

## Time and Space in the Novels of Palestinian Writer Sahar Khalifa

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## Time and Space in the Novels of Palestinian Writer Sahar Khalifa

### Abstract

This article seeks to examine the connections between time and space in the novels of the prominent Palestinian writer, Saḥar Khalīfa. In her writing, Khalīfa emphasizes the status of women in society. She describes Palestinian society, and links each of her works to the collective Palestinian struggle and the parallel female struggle. She draws inspiration from her personal identity, and contributes to the development of a cultural discussion and creation of a collective identity. Khalīfa's works constitute a broad literary corpus, describing through time and space the events of Palestinian society in general and the status of Palestinian women in particular. These events constitute a chronological timeline that reflects processes of forming a Palestinian collective identity, and in a narrower circle it describes the changes that have taken place in Palestinian women's lives, and the processes that contributed to shaping their identity in light of political-national changes. Thus, the connection created in Khalīfa's novels between historical time and physical place is an inseparable part of the entire range of literary means that drive the plot and emphasize the role and status of Palestinian women in society.

### Keywords

Saḥar Khalīfa; Palestinian women; Modern Palestinian Literature; Time and Space

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### Sahar Khalifa and her Writing

Sahar Khalifa<sup>1</sup> is a notable Palestinian writer who reflects in her writing the connection between the historical and sociocultural processes taking place in Palestinian society. Like other Palestinian writers and poets, she focuses on historic events that played a role in shaping this society. In her literary writing she expresses the inner conflicts and presents her protagonists – women and men alike – as people living their day-to-day life against the backdrop of their struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Several stylistic techniques can be found in novels written by Palestinian women that advance the idea of women's liberation from the shackles of male society. Evident in Khalifa's literary works is the dialectical relationship between two central themes: nationalism and gender. Descriptions of women as social creatures entitled to self-fulfillment recur in her novels in several variations, whereby she attacks male behavioral patterns in patriarchal society.<sup>3</sup>

Some<sup>4</sup> compare Khalifa's contribution to the development of Arab women's literature to that of Lebanese writer Zaynab Fawwaz (1846-1914), who in 1899 was the first Arab woman to write a novel.<sup>5</sup> With the publication of her *Bāb al-sāḥa* (*The Courtyard's Gate*, 1990)<sup>6</sup> and *al-Mīrāth* (1997, translated into English as *The Inheritance*)<sup>7</sup> in the 1990s, Khalifa became a prominent writer in the Arab world, and the subject of studies presented at conferences on the Arabic novel.<sup>8</sup>

Khalifa's uniqueness is the fact that her works reflect events taking place in Palestinian society before they become history, and this accords her text a historical, not only literary, character.<sup>9</sup> Another characteristic is that through the connection she makes between

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<sup>1</sup> Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifa was born in Nablus in 1941. Today, Khalifa is a writer and feminist involved in advancing women's status in Palestinian society and protecting their rights. This involvement manifests both in her literary works and the Women and Family Affairs Center she has operated in Nablus and Amman since 1989. She completed her BA studies at Bir Zeit University, and went on to study for her MA in the US. She completed her studies at the University of Iowa in 1988, where she was awarded a PhD in gender studies and American literature. Khalifa has written 11 novels, the first of which, *Lam na'ud ghawāri lakum* (*We Are not Your Slave Girls Anymore*) was published by Dar al-'Adāb in 1974. The most recent, *Arḍ wa-samā'a* (*Heaven and Earth*), was published in 2013, and she has recently (2018) published her autobiography, *Riwāyatī li-riwāyatī* (*My Story to My Story*). Sahar Khalifa has won several writing awards, among them the Najīb Maḥfūz Medal in 2006 for her 2002 novel *Šūra wa-'ayqūna wa-'ahd qadīm*, translated into English as *The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant* (Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb), and the 2008 Prix de Lecteurs du Var for her 2004 novel *Rabi' ḥār* (translated into English as *The End of Spring*, 2007; Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See, Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 227.

<sup>3</sup> Nazih Abu Nidal, "The Novels of Sahar Khalifeh", *Palestinian-Israel Journal*, 10:2 (2003), 113.

<sup>4</sup> In the opinion of Arab women's literature researcher Bouthaina Sha'abān, just as Fawwāz was the first Arab woman to publish a novel in the late nineteenth century, Khalifa is the first who, in the late twentieth century, established a genre of women's political novels written in a liberated style and employing various writing techniques. In her view, Khalifa is one of the most important Arab women writers of this period. Evidence of this is the importance accorded to her work by Western critics. See: Bouthaina Sha'abān, *100 'am min al-riwāyya al-nisā'iyya al-'arabiyya* (*100 Years of Female Arab Novels*). Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1999, 215.

