



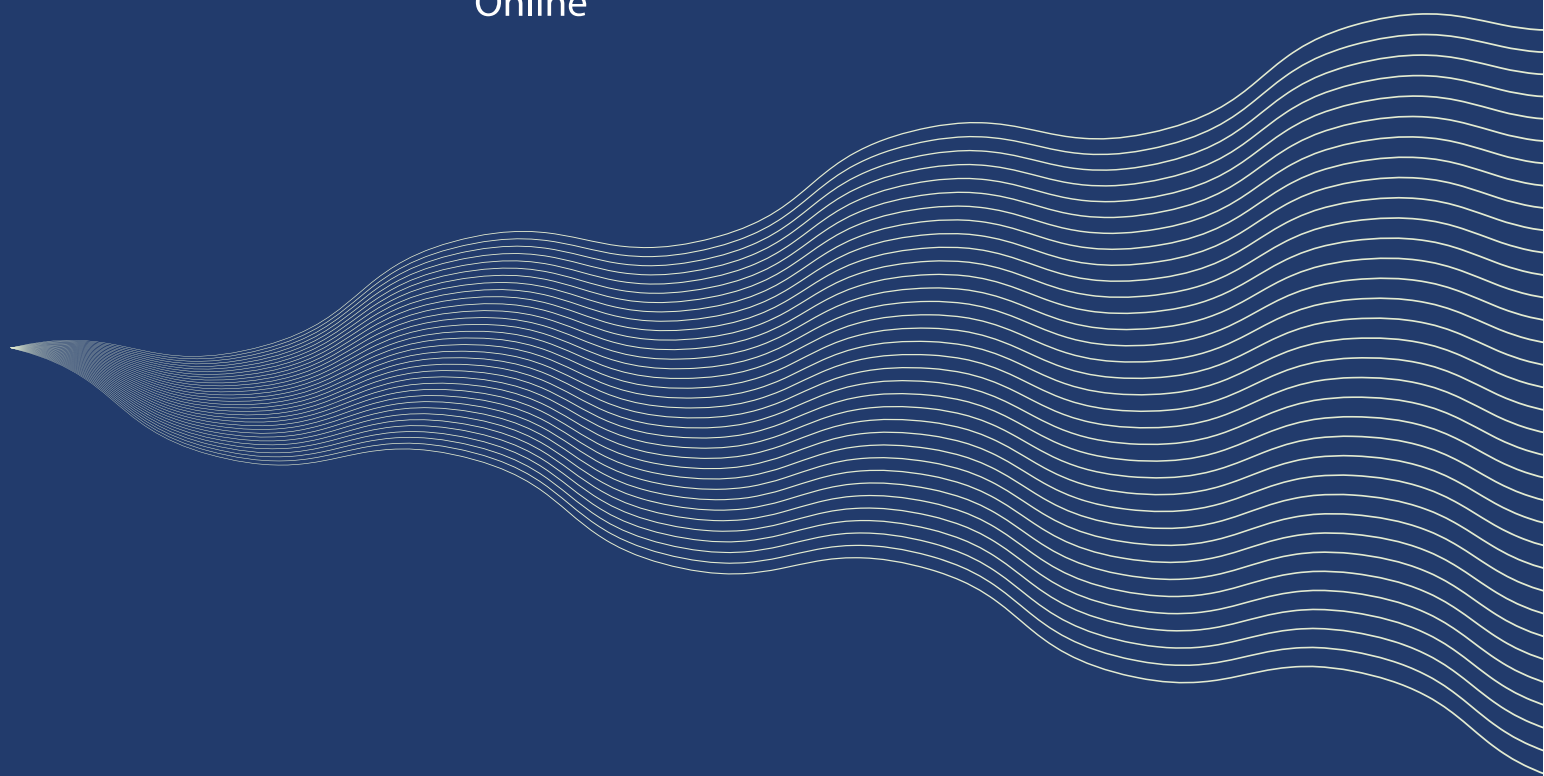
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# TANULMÁNYKÖTET CONFERENCE BOOK

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## **Feminist Insights from Middle-Eastern Literature: What is Being Inherited? A Feminist Reading of the Palestinian Novelist Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance***

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The Palestinian literature is being described as a marginalized arena of study since little attention has been devoted to explore the Palestinian literary works in relation to world literature. More specifically, little attention has been devoted to explore the writings of Palestinian female writers. Thus, the Palestinian female remains a veiled subject and little research is being dedicated to de-veil this Oriental subject to the global scene. Accordingly, this research attempts to broaden the scene through analysing the literary works of the Palestinian feminist writer Sahar Khalifeh, in particular, her novel *The Inheritance* (1997).

