

Patriarchal Oppression in Palestinian Society Through the Institution of Marriage in the Novel *Of Noble Origins* by Sahar Khalifeh

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ABSTRACT

The institution of marriage prescribes different norms for men and women. Patriarchal and heterosexual marriage expects husband and wife to follow their set gender roles which is an inseparable part of this institution. It works in a hierarchy. The Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh, who hails from the West Bank, condemns the hypocrisy of the institution of traditional marriage that oppresses women in Arab society. In her literary narratives, Khalifeh portrays the traditions and customs of Arab society which act as weapons of oppression against women. In her works, she demonstrates that it is the customs and traditional practices imposed on women that are oppressive rather than religion. The objective of the paper is to dissect the way in which the institution of marriage largely supports and upholds the patriarchal and neopatriarchal values even in an ostensibly revolutionary population such as the Palestinian society by focusing on one of the Arabic novels of Khalifeh - *Of Noble Origins* translated into English. This paper examines the patriarchal norms of male dominance in public spheres and also highlights how the Palestinian women resist these sexist ideologies prevailing in their society. Thus, the study of Khalifeh's narratives in this paper is two-pronged: first, to analyse how male domination works, and second, to scrutinize how the women in her novels find ways to respond to the multi-level patriarchal domination. The paper includes a theoretical framework comprising patriarchy, neopatriarchy and male gaze.

Keywords: patriarchy; neopatriarchy; gender discrimination; institution of marriage; Sahar Khalifeh

INTRODUCTION

Sahar Khalifeh is one of the most outspoken authors from the Occupied Territories of Palestine – the West Bank. She has written novels, short stories and essays in Arabic; six of her novels have been translated into nine languages. She stands next to the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish whose works of literary art have been frequently translated. She started her literary career by writing poetry. However, she prefers to write novels where she has effectively depicted the Palestinian life situations. In her novels, Khalifeh depicts Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the effect of Israeli Occupation on Palestinians. She throws light on the multifaceted oppression that women endure under Israeli Occupation. Apart from her engagement with the issue of Israeli Occupation, Sahar Khalifeh focuses on the issues of gender discrimination in various arenas of the society. This paper invariably looks at how Khalifeh challenges the androcentric order which happens to be the root cause of the patriarchal domination. Khalifeh believes that Palestinian women suffer due to the prevailing patriarchal system which supports these oppressive customs and traditions. Khalifeh's novels address the issues such as: discrimination against girl child at home, domestic

burden on women and young girls, lack of educational opportunities for girls, lack of freedom, gender segregation, domestic violence, lack of inheritance or property rights for women, male control over women's bodies and sexuality, and restrictions on women's physical mobility and dress. Khalifeh condemns the hypocrisy of the institution of traditional marriage that oppresses women in Arab society. Hence, the paper specifically focuses on the institution of marriage that largely supports and upholds the patriarchal and neo patriarchal values in the Palestinian society. Therefore, this paper is devoted to examine the patriarchal norms of male dominance in public spheres and also to highlight how the Palestinian women resist these sexist ideologies prevailing in their society. Thus, the study of her narratives in this paper is two-pronged: first, to analyse how male domination prevails, and second, to scrutinize how the women in her novels find ways to respond to the multi-level patriarchal domination.

KHALIFEH AS FEMINIST WRITER

As a feminist writer, Khalifeh portrays the traditions and customs of Arab society which act as weapons of oppression against women. She emphasizes that it is the customs and traditional practices imposed on them that are more oppressive rather than the religion. In an interview with Suha Sabbagh, Sahar Khalifeh discusses in detail the role of women in a patriarchal society and the means to achieve equal status. She narrates how her mother became passive and lost purpose in her life after the death of her husband. Her mother felt that she lost her intelligence, beauty and power after her husband's death. She says that it was not just her mother but all the women including her sisters and herself who became the victims of the traditional society. This indicates how the women identified themselves with their husbands and remained as the shadows of their male counterparts, inspite of shouldering the major responsibilities of the family. Khalifeh says that in her mother's tragedy she sees the tragedy of all women, regardless of traditions, laws and cultures. A woman is born and meant to suffer – a mentality that caused her to become a feminist, she explains.