<sup>5</sup> *Husn al-'awāqib: Ghāda al-zahra* (*Good Consequences: Ghāda the Radiant*).

<sup>6</sup> Sahar Khalifa, *Bāb al-sāḥa*. Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Sahar Khalifa, *al-Mīrāth*. Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1997. In English: Sahar Khalifeh, *The Inheritance* trans. Aida Bamia. Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Bouthaina Shaaban, *Voices Revealed: Arab Women Novelists 1898-2000*. London: Lynne Rienner, 2009, 159.

<sup>9</sup> Abu Nidal, "The Novels of Sahar Khalifeh", *Palestinian-Israel Journal*, 113.

national and gender struggles, she shows women a way in which they can control and extend their struggle. At the center of Khalīfa's novels stand questions of the Palestinian people's most appropriate and correct way of resistance, and how feminine activism can bring about a situation wherein discourse can become an agent of change. Her novels also reflect how, by means of a literary text, one can play an active, non-violent role in the national struggle as part of feminine activism.<sup>10</sup>

### **Time and space in the novels of Saḥar Khalīfa**

Khalīfa's works constitute a broad literary corpus, which by means of changing spaces and time describes the unfolding of the major events experienced by Palestinian society in general and Palestinian women in particular. These events constitute a chronological timeline reflecting the formation of a Palestinian collective identity, and in a narrower circle they describe the changes that have taken place in the life of Palestinian women and the processes contributing to the formation of their identity in light of national-political changes. Accordingly, in Khalīfa's novels the connection created between historical time and physical place is an inseparable part of the gamut of literary means that play a part in shaping women's identity in them. The characters do not act in a void, but in a defined place and time, and they are constantly influenced by the connection between them and the new conditions created as a result.

Moroccan poet and modern Arabic literature researcher Ḥasan Najmī, who examines Khalīfa's writing in her first five novels, thinks they should be read linearly, as if they are a single major work comprising several novels, in each of which Khalīfa repeatedly emphasizes central themes, specific characters, issues, and scenes. All the novels exist in a common space, which is what links them. Thus, for instance, the novels *al-Ṣubār* (1976, translated into English as *Wild Thorn*, 2000)<sup>11</sup> and *'Abbād al-shams* (*The sunflower*, 1980)<sup>12</sup> are two parts of the same work. This is based on the fact that appearing beneath the title are the words *'Takmila al-ṣubār*' (continuation of *al-Ṣubār*), and on other commonalities between the two works, such as characters and events, and on the aesthetic and psychological role of the lyrical opening taken from the poem by Palestinian Poet Fadwā Ṭūqān (1917-2003).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, viewing Khalīfa's novels as a single text aids understanding the space in which she writes and shapes her characters, since this text does not stand alone but is an inseparable part of an ideology and culture that are part of this space.

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story*. Berkeley, London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995, 217.

<sup>11</sup> Saḥar Khalīfa, *al-Ṣubār*. Jerusalem: Galileo, 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Saḥar Khalīfa, *'Abbād al-shams*. Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> Ḥasan Najmī, *Shi'riyya al-ḥadīqa: al-mutakhayyil wa-al-hawīyya fī al-riwāyya al-'arabiyya* (*The Poetics of Space: The Imaginary and Identity in the Arabic Novel*). Casablanca and Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 2000, 102-103. Ḥanān Ashrāwī contends that despite the continuity expressed in identical characters and political aspects, the second novel is discrete since it places women at the center and discusses their life in Palestinian society. See Hanan Daud Mikhail-Ashrawi, *The Contemporary Literature of Palestine: Poetry and Fiction. A Dissertation for the Degree of "Doctor of Philosophy"*, Virginia: University of Virginia, 1982, 262. See also Mattityahu Peled, "Saḥar Khalīfa's *'Abbad al-shams*: A Feminist Challenge", in Ami Elad [-Bouskila] (ed.), *Writer, Culture, Text: Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*. Frederickton: York Press, 1993, 37. Noteworthy in this context are other writers such as the Sudanese writer al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ (1929-2009) and the Syrian writer Khalīl al-Na'imī (b. 1943) whose works constitute an organic space. See Ami Elad-Bouskila, "Shaping the Cast of Characters: The Case of al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ", *Journal of Arabic Literature*. XXIX:2 (July 1998), 63-64. This also exists in the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez (b.1928), Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), and William Faulkner (1897-1962). See *ibid.*, 64-68.