The research elaborates on the way Khalifeh's characters are victimized within the Palestinian society that suffers from both occupation and the patriarchal traditions. Thus, the research traces the way Khalifeh portrays her female characters in the novel as victims living under a double colonization within the Palestinian society. The research draws on post-colonial feminist theories since the Palestinian female appears as an oppressed (colonized) subject who has her own unique challenges. In other words, the research questions the Western feminist approaches regarding the Oriental woman's representation since the West approach the Oriental female according to their own values. Thus, the research argues that non-Western women should not be treated as a homogenous category with coherent identity and universal characteristics; instead, social, religious, political and cultural factors should be taken into consideration when addressing the woman question in Third World countries.

The research concludes that all the practices against the Palestinian female are of patriarchal nature while the male figures are not responsible to observe their morality. Such patriarchal patterns continue to veil, circumscribe women's lives and prevent them from being full citizens within the Palestinian society. Thus, in Khalifeh's work, women still appear as victims of the inherited patriarchal traditions.

*Keywords: Palestinian literature, Patriarchal system, Post-colonial feminism, Sahar Khalifeh, The Inheritance (1997)*

## I. Introduction

The journey of the Oriental female to liberate herself and shift her position from the private sphere at home to the public arena within her society is of double burden compared with her Occidental sister. On the one hand, the Oriental female has to resist the colonization imposed on her as a colonized subject living in Third World countries, and on the other hand she has to refute the domestic oppression imposed on her as a prey for the patriarchal traditions. Accordingly, any attempt from Western feminists to de-veil the situation of the Oriental woman would not reflect the real scene in details. For example, the Indian feminist critic Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues:

What is problematical, then, about this kind of use of 'women' as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts, this move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities (1984, p.344).

In other words, regarding the woman question in the Orient, there are three factors which are: "Colonial occupation, the occupation of Palestinian land, and more recently the Gulf War, have shaped the views of both men and women in the area" (Sabbagh, 1998, p.43). In addition, the Palestinian feminist activist Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi criticizes the Occident feminist frameworks regarding the Oriental female; in particular, the treatment of the Oriental woman as the 'Other' veiled subject using a Western mentality stating:

To me the major drawback was the political lack of responsibility and foresight in understanding women's position among all the oppressed of the world ... if you are fighting against the oppression of women or discrimination against women, you must fight against all sorts and oppression or discrimination ... Western feminists will have to put their own house in order and see that there is not just sisterhood but also an affinity among all the oppressed, regardless of the nature of the oppression, before they address other forms of oppression (An interview 1998).

Accordingly, this research aims to broaden the Oriental feminist scene by providing insights from Palestinian literature as an example on women status in Third World countries. However, it is important to mention that the research is not trying to create a unified image of the Oriental female or the Palestinian female as opposed to that of the Western representation of her, yet it aims to feed the scene with some feminist insights which could help in revealing some information about the unique experience of some Palestinian females since "The literature on Palestinian women is still far from being complete" (Sabbagh, 1998, p.62). Thus, voicing what the Palestinian critic Suha Sabbagh called "Palestinian women's 'herstory' (that) is a story of empowerment, of gaining greater rights from patriarchal structures, of a double resistance" (1998, p.76) becomes a must. Accordingly, the present research puts the Palestinian literature on the table for examination by analysing the production of the pioneering feminist writer Sahar Khalifeh in her novel *The Inheritance* (1997).

### I.1. The Female Image within the Palestinian Family

It is important to highlight the way women are being represented in Palestinian literature. In other words, women are always confined within the threshold of their domestic roles; thus, they perform their roles as protectors of their home, family, chastity, virginity and honor.

Accordingly, any violation of these domestic roles would lead to punishment by the male figure within the Palestinian society. Hamamlra asserts that “Palestinian women who transgress the borders of the domestic sphere are subject to verbal and physical violence and sometimes, so-called, honour killing” (2019, p.4). This is represented clearly in the position that women occupy within the social fabric of the Palestinian family since:

The structure of the family remained hierarchical, with variables such as age and gender shaping the pattern of relations among its members. The father represented the top of the hierarchy, with central decision-making authority, especially in cases of marriage, divorce, and inheritance ... Females ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy, with little or no share in decision making (Jad, 1998, p.114-115).

