in a black continent'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes And Genealogies*, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> *July's People*, p. 8.

The hysteria of the mad doubles in *‘Abbād al-Shams* and *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, present in the characters of Khaḍrah and Nuzhah respectively, as well as the displaced Maureen in *July’s People*, signifies a fundamental change in their political and social systems. Their powers of resistance are a sign of their repression. Cixous, using Freud’s idea of the hysterical history, sees the power of the repressed working in the same way: “anachronism has a specific power, one of shifting, disturbance, and change, limited to imaginary displacement [...] that is how the hysteric, reputed to be incurable, sometimes took the role of a resistant heroine.”<sup>27</sup> On the relationship between the repressed and culture in general she comments: “do the abnormal ones — madmen, deviants, neurotics, women, drifters, jugglers, tumblers — anticipate the culture to come, repeat the past culture, or express a constantly present utopia?”<sup>28</sup> This analogy between the hysterics and the return of the repressed proves vital to this thesis because it emphasises the transitions undergone by their societies, and highlights the political discourse assigned to the female body (or the male body) to signify such a change. However, if the repression is part of a dominant patriarchy — as in Khalīfah’s novels — the return is violent. This is confirmed by Cixous:

“When the repressed of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions: for at the end of the age of the phallus, women will have been either wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent, white-hot fire. Throughout their deafening dumb history, they have lived in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellion.”<sup>29</sup>

Nuzhah’s hysterical outbursts in *Bāb al-Sāḥah* are destructive of the *intifāḍah*’s ideology and the homosocial conventions of society. For example, when her brother dies, she revolts and spits on Palestine, screaming: “I want my brother and not Palestine.”<sup>30</sup> Her reaction is seen by others as insane. Similarly, when she is alone with Ḥusām earlier in the novel, he interrogates her about her mother and their involvement in prostitution. When asked about the peculiarity of their house she

<sup>27</sup> Helen Cixous and Catherine Clément, in *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I.B.Tauris Publishers, 1996.) p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, p. 210.

mumbles: “What’s wrong with this house? Since the start of the *intifāḍah*, no one came here.” He answers, “And before the *intifāḍah*, you had strange people coming every day?’ ‘Yes, like your father’.”<sup>31</sup> Such paradoxical incidents challenge the political and social structures, and imply the need for their reconstruction on a basis that will unite people of all social strata around the monolithic sign of the *intifāḍah*, which represents the emerging national identity.

Gordimer’s liberal imagination enabled her to visualise the falsity of the Apartheid system whereby the whites dominated the predominantly black country. It also helped her to visualise a future system in South Africa, with new relationships and the reversal of roles and power, as is the case in *July’s People*. As Bader confirms:

“Gordimer’s familiarity with the mining area and life of white middle-class people in Johannesburg has shaped her realism, but later through her wide liberal vision Gordimer trespassed to the daily life of non-whites and their suffering under colonialism and Apartheid. [...] Gordimer’s novels tend to transform reality beyond colonial history and the Apartheid reality to create a new identity, a new nation, and a new home in the coming South Africa.”<sup>32</sup>

The unknown future envisioned by Gordimer highlights the reversal of roles between whites and blacks of both sexes, giving black women a sense of supremacy which Maureen dismisses in her confidence as a white. Both writers therefore realistically portray the oppression suffered by indigenous people under the destructive systems of Apartheid and Zionism, while exploring the limitations and devastation of these superimposed racial and sexual hierarchies.

Both writers are inclined to explore the interaction between personal and national identities. For example, in *Bāb al-Sāḥah*, Nuzhah’s obsession with worldly pleasures dissolves when Ḥusām and the other politically involved female characters enter her house and she begin to feel part of a whole. Their presence allows the dialectic of ideological contradictions to resolve itself in Nuzhah and the contrast between her way of life before and after the *intifāḍah* defines her personal and national consciousness. This change becomes clear when she sees a small wrinkle around her

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> Yousef Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

eyes but this time does not think of going to Hadasa hospital to have a face-lift as her mother would have suggested. Instead, she thinks of a deeper issue: the time she has wasted, her opaque future, the endless strikes and curfews, and her desire for the security of a family of her own. Khalīfah thus shows that the polarisation of Nuzhah's personal and national identity at that point emerges out of the collective political and national identity. Her personal identity gradually dissolves and she transcends her hostility towards society and men. She develops a political conscience, motivated by her brother's death and her commitment to the cause. This paves a way for a national sorority that is altogether new to her. Ḥusām and others taking shelter at her house is her only gateway to involvement in the national struggle. As in her other novels, Khalīfah therefore attempts to show both the polarisation of segregation and women's interaction with the national struggle.