Women occupy a central place in the space about which Khalifa writes, and are presented in various time perspectives: Prior to the 1967 war in the West Bank, in the novel *Lam na'ud ghawārī lakum* (*We Are not Your Slave Girls Anymore*); after the military government was removed, in *al-Ṣubār* (*Wild Thorn*) and *'Abbād al-shams* (*The sunflower*); during the First Intifada (1987), in *Bāb al-sāḥa* (*The Courtyard's Gate*); the subsequent period, in *al-Mīrāth* (*The Inheritance*); the Second Intifada (2000), *Intifādāt al-'aqṣā*, in *Ṣūra wa-'ayqūna wa-'ahd qadīm* (*The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*) and *Rabi' ḥār* (*The End of Spring*), which focus on specific events, such as the fighting in Nablus and the siege of Yasir Arafāt's Ramallah compound in 2002. In this regard, Khalifa's works reflect a broad sphere of activity expressing a timeline of chronotopic areas. In her later novel, *'Aṣel wa-faṣl* (translated into English as *Of Noble Origins*, 2012), she even goes as far back as the period prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, when the Palestinian people's national and cultural identity began forming. This space, depicted by Khalifa, brings together different points in time in Palestinian history. Women's consciousness, their individual and collective identity, and their social struggle that takes place at a specific time, all become an overarching struggle that takes place at different points in time and characterizes Palestinian women from the pre-1948 period, mainly the post-1967 period, up to the 2000s.

It should be noted that the connection between the works also emerges in recurring motifs and names in them. Thus, for example, 'Anbar the cat belongs to the protagonist 'Afāf in the 1986 novel *Mudhakirāt 'imra'a ghayr wāqi'iyya* (*Memories of an Unrealistic Woman*). The cat can talk and reflects women being shackled to the patriarchal system of values.

'Afāf explains that the cat represents everything that has been stolen from her:

*It is in you that the childhood taken from me is realized, past and future. In you the common feminine qualities materialize [...] Your eyes, in them I see a spark I have long since lost. The look that shifts above every barrier of fear and prohibition [...] And this extrication from the fetters of the need to feel love and sensitivity [...] Where am I compared to you, where am I?<sup>14</sup>*

The above underscores the degree to which the life of 'Anbar the cat is carefree compared to the woman's life. The woman protagonist is in a situation wherein she is so tortured and constantly suffering that she envies an animal, the cat, because it lives in freedom and owes nothing to social mores. Through the cat, which while it is perceived as a pet is not submissive towards its owner like other pets, the author levels harsh social criticism and points an accusing finger at the social mores stemming from traditional customs. The criticism is dual, leveled both at society in general and women in particular.

In *Rabi' ḥār* (*The End of Spring*), 'Anbar is the cat of the Palestinian Aḥmed, which is stolen by Mira, a Jewish girl from the nearby settlement, and which for the author metaphorically symbolizes the struggle for land. The choice of the same name for the cat in two different novels – once reflecting the woman's situation and in the other reflecting that of the land – links the feminine and national spaces, and thus buttresses the author's agenda, whereby the woman's situation reflects that of the nation throughout the historical

<sup>14</sup> Sahar Khalifa, *Mudhakirāt 'imra'a ghayr wāqi'iyya*. Beirut: Dar al-'Adāb, 1986, 43. Translations from the novels in this article are the author's.

development of Palestinian society. The same cat appears in two different novels as a motif underscoring this Gordian knot, and strengthens it considerably.

Another example of the connection between the various works can be found in the recurring knife motif. The knife with which the brother kills his sister in the novel *Bāb al-sāḥa* (*The Courtyard's Gate*) is no different from the knife in which 'Afāf's mother slices an apple in the novel *Mudhakirāt 'imra' a ghayr wāqi'iyya* (*Memories of an Unrealistic Woman*), and thus symbolically cuts her daughter's body and heart. It is also the same knife with which the father in the novel *al-Mīrāth* (*The Inheritance*) wants to kill his 15-year-old daughter because she is pregnant.

The knife as a recurring motif expresses the connection between the various works and the power exerted by patriarchal society towards women who do not act according to the accepted social norms.