This shows the subordinate position that women occupy within the Palestinian social fabric. In addition, the Palestinian female image in literature is not different from her image in real life since her literary image is also dyed with a patriarchal ink. For example, the well-known Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish portrays the Palestinian female within only domestic roles such as the mother, the wife, the lover, etc. who needs to be protected and saved. Darwish “has created a connection between the nation and women with various characters, especially the love and mother, ..., and lots of evidence reveals that women occupied the highest position in the poetry, making it a sacred symbol - the homeland” (Yu & Alhartani, 2018, p.3). Thus, women representation is controlled by the patriarchal pen.

However, the female reaction to this patriarchal system could be traced in Sahar Khalifeh’s work. In other words, Khalifeh becomes aware of these phallogocentric patriarchal traditions and representations of the Palestinian female; thus, she tries to refute them in her writing. Khalifeh comes to understand this subaltern position of the Palestinian female since her biographical records reveal that she suffers from this marginalized position early in her life, she is treated as a “miserable, useless, worthless sex ... Growing up female meant that there would be many rules surrounding her life. As an escape, she resorted to reading, writing, and painting” (Koy, Gustafson, Obitz-Cooney, 2006, p.1). Accordingly, in her work, Khalifeh tries to subvert this stereotypical image of the Palestinian woman since:

Her main characters, a woman head of a household, a journalist, a prostitute, and a housewife, are trapped between poverty, occupation, traditional norms, and unchanging male perceptions. Yet, they grow and become stronger through their adversity and are able to make a contribution to society in many ways (Sabbagh, 1998, p.35).

Khalifeh’s characters “fight occupation they also fight against restrictive traditional values inculcated into their innermost self” (Sabbagh, 1998, p.35). Thus, *The Inheritance* (1997) stages the floor for Khalifeh to reveal the obstacles that the Palestinian female suffers from which, in turn, prevent her from moving forward. The reasons for choosing *The Inheritance* (1997) for the analysis is that the novel revolves around the concept of the female honor that is a daring yet rarely discussed topic in her work. This echoes Alhawamdeh’s words who states “little attention has been given to Khalifeh’s *The Inheritance* because I think it does not concentrate on the narrative of resistance to the Israeli occupation to the West Bank” (2015, p.105) compared with her early novels where the focus is more political than feminist. In addition, *The Inheritance* (1997) devotes a sufficient space for the female characters to manoeuvre within and it reveals their agonies to the readers “Khalifeh’s real success in this novel is giving voice to different Palestinian characters of various circumstances; most important of who are female characters who are rarely heard in literature before” (Elnamoury, 2016, p.3). Thus, the investigation of those characters could feed the research with the patriarchal images Khalifeh tries to subvert in her work.

## I.2. Honor and Inheritance within the Palestinian Context

World Health Organization defines honor crimes as a “girl or woman being killed by a male or female family member for an actual or assumed sexual or behavioural transgression, including adultery, sexual intercourse or pregnancy outside marriage or even for being raped” (2012, p.2). This definition entails two important aspects within the Palestinian society: on the one hand, it shows that death is the destiny that awaits the female figure who fails to preserve her honor. On the other hand, it shows that the concept of honor is linked only with the behaviour of females whereas the male figures are not responsible to observe their morality and behaviour “since the male’s immorality does not affect the honor of the family. Such gender imbalance brings victimization to women, who are transformed into a symbol of the family’s honor to be protected and avenged by their male relatives” (Alhawamdeh, 2015, p.105). Thus, when it comes to Palestinian traditions, the cleaning of the male honor by sucking the female blood to death, is a must since the social context within the Palestinian society places much emphasis on the reputation of the male figure and what people say about him. In this regard, Kanaana, the Palestinian anthropologist and folklorist, notes “the fact that Palestinian culture is an oral and aural culture that privileges the spoken over the written” (2005). In other words, if a woman violates the codes of morality regarding her honor, the man should react to this violation. Abu-Odeh asserts that “to be a man is to engage in daily practices, an important part of which is to assure the virginity of the women in your family. In Arab culture, a man is that person whose sister’s virginity is a social question for him” (1996, p.13). Thus, it is considered shameful for a man not to revenge over the loss of his honor. “If a man doesn’t intervene by killing his sister/wife once she has shamed him, he suffers a loss of his gender: he is no longer a man” (ibid.). However, it is important to mention that there is no correlation between honor killing and religion since some male figures resort to employ Islam as a veil for their violence against women:

There is no mention of honour killing in the Quran or Hadiths. Honour killing, in Islamic definitions, refers specifically to extra-legal punishment by the family against a woman, and is forbidden by the Sharia (Islamic law). Religious authorities disagree with extra punishments such as honour killing and prohibit it, so the practice of it is a cultural and not a religious issue (Muhammad, 2013, pp. 20-21).