Similarly, in *July's People*, Maureen is presented in the old world as dependant on July, who assumes her husband's previous authority. Bam loses his significance as a husband, and he is not unaware of this change. July gains power over her and antagonistic feelings develop between them when the gun goes missing. Maureen is aware that July had a hand in it, and an argument ensues: "Suddenly he began to talk in his own language, his face flickering powerfully."<sup>33</sup> July's nationalistic feelings are strong at this stage, evident in the use of his own language and his conspiring with Daniel to steal the gun. Gordimer skilfully elucidates the increasing power of the blacks, particularly when the chief wonders at the lack of ammunition and what might happen if they were attacked by the Russian-backed Sowetans. Bam tells him that "you mustn't let the government make you kill each other. The whole black nation is your nation."<sup>34</sup> Maureen's predicament is therefore both personal and nationalistic; she does not belong to Bam nor to the blacks, and her sense of identity is marred "like a solitary animal" at the end of the novel. This escape is expressive of the new reality in South Africa, one in which the country depends on its people and the whites play an insignificant role.

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<sup>33</sup> *July's People*, p. 152.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

*Bāb al-Sāḥah* foregrounds the perpetual problems of sexism and inequality prevalent in Palestine and provides a historical backdrop for the subsequent violence. It depicts the flaws of the patriarchal logic that deprives women the dignity and freedom to live their life fully and their anger at this system. This point, as seen by the writer, is controversial, since it holds back the collective uprising of the nation. For example, Nuzhah's house and the nationalist activities conducted there provide a context for the reader to grasp the implications of women's collective identity and national transcendence. Khalīfah shows that violence is not necessarily self-motivated but thwarted by the ongoing predicament, the loss of family members, the violence and injustice. When Nuzhah is faced with the death of her brother, she becomes vengeful, despite her doubts about the *intifāḍah* ideology. She steps forward and guides the others through the secret tunnel to the courtyard. Meanwhile, Samar's position in her family provides the context for the obstacles to women's emancipation; her shame and indignity are intensified in the presence of her brothers, who see her as inferior. Khalīfah also shows the effects of social repression of women whose national identity is given prominence over their personal or sexual identities. For example, Samar's personal identity develops only in the context of a nationalistic struggle; it reveals itself through her love of Ḥusām at the end of the novel, where her inner and outer world interact for the first time and she recognises herself as a person outside the patriarchal confines of her family. Lady Zakiyyah's positive role in society provides a nationalistic discourse, nursing those wounded in the *intifāḍah*. She is a subject and an active woman amidst other young and confused female characters. She is the ideal image of Palestinian woman, a true Muslim who invokes the names of the holy prophets throughout the novel and preserves the indigenous culture by serving her community, and by disciplining the wayward Nuzhah by encouraging her to act in a more proper fashion.

The invocation of violence in the work of these writers is typical of nationalist literature. They form what Fanon calls 'a counter-colonial narrative'. Gordimer's ability to visualise a future era is exceptional in the sense that it bypasses the violence of the present and foresees the return of black South Africa. She tries to visualise co-existence between whites and blacks and a commonality of political aims, but also

predicts that these ideals will be impossible to achieve. The invocation of July's village and landscape asserts the blacks' existence and culture, while Maureen's inability to live in this culture is indicative of the falseness of the whites' existence there. Similarly, in exploring the issue of the *fida'iyin* in *Bāb al-Sāḥah* Khalīfah gets to grips with the idea of the spiritual transcendence through which they go. Death is recognised as a route to salvation. This novel sheds light on the controversial ideology of 'suicide bombers', who have since acquired a global notoriety.

The violence that erupts in *July's People* foretells of an imminent reality, the handover of political power in South Africa to the blacks. The imagined marginalisation of the whites and the collective national transcendence of the blacks are clearly foregrounded in the carnivalistic scene or the *gumba-gumba*: a black celebration in July's home. This is accompanied by the deliberate marginalisation of the whites by the writer, through which she emphasises their false position. Through such representations Gordimer reveals her historical unconscious, which is the unconscious of the South African history itself. The abundant use of the grotesque in the novel provides a context that foregrounds the heterogeneity of the South African reality and the invalidity of the white lifestyle in the old world. The novel opens with a scene that signals the writer's unconscious prediction of the end of the whites' supremacy over the blacks: July knocks on an imaginative door, and serves them tea in pink glasses in the mud hut.