The dynamics between general Palestinian time and space and a specific place, be it a home, a neighborhood, or an entire city, is a crucial factor in driving the plot in Khalīfa's novels, in creating relationships between the characters, and in conveying the social message. Mainly evident in her first novel, *Lam na'ud ghawārī lakum* (*We Are not Your Slave Girls Anymore*), written after the October 1973 war, in 1974, is the internal sociocultural disposition of the younger, educated generation of Palestinians who grapple with and anguish over trenchant social issues. Numerous conversations in the novel are therefore held between the bookshelves in the Ramallah library. The library, which occupies a dominant place in this novel, was chosen to intensify the message that this is a time for intellectual change (which the library symbolizes) and that Palestinian society must construct its renewed values in the spirit of the times and through education.

According to Bakhtin, the "meeting chronotope" can be of considerable importance and it constantly present in organizations of social and governmental life and it is of great importance to the establishment of social order.<sup>15</sup>

Khalīfa, who chooses the library as a meeting place, thus highlights the importance, in her view, of education. The theme of education in general and the educated woman in particular is a central and important subject in her novels. In Khalīfa's view, the feminine struggle is the struggle of educated women who need to take part in sociocultural building. This can be seen in the characters of Rafīf in *Abbād al-shams* (*The sunflower*), Samar in *Bāb al-sāḥa* (*The Courtyard's Gate*), and Zaynab in *al-Mīrāth* (*The Inheritance*).

It should be noted that on the cover illustration of *Lam na'ud ghawārī lakum* (*We Are not Your Slave Girls Anymore*), an element that itself expresses space in the work, we can already see the Palestinian woman challenging the conditions of her life and the political situation.<sup>16</sup> The woman is drawn against a background of orange trees, she is wearing traditional dress, and is holding a broom and a pot, symbols of her role in her personal space,

<sup>15</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Carol Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 97-99. 'Chronotope' is a term Bakhtin borrowed from biology and Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and which connects the dimensions of time and place in a work. Bakhtin says that 'We should understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature.' See Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics", in Brian Richardson (ed.), *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames*. Ohio State University, 2002, 15 (15-24). According to Bakhtin, a literary work's artistic unity in relation to the actual reality is defined by its chronotope, which is grounded in specific historical circumstances.

<sup>16</sup> See Yūsuf Ḥaṭīnī, *Mukawanāt al-sard fi al-riwāyya al-filistīniyya* (*The Narrative Components in the Palestinian Novel*). Manshūrāt itihād al-Kutāb al-'Arab, 1999, 118-119.

but she has other hands that hold a rifle, a symbol of the struggle, and a book, a symbol of education, which are elements likely to bring about change in her status.

In the novel *al-Ṣubār (Wild Thorn)*, written two years later, the time element becomes even more central by highlighting the generation gap between fathers and sons, and place, too, is a central thematic and poetic element – the main bone of contention in the novel being whether to work in Israel or remain outside its borders. In this novel, the time-space relations influencing a woman are essentially different from those influencing a man, and this is because a woman is mainly active in the home space, whereas a man acts in the public-social space. For this reason, Palestinian writer and modern Palestinian literature researcher Husayn Munāṣra suggests examining the chronotope concept in the feminine context by means of two social systems that shape women: the traditional system that shackles them to the time and space in which they act, and thus the place of their activity is shaped by the male system; and the other system that causes women to rebel against and challenge traditional time and space and open a door for themselves to construct a new space and determine different time relations. Either way, the dynamics between women's activity and place and time are affected by the male world.<sup>17</sup>

The struggle of Nawwār in *al-Ṣubār (Wild Thorn)* fully illustrates women's shackles in light of the time-space relationship dictated to her by male society. Despite the protagonist's education and desire to construct new values, she does not rebel against the existing situation, and consequently, despite her struggle, she remains shackled to a man.

The novel *'Abbād al-shams (The sunflower)*, which in many respects is a continuation of *al-Ṣubār (Wild Thorn)*, places the Palestinian neighborhood at the center of the action. In general terms, the village neighborhood in Khalifa's novels constitutes the plot's locale, and thus the space of the women's activity and the arena of their struggle. Since the neighborhood is where women spend most of their time, they know it better than the men, and this is clearly evident in *Bāb al-sāḥa (The Courtyard's Gate)*, when Nuzha leads the men to the square and demonstrates her knowledge of the neighborhood's streets and alleys. It is the neighborhood and the rumor mill that develops in it that also lead Sa'adiyya in *'Abbād al-shams (The sunflower)* to fight with all her might to leave and build an isolated house, to mark out a different space for herself that is separated from the public-social space. Sa'adiyya fights to change the space of her activity, and thus change the social dynamics as well, which make her feel imprisoned and ostracized in her own home. The importance of space manifests in both novels: In *'Abbād al-shams (The sunflower)* the women are depicted in the *ḥamām*, the bath house. This is a women's space in which relationships between the women are expressed against the backdrop of the time in which they live. In this place we can see how class distinctions are maintained, but at the same time an ostracized woman like Khaḍra the whore can express herself freely there, since the women are free of the values of the male world. In *Bāb al-sāḥa (The Courtyard's Gate)* the women reflect part of the male world fighting in the Intifada. The novel's title, *Bāb al-sāḥa* (the name of the neighborhood in Nablus) attests to the space in which the plot unfolds. The neighborhood is in fact a microcosm of Palestinian society in general and Palestinian women in particular, mainly in light of the worldview that each of the female protagonists brings with her as she acts in her own limited space. In this novel, the home chronotope