Moreover, honor crime practice is universal and it is not peculiar to the Palestinian society per se since World Health Organization declares that “there are an estimated 5,000 murders in the name of ‘honor’ each year worldwide.... These killings occur mainly in parts of the Middle East and South Asia, but also among some migrant communities” (2012, p.2). In addition, the concept of honor is linked to the inheritance process within the Palestinian family. In other words, the preference of a baby boy over a girl is the norm since the male hire would keep the family lineage whereas the female is viewed as a burden. This echoes Canaan’s words who observes that “The preference for male children who are taken to signify honour and the perception of female children as tokens of burden and shame are common features in Palestinian proverbs” (1931, p.175). Accordingly, within this system of symbols regarding honor and inheritance, the present research will trace the scenes Sahar Khalifeh presents in her novel *The Inheritance* (1997) and analyse the way the female characters are being victimized by the patriarchal traditions within the Palestinian society under the veil of honor and inheritance. In light of these concepts, the research will trace the behavioural aspects of the three main characters Zayna, Nahleh and Futna and highlight the masculine oppression imposed on them under the veil of honor and inheritance as will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

## II. Discussion: The Burden of the Female Honor in *The Inheritance*

### II.1. The Female Quest within the Third Space

Zayna is the main narrator of the novel and she is the one who tries to make connections and reconciliations with other female characters during the course of the events taking place in *The Inheritance*. Zayna is half Palestinian, half American since she was born to a Palestinian father and an American mother. From Zayna's perspective, this is a problematic hybrid space. This recalls Homi Bhabha's concept of 'the third space' in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) where the offspring of the migrant find themselves inhabited in a neutral space. Thus, Zayna is confused about which side she should choose for herself. This is manifested in *The Inheritance* when Zayna's grandmother, named Deborah, comments on the situation of America during 1990s, the era of the war between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, stating "Oh God! What happened to America and the Americans? What happened to us?"(27). Zayna contemplates:

It was 'We' that hurts me. What is the meaning of us? Who are we? We are the Americans? I am not American. 'Who are you then?'... I didn't say I was Arab because I wasn't. Who am I then? Despite my mother's citizenship, my birth certificate, my school certificate, my books, my accent, my clothes, and everything about my life, I was not truly American. The depths of my mind were inhabited by visions and pictures, love songs, those Arabic mawals moving like the passage of a breeze, the scent of violets, the fragrance of memories, all leaving behind a honey-sweet solution in the heart (27,28).

This proves that Zayna is stuck between the standards of the two spaces which are totally the opposite of each other: the Occident that is represented by her maternal American roots and the Orient that is represented by her paternal Palestinian roots. This gap between both sides affects Zayna's behaviour both as a teenager and as a mature person. Thus, to understand Zayna's behaviour as a teenager, it is important to reflect on her familial surroundings. For example, *The Inheritance* shows that Zayna's father could be described as a traditional Palestinian male figure. That is, he wants his daughters to follow his steps and inherit the Palestinian traditions that put much emphasis on the virginity of woman. Zayna's father states "I want my daughters to be brought up as Arabs, clear and transparent as a candle" (17). However, during her teenager, Zayna gets pregnant and her father wants to end her life "he was chasing me in the street, holding the longest knife. I was fifteen years old" (17). In this situation, Zayna's father appears as a typical Palestinian male who wants to wash the shame caused to him by his daughter's pregnancy outside marriage. The father is acting according to the Palestinian traditions that treat female honor and virginity as concepts that are constituents for the male reputation. Thus, according to Zayna's father patriarchal perspective, his daughter makes the light of his candle blurred and this, in turn, affects his reputation as an Arab male. Zayna decides to escape to her American grandmother to help her survive this situation. Her father shouts angrily "Daughter of a dog, by God I will suck your blood!" (23) Her grandmother tries to help her yet the father insists that he ends her life "It's over; consider her dead. She must pay for her mistake. I must wash away my shame and hers"(23). While chasing her, *The Inheritance* portrays Zayna's father as a "smashing monster, without mind or sense. He wasn't the father I knew but a total stranger"(23).