In all of her novels Gordimer openly criticises and undermines the colonial system of Apartheid. In *Burger's Daughter* she observes the blacks rejection co-operation with the whites, while the aggressiveness of African nationalism is a feature of both novels. The whites' marginalisation by the Africans in *July's People* sheds light on Gordimer's predication of the new era and her doubts about it. She is agonised by the thought of change, despite her deep criticism of the whites' privileged life. She sees co-existence as possible only between the children in *July's People*, although this is contradicted at the end of *Burger's Daughter* when Rosa is depicted as working along the blacks. This conveys Gordimer's increasing pessimism regarding the co-existence of whites and blacks in the new era, which is understandable in light of the increasing

violence in South Africa at that time: the massacre of Sharpeville, the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, the Soweto chaos, the torture and killings of black leaders, and the imprisonment of figures like Mandela. These crucial events influenced Gordimer's thought and her projection of a new reality.

Both writers shed light on the prospect of the heterogeneous culture and society by showing the linguistic and communicative gap between coloniser and colonised. The power of the coloniser's language on the one hand and the colonised 'silenced' language on the other, especially in South Africa, signify the link between cultural control and official practices which compound the subordination of the native language. In *July's People* Gordimer silences the colonisers and empowers the natives in an attempt to visualise the changed reality. Maureen is represented in the last scenes as shocked and offended by July's answering her with his own language, a language that represents the repressed culture and signifies the reversal of political order in South Africa.

In Palestine, the different names for cities and places are an expression of this heterogeneous culture. Khalīfah reveals the tensions and conflicts fermenting in Palestine between soldiers and natives, as when the latter insist on using the Arabic name of a city while the former uses the Jewish. The predominance of the Jewish language and culture in official practice is an example of colonisation. Khalīfah also highlights the idea of silence among Palestinians who work in the factories of Tel Aviv and their occasional eruptions of violence against the injustice inflicted on them.

Both writers therefore provide the reader with a literature that expresses a unique history and culture and addresses an emerging nation which seeks to be defined on its own terms. Gordimer focuses on the agony of the liberal whites' and the colonising power in South Africa, while Khalīfah looks at the self-realisation of Palestinians. Both writers are therefore caught up in a similar dialectic between native and settler, and an opposition of self and other that inspires an assertion of identity on both sides. As Said puts it, "the construction of identity [...] involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous

interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from 'us'.<sup>35</sup> Khalīfah dismisses Israeli culture just as Gordimer dismisses the black South African culture in her earlier novels. C. L. Innes, in "“Forging the Conscience of Their Race’: Nationalist Writers”,<sup>36</sup> observes the dichotomy of native and settler as paradoxical in literature. For example, the colonisers assert their identity through characters and attitudes, relating the native to nature rather than humane or cultural experience, and relating their own identity to the modern world of urbanisation and civilisation. This point is clear in Gordimer’s fiction, and particularly *July’s People*, the setting of which asserts the native’s belonging to nature and agrarian culture in contrast to the urban settlers. The primitive life of the natives in this novel is a reflection of the colonial view of them as lacking culture.

Similarly, the Palestinian nationalist literature counters the coloniser’s dominance by asserting the native identity, culture, and history. For example, through the different settings and individual attitudes Khalīfah attempts to affirm the uniqueness of the Palestinian culture and tradition. She tries to unite Palestinians by creating an individual social attitude that helps their cause. Her novels convey the shift in attitudes among Palestinians from moderation to extremism and prove that conditions of extreme stress and crisis can result in substantial changes in attitude and conscience. She delineates the ongoing struggle of people and the endless Zionist attempt to annihilate Palestinians, to torture them and confiscate their lands. She insists on using folkloric songs and maintaining the old customs and traditions in her fiction in order to confirm Palestinian national identity, and she relates the native people to the nature, culture and history of the Arab world.

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Vintage, 1994) pp. 331-32.

<sup>36</sup> C. L. Innes, "“Forging the Conscience of Their Race’: Nationalist Writers.” In *New National And Post-Colonial Literatures*. Bruce King (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) pp. 120-126.

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