<sup>17</sup> Husayn Munāṣra, *al-Mar'aa wa-'alāqātihā bi-al-'aāḥar fī al-riwāyya al-'arabiyya al-filṣṭīniyya (The Woman and her Relationship with the Other in the Palestinian Novel)*. Beirut and Amman: al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nasher, 2002, 467-468.

expresses the change taking place in the Palestinian woman's identity in light of the national struggle. Each of the female protagonists represents a specific social class that contributes to shaping the women's identity and the change taking place in it. This change is clearly evident in each of the female characters in Nuzha's house.

Nuzha is one of the three protagonists of this novel. Together with the educated Samar and Zakkiya the nurse they reflect different social strata. Nuzha is considered a promiscuous woman who lives in a house that is considered an immodest home. When she was 15, she married a 45-year-old man, and her life with him is filled with suffering. She also tells Samar that her older brother used to beat her because she loved to dance.

The three female characters meet at Nuzha's house because Husām, who was wounded in Nablus, is hiding there. The novel ends when several men want to go out into the square despite the curfew. Nuzha leads the group through the kitchen in her home to the backyard that leads into the square. Thus, the house is a space expressing Palestinian society in general and the space of the Palestinian woman in particular. According to Khalīfa, to succeed in the national struggle, the men need feminine knowledge of the town's alleys, and thus the feminine space becomes a central part of the general national space.

The central theme in *Mudhakhirāt `imra`a ghayr wāqi`iyya* (*Memories of an Unrealistic Woman*) is the protagonist's inner identity, but in this novel her identity is not part of a collective national one. The plot moves along different timelines throughout the Arab world, and the space shifts between reality and imagination. In this case, too, the title attests to the space in which the plot shifts. The reader enters the female protagonist's consciousness and moves with her in her memories and thoughts. The woman's memories and consciousness present to the reader the tension between space and time, women being shackled to the conditions of the space in which they live and act. Even though physically she is in different places – Amman, the Emirates, or the West Bank – the protagonist is psychologically bound to the system of patriarchal norms and values that prevent her from realizing her feminine identity. 'Afāf, the protagonist, succeeds in breaking through the boundaries of space and time by creating an alternative inner world based on consciousness and blurred boundaries between reality and imagination, and this detachment is the result of a lack of self-fulfillment and an unformed identity. Thus, she expresses the identity crisis of women in general in Arab society, whose identity is passed down to them by their family, neighbors, society, and husband:

*I am the daughter of the inspector, and I remained so until I married and became a merchant's wife, and sometimes I am both.*<sup>18</sup>

The woman's identity in patriarchal society is always dependent on a man: in the past it was her father ("the daughter of an inspector"), and later her husband ("a merchant's wife"). For Khalīfa, identity formation is part of the history of personal memory that also embraces social memory.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Khalīfa, *Mudhakhirāt `imra`a ghayr wāqi`iyya*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Zuhūr Karām, *al-Sard al-nisā`ī* (*The Female Narrative*). Casablanca: al-Madāris, 2004, 182. Also worthy of note in this context is the article by Nazik Saba Yared that discusses the works of Lebanese women writers, among them Ḥanān al-Shaykh (b.1945) and Laylā Ba'albekī (b. 1936). In it she examines the central conflicts presented in their novels, and identity formation processes described in their light. One conflict that emerges is the tension between the woman's desires and the dictates of the patriarchal society. See Nazik Saba Yared,