At this moment, Zayna's grandmother grabs a hunting rifle and starts threatening Zayna's father that she would shoot him. Finally, her father puts the knife aside and they help him by treating his bleeding hand. Zayna's grandmother addresses him "calm down ... Zayna is staying here. You can go to your people and tell them that you acted like a man and killed her" (25). *The Inheritance* employs the verb 'tell' to convey the idea that the Palestine culture

is an oral one; thus, Zayna's father image as a man would be preserved if he spreads the news orally that he already punishes his daughter. However, when Zayna's father leaves the house for the last time, Zayna shouts "Dad Forgive me!" (25). At this point, *The Inheritance* communicates two important things: on the one hand, the male figure within the Palestinian society acts as an authority who has the right to confiscate his female's life if she violates the moral codes of behaviour and morality, by doing so, the male figure believes that he could correct his image in front of his male peers and preserves his manhood qualities. On the other hand, the novel proves that the burden of the inherited traditions within the Palestinian society could drive the male figure to become an extremist to the extent that he could kill his kin of the same blood just to satisfy the masculine codes of behaviour.

Accordingly, *The Inheritance* shows that the father is also a victim of the social traditions, which means that he tries to find an escape from these patriarchal traditions by inflicting harm on the weaker sex; that is the Palestinian female. *The Inheritance* is not putting all the pressure on Zayna's father alone; instead, it tries to make the door open for change within the Palestinian society since the novel does not allow the father to slaughter his daughter. Instead, he stops the chasing and leaves the grandmother's house going back to his roots, the West Bank in Palestine. In addition, Zayna's grandmother even though she is an American, she knows enough about the cultural expectations when it comes to men's reputation and honor within the Palestinian society. Deborah tells Zayna's father to go and tell his people that he ends the life of his daughter and that he becomes a man now. These incident takes place in autumn where the yellow leaves are falling down and a new life is about to emerge and bloom. Hopefully, the decaying patriarchal societal traditions would disappear and be replaced by non-biased gender equality norms "autumn was in its last days and the leaves are falling down" (25).

The second stage in Zayna's life where this neutral space becomes problematic for her is manifested in her adulthood. Thus, firstly, it is important to highlight the way *The Inheritance* represents Zayna as a mature female then discuss the impact of this hybrid space on her behaviour. Zayna, as an adult female, is portrayed as a successful female figure at the professional level. She becomes an anthropologist who is interested in studying the nature of human beings and their social affairs. Zayna now is in her thirties and she is an economically independent woman. Zayna reveals "my mother died so I inherited her, I have two apartments, one in Washington and the other in San Diego. I have two cars, yacht..." (30). However, after all these achievements, Zayna feels that she still misses something. Thus, upon receiving a letter from her uncle telling her that her father is about to die and she has to go back to Palestine if she is to claim her share of the inheritance, Zayna decides to accept her uncle's letter and make her first lifetime visit to Palestine to meet her roots "Come quickly before the thread breaks and you lose your claim to the inheritance"(43). Upon her acceptance of the letter, Zayna will shift from the position of the West to that of the East.

Zayna is threatened not to get her share of the inheritance since Palestinian females are being denied the right to get their shares of the inheritance just because they are females. In other words, the female figure is not entitled to have any access to financial independence within her society. This is clear in the way Zayna describes the way one of the villagers welcomes her "and he starred at me for some time trying to discover if I as a 'female', deserve all this inheritance" (52). The paradox within the Palestinian society is that in some cases, women are being killed because the family does not want to give the woman her share of the inheritance; thus, the concept of honor killing is used as a veil to justify and cover up their violence and ill-treatment of women. From the patriarchal perspective, women's honor is having a slippery definition, sometimes it is a symbol for the male figure's reputation and his manhood qualities; however, in other circumstances, the same concept is used as a veil to hide the patriarchal desire and drive for money and power. Thus, *The Inheritance* tries to de-veil

the way the Palestinian society treats its females through Zayna as a victim who comes to act within this neutral ‘in-between’ space since she grows up as a female without being exposed to all these discriminating cultural practices. By doing this, *The Inheritance* doubts the concept of ‘Third World woman’ as a coherent group that Mohanty criticizes and it provides a clear demonstration for the necessity of taking into consideration the peculiar socio-economic conditions for each group of women in different parts of the world. Thus, Zayna, the anthropologist, will be more familiar with the patriarchal system within the Palestinian society that oppresses women through her interaction with other female characters within the Palestinian society that will be discussed below.