Khalifeh speaks about her family: her father was a nice person and her parents had a happy married life. Her father, she says, succumbed to the pressure of society and remarried as her mother failed to give birth to a male child. The society mockingly called her “mother of daughters” and her mother suffered immensely due to this second marriage. The suffering of her mother naturally had a deep impact on her daughters. Though her sisters accepted the patriarchal norms, Khalifeh compellingly felt a sense of strong resentment (Sabbagh, 1998, pp. 137-138).

Immediately after her graduation from a provincial high school in Amman, Khalifeh was forcefully married to a bank manager. After her marriage, she lived in Libya. She gave birth to two daughters and her married life was a disaster. She decided to end her thirteen years of marriage and took divorce from her husband in 1972. She writes “I could just shrug off by ending my horrendous marriage and alienation in Libya. I was a woman: young, alone, divorced, left without a guardian or virtue, meaning that in society's eyes” (Khalifeh, 2020). She then determined to continue her education at the age of thirty-three. She has written political novels focusing on two major issues: the Palestinian struggle and the feminist struggle. As she explains, liberation should include all aspects of social as well as political oppression.

“Women's struggle for liberation isn't much different from that of the nation. One is as political as the other. The difference is that national politics are glorified, crowned with a halo. But when it comes to the feminist and sexual struggle, there are challenges, grumbling, and arbitrary accusations that sometimes reach the heights of heresy or even treason”

(Khalifeh, 2020)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although much research work has been done on Sahar Khalifeh's outstanding works like *Wild Thorns* (Metres 2010: Cotter, 2012; Mohamadi and Sadeghi, 2014; Tawfieg, 2019; Mahmoud, 2019), and *The Inheritance* (White, 2013; Angierski, 2014; Alhawamdeh, 2015) which deal with the effects of war, Israeli occupation, exile and everyday tussles of resistance, her later novels are not much discussed.

In *Wild Thorns* Khalifeh mainly focuses on the impact of Israeli occupation on Palestinians but less attention is given to patriarchal oppression of Palestinian women. In this novel Khalifeh portrays the anxieties of the characters on the breaking of marriage as an institution which are the repercussions of economic challenges caused by Israeli occupation and which in turn led the Palestinians trying to find the need of resistance to Israeli occupation. In the novel *Wild Thorns*, the protagonist Usama and his cousin Adil show no interest towards marriage. Usama's mother forces him to marry his cousin Nuwar who is beautiful and young. But he shows no interest, as there were many financial problems in day to day life. He is shocked to see the difficulties faced by the people of West Bank due to the Israeli Occupation. Adil, who is frustrated by the economic burden, does not show any interest in marriage too. The novels she wrote after *Wild Thorns* such as *The Inheritance* (2005), *The Image*, *The Icon*, and *The Covenant* (2008a), *The End of Spring* (2008b), *Of Noble Origins* (2012), *The Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman* (2014), *Passage to the Plaza* (2020), *My First and Only Love* (2021) are the novels which were written in different times in a span of more than three decades where she effectively articulates how marriage, a well-established institution suppresses and oppresses women in a family.

Sharon Sasson (2019), in her research article, "Time and Space in the Novels of Palestinian Writer Sahar Khalifa", examines the inseparable relationship between time and space that is present in Khalifeh's novels. This paper also highlights various literary techniques and styles employed by Sahar Khalifeh in a rich oeuvre.

Khalifeh's novel *The Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman* depicts the life of a female protagonist Afaf who is the sole narrator of the novel. She faces many challenges in her life because of marriage. Hijazi in his article 'The Concept of Focalization in Sahar Khalifeh's: Khalifeh's Imra'ah Gher Waqai'a: A Narrative Discourse Analysis' argues through the lens of the feminist narrative discourse by using focalization technique to understand the position of Afaf who is the victim of Patriarchal society (Hijazi, 2020). In another article on 'The Concept of Gender Inequality in Sahar Khalifeh's Imra'ah Gher Waqai'a: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis' Hijazi argues from the linguistic perspective to understand the concept of Gender Inequality. His analysis is based on feminist critical discourse with the help of lexical and syntactic choices of the discourse. The researcher has employed feminist critical discourse techniques for the interpretation of the novel (Hijazi, 2019).