Also evident in Khalīfa's later novels, *Ṣūra wa-`ayqūna wa-`ahd qadīm* (*The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*) and *Rabi' hār* (*The End of Spring*), is the great importance of time and the scene of the action. Among other things, the unfulfilled love of Ibrahim and Maryam in *Ṣūra wa-`ayqūna wa-`ahd qadīm* (*The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*) is the result of social immaturity in accepting a relationship between a Muslim man and a Christian woman, and it is their son, Mishel, the future generation, who pays the highest price. In this novel, Khalīfa also accords Jerusalem great, even cardinal, importance, a tendency that began in *al-Mīrāth* (*The Inheritance*). In these two novels, Jerusalem is an integral part of the plot, of shaping the characters and the relationships between them, and this once again underscores the dynamics between time and place and crafting of the novel's plot. As a Palestinian national writer, Khalīfa chooses to highlight the sanctity of the city in light of *Intifādāt al-`aqṣā* that broke out two years before the novel was published, and the Palestinian woman's struggle – which had been a central theme in her novels until then – becomes an inseparable part of the struggle for Jerusalem's sanctity. The reader is introduced to Miriam's qualities through Ibrahim's consciousness, and especially through the connection he creates between their relationship and the City of Jerusalem. Thus, for example, he expresses his love for Miriam and his obsession with her by emphasizing the deep connection to Jerusalem, which is sometimes even deeper than the connection to a mother: "I forgot myself, I forgot my mother and I forgot Jerusalem."<sup>20</sup>

In *Rabi' hār* (*The End of Spring*), Khalīfa emphasizes the importance of Nablus, and creates a linkage between the city and the Palestinian woman, which was a prominent theme in *Bāb al-sāḥa* (*The Courtyard's Gate*). The time-place relationship is an inseparable part of the entire gamut of literary means employed in shaping the novel's feminine struggle. Su'ād, the protagonist, does not act in a void, but in a defined place and time, and is thus constantly influenced by the connection between them and the new conditions they create. The city that Su'ād views is described as an inseparable part of her identity<sup>21</sup> and in fact, Nablus is dubbed "Mother of history and identity."<sup>22</sup> The relationship between the strong, independent 'Um Su'ād and her imprisoned husband also expresses the importance of the city. After all the years of his absence, the husband compares his love for his wife with his love for Nablus. The importance of Nablus is emphasized by the connection between place and time, and by perceiving it as a new bride:

*This Nablus remains a bride that has not changed throughout history. In the past it was a pulsing heart and in the present – an even greater love.*<sup>23</sup>

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"Identity and Conflict in the Novels of Contemporary Lebanese Women Novelists", *Edebiyât*. 12 (2001), 215-228.

<sup>20</sup> Saḥar Khalīfa, *Ṣūra wa-`ayqūna wa-`ahd qadīm*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> In her autobiographical works, Palestinian poet Fadwā Ṭūqān, who is also a native of Nablus, describes the change that has taken place in the city as part of the change in her. See, Fadwā Ṭūqān, *Riḥla jabaliya, riḥla ṣa'aba*. Beirut: al-Maktabā al-Jāmi'iyā, 1985 (*An Autobiography: A Mountainous Journey, a Difficult Journey*, trans. Olive Kenny, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1990). Liyāna Bader (b. 1951) wrote an entire novel, *Nujūm `Ariḥā* (Jericho's Stars) about her connection with Jericho; the change that has taken place in Jericho is identical to the change in the Palestinian people and the inner change that has taken place within her as a woman. See, Liyāna Bader, *Nujūm `Arḥā*. Beirut: Dar al-`Adāb, 1993, 253-254.

<sup>22</sup> Khalīfa, *Rabi' Hār*, 303.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

### Summary

Space and time relations in Khalīfa's works reflect Palestinian society's developmental process in light of the national struggle, and mainly the developmental process undergone by Palestinian women from various strata of the population along a chronological timeline. The chronotopic sphere expresses women's shackles in the political situation of Palestinian society, and thus it heightens the tension between the woman's individual and collective identities and underscores the need for change. The specific places in which the action takes place vary, but their multiplicity only accentuates the fact that the oppression under which Palestinian women live is all-encompassing – in every place and at any time, even overseas. Place and time are unified into one general space in which the Palestinian woman lives and acts, and her personality and identity are formed in its light. Thus, she expresses the identity crisis of women in general in Arab society, whose identity is passed down to them by their family, neighbors, society, and husband. The use of varied literary techniques and styles attests to the writer's exposure to literary conventions prevailing in the West and the Arab world alike, and the use she makes of them in the Palestinian context accords the tension between the private-feminine and the collective space an additional tone. The literary means contribute to conveying the feminine and societal message, and to weaving a developed fabric of identities combining the feminine and collective identities of the female characters in the works.

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