## II.2. The Female Honor

Nahleh is represented in the novel as a sacrificing female figure who spends her whole life working in Kuwait as a teacher to support her family financially, a family that consists mainly of males, that is her five brothers: Jaber, Jamal, Mazen, Said and Kamal. However, during the Iraq-Kuwait war in 1990s, Nahleh loses her job and is forced to go back to the West Bank again. Nahleh is not satisfied with this shift in her life since she realizes that she is left alone: “I woke up to find myself old, without a husband, without a house, and no one to call me mama” (71). Nahleh feels that her family does not appreciate her efforts in helping them to survive: “I worked in Kuwait, being milked like a cow, teaching and bringing them up, but they paid no attention to me and did what they wanted” (70). *The Inheritance* hints to the fact that the family allows the female to change her place and cross the threshold of domesticity if that place brings them profit. In other words, it treats women as toys who are deprived of feelings and they only do what serves the patriarchal agenda. Thus, *The Inheritance* assures that this is one of the fundamental themes Sahar Khalifeh’s feminist approach tries to criticize; that is the necessity to treat women as individuals not as machines or emotionless subjects that are under the control of the patriarchal system all the time.

Thus, Nahleh is not satisfied with her current situation as an unemployed woman “I am not used to staying at home. I spent my whole life working. Now I find myself doing nothing but housework, sweeping and cleaning, washing and making pickles! I’m about to explode, this kind of life is killing me. Am I going to stay home after having spent a lifetime working?” (117). Nahleh does not want to end her life at home without a job since she is used to have her own room and her own income as Virginia Woolf insists on in her book *A Room of One’s Own* that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1929, p.4). Accordingly, after losing these weapons, Nahleh starts to look for alternatives to fill this gap. She starts to beautify and use make ups, her father once wonders: “Where is Nahleh? Where did she disappear?” and Nahleh continues to stay in her room in front of her mirror trying new outfits and playing sports to lose weight ... then she starts to write, writing her memoir ... she starts writing one page then she writes other pages, after that she stops and does not know how to continue or what to say” (95). Most of the time, “Nahleh sits in front of her mirror and starts to apply crèmes and oils, which she brought from Nablus, on her skin” (96). By doing this, Nahleh tries to look for a partner with whom to continue her life.

The situation Nahleh finds herself within, the pressure of her family and the traditions that view the unmarried woman as a spinster makes the situation worse. *The Inheritance* inserts “Spinster? Spinster! A shallow sick word for the single unmarried woman and an unmarried woman is a fruitless land, it is not attractive. It does not arouse the thought and feeling. And this is the situation of the woman without rain” (66). In other words, the husband/male is like the rain that will make the woman become fruitful. In addition, within the Palestinian society, mothers themselves are concerned about their daughters being married

since having unmarried daughters who are still even in their thirties means that the mother's daughters are like "the sluggish goods" (147). However, Nahleh is in her fifties now and she insists that getting married could be the solution for her problems. This belief is rooted in the cultural practices within the Palestinian society and the oral traditions. A popular Palestinian proverb shows that the movement of the Palestinian female and her exchange of place is too restricted within only two places 'A woman leaves her house twice: when she gets married and moves to the house of her husband, and when she dies and is carried to her grave'. Although marriage is assumed to be an escape from being treated as unwanted low demanding goods. Nahleh is still trapped in this trading process since marriage is performed by an exchanged of money, that is the dowry between the male figures. Nahleh is forced to adhere to the societal norms that view marriage as the only destiny for women if they are to be considered worthy creatures. Thus, she loses her status as a free independent woman and finds herself in a situation where she has to confront to the out-dated Palestinian patriarchal traditions. *The Inheritance* describes the scene where Nahleh is sitting in front of her mirror to recognize who she is and her reflection in the mirror would tell her more about who she is. It is the mirror that serves as a crossing point between Nahleh the independent woman and Nahleh the victim of the inherited patriarchal traditions.

Accordingly, this victimization of females within the Palestinian society derives Nahleh to insist on searching for a male partner that would uplift her from this situation. Nahleh believes that the male figure would empower her. Thus, she starts a relationship with an old man named Abu Salem who is already married and has children. Nahleh is caught having a love affair with him in a party that takes place in her town; thus, she has to marry him, "she does not find a place for love except in the toilet area!" (200). When her family discovers this, Nahleh has to suffer the consequences. Thus, she escapes to Zayna's place; however, Nahleh's brother Said insists that he kills her. When he finds her with Zayna, he shouts "Open the door! You daughter of a dog?" (136). He takes a knife from the kitchen and threatens Nahleh "With this, you see! With this. Does she think there are no males in her family" (163). *The Inheritance* shows that the shame caused by the female to her male relatives is only washable by her blood, which means ending her life. In addition, ending the life of the female by using a 'feminine tool' that is the knife, which is a 'domestic tool' usually used in the kitchen, could indicate that no one will blame the male since females are being killed by a domestic tool not a patriarchal one like e.g. the sword, the pen, the gun, etc. Moreover, *The Inheritance* employs the phrase 'the biggest knife' many times, a kind of knives that is usually used in the butchers' shop; thus, this could be a sign to exaggerate the amount of oppression and the huge punishment imposed on women.