The novel *Passage to the Plaza* is set during the early days of the First Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993). The protagonist of the novel Nuzha is the daughter of a sex worker Sakina. Nuzha wishes to escape from her mother's shadow who was a prostitute. She manages to help the injured person Hussam, a freedom fighter by hiding him in her home. Samar is another prominent female character, in the novel who is a university graduate as well as a young researcher. Samar is interested to conduct a research on women in order to study the impact first Intifada on Palestinian women. The novels also throw light on the theme of domestic violence witnessed by Palestinian woman in their day-to-day life.

Khalifeh's another novel *My First and Only Love* is the continuation of an earlier novel *Of Noble Origins*. The novel *My First and Only Love* revolves around the life of the Protagonist Nida, who returns to her family home in Nablus after prolonged exile. This novel also narrates the stories of resistance, colonial violence and the contemporary Palestinian political situation. The literature review conducted on the novels of Sahar Khalifeh indicates that the research has to be done on her latest novel with a new perspective.

The present article includes the novel *Of Noble Origins* that has not been much discussed in the previous studies. The concern of the present paper is to highlight the issues related to marriage in patriarchal as well as in neopatriarchal scenario of Palestinian society. The novel *Of Noble Origins* is a historical novel that epitomizes British colonial rule, transfer of power from the British to Jews and the Palestinian revolt of 1936-1939. While these are matters of academic concern in every right, the present study mainly focuses on the social problems related to exploitation of Palestinian women in a family. It analyses women's oppression and gender exploitation prevalent in Palestinian male-dominated society. It also addresses the issues that have not been looked into in previous studies of Khalifeh's works. This paper also focuses on the way patriarchal and neopatriarchal values are supported consciously and unconsciously by both men and women in Palestinian society. Therefore, it is better to understand the ideas of patriarchy and neopatriarchy in a nutshell.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper uses patriarchal and neopatriarchal ideological framework in order to understand the institution of marriage presented in the literary narratives of Khalifeh. This paper also focuses on the way patriarchal and neopatriarchal values are supported consciously and unconsciously by both men and women in Palestinian society.

PATRIARCHY AS AN IDEOLOGY

The term 'patriarchy' literally means the rule of the father who is the head of the household and the 'patriarch' is one who controls the entire family by exercising his power. He controls his wife, children, and other family members. In general, the term patriarchy points "to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Bhasin, 2006, p.3). The radical second-wave feminists argued that patriarchy is the main reason for women's oppression. Walby defines "patriarchy as a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1990, p. 20). Furthermore, it upholds the ideology based on the biological determinism – "the notion that every individual man is always in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one" (p. 20). Walby divides patriarchy into two major domains such as public and private. Private patriarchy prevails at household level, which results in women's oppression within the four walls of the house. On the other hand, public patriarchy operates at the work place. (p. 20).

Patriarchal norms control the institutions of marriage, family and social communities. The norms of marriage are oppressive to female counterparts as well as to those who do not participate in the institution of marriage. The pressure on women to get married is more when compared to that on men. Women are not treated well if they remain unmarried. The Arab traditions and customs have given enormous power to a husband who acts as the controller of a woman's destiny.

Premarital, extramarital relations are severely forbidden for girls in Arab societies with punitive measures.

NEOPATRIARCHY

Hisham Sharabi exhaustively examines the factors that led to the rise of a new form of social order in Arab societies in his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. It is a modernized form of patriarchy. Etymologically neopatriarchy is a word to connote a new or contemporary patriarchy where dominance of men prevails in social and cultural systems or within the nuclear family. Sharabi precisely identifies the economic, political, social and cultural changes that led the Arab society not to modernity but to neopatriarchy. It could be considered as a distorted form of modernity resulting from primordial loyalties, internal economic and political structures on one hand and external (western) dependency on the other. He says that this concept refers equally to macro structures like society, the state and the economy, as well as to micro structures like family or the individual personality (Sharabi, 1988, p. 207).

Deniz Kandiyoti, a Turkish author and researcher, analyses the complexities present in patriarchy which led to bargaining in the system of patriarchy, in her article “Bargaining with Patriarchy”. In classic patriarchy women are subservient and are subjected to male-dominance. It gives authority to men in the household. When the bride enters her husband’s household totally dispossessed, she is subservient to her mother-in-law besides her husband and father-in-law and she can establish her place only by producing a male offspring. This pattern is found in North Africa, Muslim Middle East, India and China (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274). Yet the aims of patriarchy and neopatriarchy are similar and the main intention is to repress and subjugate women in the family.

MALE GAZE

Patriarchal ideologies differentiate and classify woman’s body in terms of age, size, colour and their appearance. The concept of beauty is judged on similar basis, whose degrees may change depending on the cultural norms of the society. The female body is always moulded in such a way that it satisfies the desires of men. Again, young age is considered as the criteria to decide the beauty factor. The body politics plays a dominant role in male-dominated societies. In such circumstances, the subject matter of male gaze happens to be difficult for a woman for whom the active resistance of male gaze is not an easy task. Women passively suffer under the male gaze and participate involuntarily in the objectification of their own body. Patriarchy privileges men to enforce power and authority, as well as to have possession of the female body.

FINDINGS

MARRIAGE AS A PATRIARCHAL INSTITUTION

In the novel *Of Noble Origins*, the two siblings Zakiyeh and Rasheed represent the older generation of Palestinian society. Rasheed is a male chauvinist and widower with a son and daughter. He is a rich merchant who does export business with Jews and other foreign partners. On the other hand, Zakiyeh is a gutsy conservative protagonist who acts as a neopatriarch. After the death of her husband Zakiyeh has taken the responsibility of upbringing three children. These two central

characters of the novel uphold the patriarchal and neopatriarchal values through the institution of marriage. Rasheed believes and practices patriarchy and his sister Zakiyeh consciously supports these values and act as neopatriarch.

Rasheed's son Rashad is a spoiled youth. He often visits the nightclubs and enjoys sex with dancers and Jewish girls spending his father's money without any botheration. Initially, Rasheed supports and encourages his son to enjoy sexual life with women. He takes the comments made by others lightly "your son is running wild," (Khalifeh, 2012, p.17). He defends him "[l]et him get his fill" (p. 17). This is the way he encourages his son to enjoy sexual life with whoever he likes. Rashad was engaged to a girl from respected family. The girl's father noticed Rashad throwing money at the feet of the dancers and lighting a cigarette for a prostitute with a ten pound note. This incident made the girl's father to break the marriage contract. After this Rasheed starts worrying about his son who fails to receive any marriage proposals from respected families and also about his daughter Rasha who has a speech defect. During this crucial time he remembers his sister Zakiyeh and sends mutual marriage proposal for her children.

In Arab societies the decision-making in marriage for a girl/boy is still largely an affair of a family as a whole and predominately that of a father. In the absence of the father, uncle or the elder son takes the authority. The marriage is planned not on the personal interests of girls or boys to be married, but on the basis of family contract. Rasheed tries to get his son married to a decent girl and wishes to reform him. Zakiyeh convinces her daughter Wedad to marry her uncle's son Rashad. At the same time influences her elder son Waheed to marry his cousin Rasha who has a speech defect. Zakiyeh discusses with her son Waheed before giving approval to her brother. On the other hand, Zakiyeh never considers that her daughter's consent for the marriage is equally essential. She exaggerates the amount of wealth possessed and the economic prosperity attained by her brother to Wedad. She tells Wedad ". . . [y]ou will soon live like a queen and drown in wealth" (Khalifeh, 2012, p. 22).