However, Nahleh tries to defend herself by threatening her brother of calling the police "Get out! I will call the police"(163). *The Inheritance* tries to criticize the Palestinian society that does not provide the security for women inserting "but she knows well and he knows too that there is no police and that the country is a mess since there is neither government nor supervision" (163). Finally, Nahleh holds a rifle to stop Said from attacking her and she succeeds in stopping him. This recalls the same scene that happens with Zayna and her father while she is being chased by her father when she gets pregnant. Again, allowing a woman to hold a gun which is a 'masculine tool', even it is a hunting rifle, could be a sign/call from *The Inheritance* for women to take the first step and start defending themselves. *The Inheritance* repeats the same incident to communicate the message that these practices are the norms that the males resort to when it comes to their honor; that is their females' reputation within the Palestinian society.

*The Inheritance* views Nahleh as a woman who is totally indulged in the domestic traditional role of the wife towards her husband. For example, after Nahleh's husband runs away when his first wife and his children discover his second marriage, Nahleh insists that

she would not divorce him “Oh! Isn’t he my husband? Even if her runs away and escapes, he is still my husband. I am his wife and the wife should be patient and bear the hardships with her husband”(201). However, things get worse when Abu Salem’s family kidnap Nahleh since they want her to sign a paper giving up her right of inheriting him. Nahleh insists not to sign the paper stating “Will I be divorced at the end of my life? What would people say about me? You want them to say that I am without honor? You want them to say that I get married with him because of the inheritance? Or you want them to say that I married him just to taste him?” (201). *The Inheritance* describes Nahleh’s behaviour as a victim when her father says “she is lost twice: once in her body and the other in her mind” (159). When his daughter disappears and is being kidnapped, the main concern of the father is only that what people would say about him: “He was shaken up and more afraid of scandal than for Nahleh’s safety” (159). Nahleh ends up refusing to be divorced or giving up her share of the inheritance.

Nahleh is being treated as a criminal who deserves a big punishment. Her brother Kamal who works as an engineer in Germany contemplates while talking to his brothers about Nahleh’s fate after the scandal, “if she were in Frankfurt, then her situation would be different since she could talk about her ‘real self’” (155). Kamal is aware that women there express and verbalize themselves in conferences, magazines and newspapers and there are universities and institutions that give advice to divorced women and spinsters alike. In addition, Mazen believes that if Nahleh had the chance to go outside the West Bank, then her perspective about life and her behaviour would change a lot. Even at this point, while Nahleh’s brothers are discussing the possibility of taking her to Frankfurt, they continue to treat her as a child who cannot decide and reason what is suitable for her. *The Inheritance* tries to communicate the message that the problem is not about the place but about the mentality of the people who occupy that space/place. This shows the patriarchal practices that position the males as guardians who are responsible to preserve the morality of women within the Palestinian society. This also reveals the nature of the relationships between Palestinian people; their relationships are subject to traditions and rules rather than emotions. Zayna, the narrator summarizes the scene concluding “I realized that the feeling of the individuals towards each other is not as strong as I thought or the way they assume it should be. The members of my family were merely detached pieces in a rusty chain .... Their relationship was part of the traditions and was only symbolic” (160). This system of symbolization is the main subject that Khalifeh tries to subvert in all her works.

### II.3. Double Oppression

Futna is Zayna’s father’s wife. She is nearly of the same age with Zayna. Her skin is fair and she takes care of her appearance a lot. Zayna’s first meeting with Futna takes place at the hospital where her father is taking his last breath. At the first sight, both females do not like each other, Zayna comments “I looked at her and she did the same but she did not attract my attention. For an unknown reason which I didn’t understand, I felt sympathy with her” (59). However, Zayna and Futna get engage in a conversation about who will inherit her father after his death since *The Inheritance* tries to present the way the society oppress women and forbid them from taking their share of the inheritance just because they are females. Futna tells Zayna that “you are a female” (61), then she adds “if destiny had another say, I would compensate you and give birth to a male hire” (61). Zayna, the outsider, does not get the point in Futna’s speech; thus, Futna explains: “The male blocks the others to inherit and without a male brother, your uncle would inherit. Do you understand what I mean?” (61).