Rasheed arranges a picnic for the family before the marriage. He invites his friend Isaac Shalom and his daughters for this picnic. Wedad observes the behaviour of Rashad and learns that he is a womanizer. He commits excesses while interacting with Sarah, one of the daughters of Shalom, touching her body. After returning from the trip, Wedad expresses her wish to break the marriage contract. Her mother threatens her telling, ". . . no girl in the family broke her katb al-kitab" (p. 54). She also says if Wedad breaks her engagement, it would be considered as divorce. Wedad's efforts fail to break the engagement because her brother and mother have given approval to finalize the dates of marriage. Wedad becomes passive, stops taking food, and does not show any interest in doing domestic work. She does not show any interest in material things such as precious jewelry or engagement gifts. She is completely lost worrying about her marriage which is forced upon her tyrannically. Her mother neglects her; she becomes physically weak and dejected.

BEAUTY AS THE MAIN CRITERIA FOR MARRIAGE

In the novel Wedad's body and body parts are objectified and criticized by many. Her mother Zakiyeh views that her daughter lacks the beauty and attractiveness that society expects from a female body. Her mother frequently criticizes her big feet, telling her that her feet resembles that of her father. Listening to those comments frequently, Wedad hides her shoes in a cupboard without using it, keeping them there until they become too small for her feet. She believes that "big feet" is not a sign of beauty and it is a symbol of vulgarity and malformation. After reaching

puberty, her mother worries about her marriage that demands physical beauty of the girl, a major criterion for marriage. Zakiyeh is disappointed when the village hammam says that Wedad's marriage is difficult considering the appearance of her body. He says that the girl looks pale and she has flat chest and hips. Zakiyeh feels happy when her brother sends marriage proposal for Wedad. Before finalizing the marriage, the Sheikh has to confirm the age of bride considering the physical development. The maturity of body is considered as an important criterion for marriage by sidelining the growth of mind according to their age. Wedad wears high heels in order to look tall and her brassiere is stuffed to make her bosom sizeable.

On the other hand Wedad's cousin Rasha who is older than Wedad, stands straight and confidently allows the Sheikh to gaze her body. She does not need padding as her breast size is big. Both Wedad and Rasha cover their faces with veil and they allow gazing their body parts to confirm the age of legal marriage. Both Rasha and Wedad are reduced to mere bodies in this dastardly ritual of male gaze. Wedad's brother Waheed raises the veil of Rasha to examine her beauty. He looks at her face and regards her fair complexion "as cream" and her dark attractive eyes make him speechless. Later he gazes at her breasts that look "like marble", her face looks "like a full moon", and describes her "buttocks that could drive a flourmill" (Khalifeh, 2012, p.24). Her body parts stimulate Waheed's sexual drive and he becomes eager to touch her body. Rasha has speech defect, but looking at her external beauty, he compromises with this defect and agrees to marry her. When Rashad unveils Wedad to see her face he becomes dejected. Although her breasts are stuffed they look saggy. Her face was expressionless, dull and pale, even though it was decked with makeup. He becomes disappointed at her physical appearance; she neither attracts him nor meets his standard of beauty for a young bride. "Used as he was to gypsies and beautiful and flirtatious Jewish women, his bride did not confirm to his taste. He decides then and there to abandon her and take a second wife as soon as possible" (p. 25). On the other hand, Rashad is neither handsome nor attractive. He has big nose; despite his ugliness, girls pounce on him for his money. This indicates that the physical beauty of the bride is the primary criteria for marriage. In Patriarchal arranged marriages they view and judge only the physical beauty of the bride not the bridegroom. Though Rashad is not handsome, he expects that his bride should be extremely beautiful to fulfill his desires. The objectified woman is treated merely as a body without any identity as such. The objectification of a woman's body is common in Arab societies that are largely patriarchal and compulsorily heterosexual.

NEOPATRIARCHY IMPOSED BY THE MOTHER

Patriarchy being a norm in every traditional society, there are some interesting discourses as how new patterns of customs are being imposed on the younger women, by their mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws and even by their mothers. It is like continuance of patriarchal norms practiced by men. The patriarchal norms are preserved by the women to wield their power and maintain superiority. It may be referred to as neopatriarchy, which is exercised through domestic violence and it never allows the women to be independent. Neopatriarchy is operated through women to suppress the younger women by imposing on them the traditional norms. Thus these traditional values are being practiced to curb the women becoming independent. But men enjoy supreme authority while women act as neopatriarchs in the household. "It can be fairly said that neopatriarchal society was the outcome of modern Europe's colonization of the patriarchal Arab world, of the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy" (Sharabi, 1988 p.21). Yet the aims of patriarchy and neopatriarchy

are similar and the main intention is to repress and subjugate women in the family. Patriarchy has been internalized through socialization among women at early stages of their lives.

In the novel *Of Noble Origins*, Zakiyeh, after the death of her husband, being an elderly woman in the family, facilitates this process and in the absence of a male patriarch, acts like one. The entire process results in the marginalization of Wedad at the hands of her mother, Zakiyeh. The latter controls all the activities of her daughter in order to preserve or to sustain the patriarchal values in the family. She controls her physical appearance and mind and restricts her free mobility. She never allows her to take an independent decision. She discourages her own daughter from accessing education by imposing restrictions on her. She moulds her daughter in such a way that she should accept the traditional role of a woman blindly. She suppresses her physical and mental growth at an early stage of her life. Wedad overtly depends on her mother emotionally, physically, psychologically and suffers from extreme domination. She internalizes the patriarchal values consciously within the family system and takes control of the situation.

Zakiyeh is shown as a conservative mother who consciously discriminates among male and female children. Zakiyeh's character is a good example for how a woman works for the inculcation of patriarchy in the family. She tries to sustain and preserve the patriarchal values in her socializing activities also. She trains her daughter Wedad to be submissive, fragile and to be a good home maker. However, she prefers her son to her daughter and thus Wedad is neglected from her childhood. She prioritizes her sons because she believes that her sons would support her during her old age. She feels privileged becoming the mother of male children. She listens to her elder son Waheed and allows him to take an independent decision. Whereas, Wedad is prevented from becoming an independent woman and is forced to accept the norms of the patriarchal system.

Wedad's mother advises her to be wise enough to entice her husband towards her and play her role as a wife. The main purpose of marriage in Patriarchal society is access to sex and procreation. Men can enjoy sex outside the marriage, but for a wife, sex is permitted only after the marriage. Wedad as a very young girl is not aware of sexual role of a woman. She hardly understands her mother's words about sex inside the marriage without referring to the word sex. It is the duty of the wife to satisfy her husband sexually. "She said that a woman had to be strong to put up with a man's moods and his requests, and cleverly learn how to muzzle him and keep him" (p. 27). Wedad's reaction to her mother's words also indicates that she lacks sexual awareness. "She did not ask her mother what she meant by this or that, but she understood that a woman had to show her skills with housework and in the kitchen" (p. 27). She only knew that as a wife she has to cook in the kitchen and do chores in the house.

MARRIAGE AS A CAGE

Wedad marries at the age of fifteen and greatly suffers in a loveless marriage. Wedad lives alone (at) in the house completely isolated from the outside world without any love and care from her husband. She wants to run away from her marital life. She considers her married life is ". . . like a prison and her husband a jailer" (p. 58). She always looks for the alternatives in order to escape from the prison. Every morning she observes the activities going on in the harbor. She gazes at the sea shore, observes the boats, perceives the voices of the fishermen, and desires to go to the sea in order to escape from her sorrowful marital life. She dreams of mingling with fishermen catching fish and selling them, so with that money she can . . . buy a ticket to go to Beirut, to Cyprus, or even to hell, to escape the prison she lived in" (pp. 57-58). Even though her husband is away from home most of the times, spending most of his nights in dance clubs and bars, she feels, ". . . as if

he were the hunter and she a bird in a cage, both during his presence and in his absence” (p. 58). She feels like a destitute and homeless in her husband’s house. She becomes suicidal:

“[w]hat if she stood on the balcony and threw herself from the height? What if she went to the shore and threw herself to the bottom of the sea? Who would remember her if she died? Most certainly, not her husband. What about her mother, brother, her family and relatives? None of them would remember her, and if they did it would be for a few days, during the mourning period, then they would forget her and she would become a memory”

(p. 58)