This situation derives Futna to look for a solution to win the inheritance. She goes to an Israeli hospital to get a male hire; Futna undergoes an artificial insemination process in an

Israeli hospital. Thus, after Zayna's father passes away, she announces that she is pregnant. At this point, Futna has two challenges: on the one hand, she is afraid of her mother's reaction since she is an old fashion woman who is too strict when the issue is related to honor and God. On the other hand, her insemination process is done in an Israeli hospital that is in the colonizer's space. This stands against Futna's mother national views. Zayna asserts "from Futna's mother perspective, her daughter is smart since she got married of my father and this secures her daughter's life until death" (87). However, she doubts the method her daughter employs to get this child, Futna assures her mother stating "I didn't do anything that would make God angry. It's only a surgery that the doctor did at the hospital wearing gloves and a mask and there was a nurse assisting him" (90). Futna's mother shock is of double reasons: on the one hand, her daughter's body/honor is exposed to a male figure, and on the other hand, this male figure is an Israeli colonized figure. This affects the Palestinian traditional standards that consider the doctor as an oppressor and colonizer. In other words, Futna violates to codes of behaviour regarding her honor since her body is being exposed to a male who is a colonizer. After the negotiations with Futna's mother, she finally accepts her daughter's pregnancy. Thus, Futna starts the preparation to welcome her son; everything she prepares is blue since she is sure that she will have a baby boy.

Futna's labour approaches when there is a festival to inaugurate a project for water recycling in the town. People are gathering to join the festival; however, this creates a mess which requires the Israeli soldiers standing at the check points surrounding the area to interfere and prevent people from going to the festival fearing that they may smuggle guns and other weapons which would threaten their security. During this mess, Futna is lying down on the ground and shouting, she is in the process of giving birth to her long waited baby boy. People are shouting at the Israeli soldiers to let the ambulance reach Futna; however, their request is rejected and Futna is left waiting and suffering until she gives birth to her baby boy then she leaves the world. At the end, her mother holds the baby towards the soldiers saying "Thank you very much, this is your share" (316). At this moment, *The Inheritance* shows that women are not only victims of the patriarchal traditions, since Futna loses her life to get a baby boy to win the inheritance, but they are also victims of the occupation within the Palestinian society which also plays a major role in impeding women from being alive. This is part of Sahar Khalifeh's feminist approach that Palestinian women are victims of the occupation and not only males who suffer from this oppression. Palestinian women get their share of victimization from both traditions and occupation. *The Inheritance* shows that the current situation within the Palestinian society is not comfortable and this is clear in the final scene in the novel where it ends at the airport with Zayna who has interacted and exposed the life details of the Palestinian females within her father's society. Zayna realizes that she could not live within this atmosphere. It does not suit her ambitions as a young modern woman. However, *The Inheritance* does not shut the door in front of the society to change, there is still a room to fix this system, Zayna's uncle while saying goodbye to her affirms her that "It's true that the male inherits the double compared with the female, yet, your share is still reserved for you"(317). Zayna nods her heads and walks towards the plane after a journey full of knowledge about traditions and females' stories within the Palestinian society.

### III. Results

*The Inheritance* tries to depict the life of the Palestinian females who are caught between patriarchal traditions and occupation. The majority of the events in the novel are devoted to discuss the way women are being treated as symbols that stand for men's reputation and honor. Thus, any breach of the morality codes that decide the way the female should behave, her blood will be the cost. This means according to the Palestinian male codes of behaviour

that ending the life of the woman proves that the male figure is a man and he is able to preserve his reputation by confiscating the life of the female figure and sucking her blood. By doing this, he preserves the qualities of his manhood. In addition, the novel focuses on the injustice practices that prevent women from having their share of the inheritance just because they are females; thus, they are not entitled to inherit or have their own property. Accordingly, the female figure resorts to artificial means which leads to expose her body/honor to the male figure; in particular, the colonizer to have a male hire to guarantee that she will be worthy of the inheritance.

#### IV. Conclusion

The female figure is a victim of traditions and occupation, in both cases, her honor is being threatened. Thus, *The Inheritance* succeeds in revealing the social context of the Palestinian female and the layers of this culture as important keys that Mohanty insists on taking them into account if to approach the Oriental woman and release her from being victimized and confined within a symbolic system of inherited traditions that treat her simply as a coherent worthless sex.

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