Rasheed knew that his son is spending time in nightclubs drinking, dancing and flirting with Jewish girls. He also knew that his daughter-in-law is spending her nights alone at home. His sister Zakiyeh expresses anxiety over her daughter’s pathetic situation after marriage to him. He knew that the fault lies with his son. He knows that it is impossible to change the behavior of his son. So he used to compensate for his son’s follies by providing material comforts to his daughter-in-law. “. . . he would come by in the evening with all kinds of sweets, nuts, and candies; and a high-priced gold watch or a diamond necklace. He would never forget to say how much the gifts cost him” (p. 59). These lines indicate that Rasheed is consoling his daughter-in-law who is suffering psychologically, and enduring pain due to the ill-treatment of his son, by giving gifts and in turn providing material comfort. Her mother supports Rasheed as well as exaggerated her reaction to these acts, so that Wedad should understand the value of his efforts. Zakiyeh says, “God be praised. How lovely, how lovely, thank you. May this hand be safe, may you always be our master? You’re giving all this to Wedad?”(p. 60). He replies “[o]f course for Wedad. Is there anyone dearer to me than Wedad? How many Wedads are there in this world? Take this my niece, wear it, and let’s celebrate” (p. 60). This doesn’t bring any changes in her life. She wants love, care and affection from her husband. Both Zakiyeh and Rasheed fail to understand Wedad and her needs. They think that she may find happiness in expensive watch or a diamond necklace. But Wedad suffers emotionally and psychologically. She longs to escape from that cage.

DOUBLE STANDARDS IN ARAB SOCIETY

Khalifeh writes about the hypocrisy and double standards of Arab men in her novel *Of Noble Origins*. Rashad is the son of a rich merchant who does export business with Jews and other foreigners. He is a drunkard and spends his evening in Sultaneh’s night club. The club is run by a Moroccan Jew. He lives like a play boy and spends his nights with club dancers. He spends his father’s money lavishly for women and alcohol. He is always surrounded by Jewish girls; he lures them from his money and jokes. He likes young Jewish girls whom he thinks are extremely beautiful and bold in their attitudes. They wear such dresses so that their body parts are visible. Rashad finds pleasure in such erotic indulgence. He says “[t]o be honest, the girls were like Turkish delight, like cream and butter. A shining light emanated from their thighs and their breasts, causing the distinguished guests to shout, “God is great!”” (Khalifeh, 2012, p. 92). According to MacKinnon “. . . [m]en have been conditioned to find women’s subordination sexy, and women have been conditioned to find a particular male version of female sexuality as erotic — one in which they are defined from a male point of view” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 140).

Rashad believes in the stereotypes that Jewish girls are characterless, lack sexual morality and decency. He views them as objects to fulfil his erotic desires. Rashad maintains temporary relationships with Jewish women. He sees them as sexist objects and not fit for marriage and

motherhood. Like him, majority of the Arab men yearn for Jewish women. They keep their affair undisclosed, accommodating them in an apartment. They shower their love for these women and enjoy sex with them. Jewish women take advantage of the weaknesses of the Arab men who are ready to spend money on them for temporary relationship. They are not ready to marry the Arabs because of the purported superiority of the race which they belong to. When it comes to marriage, Arab men decide to marry their paternal or maternal cousins, and not their Jewish counterparts. Khalifeh writes “[a]n Arab was also a flirt. He used the woman and then got rid of her, or took a second wife and kept her only to look after the children, nothing else” (Khalifeh, 2012, p. 96).

RESISTANCE TO PATRIARCHY AND NEOPATRIARCHY

Wedad knows her father-in-law and mother are not able to help her to escape from unhappy marriage. So she decides to run away from the house and meets Lisa in Jerusalem with the hope of getting solution for her unhappy married life. Lisa is a professor and an activist who lives in Jerusalem. Wedad meets her in a picnic organized by his uncle before the marriage. Lisa is also familiar with the behavior of Rashad. She encourages Wedad to participate in the women’s demonstration with the perspective of changing her mind-set. She observes that other women participating in the demonstration are totally different from her. She becomes aware of the Palestinian issues and notices that many women are taking part in the protest against the British mandate and the Balfour declaration. She forgets all her personal worries and awful memories of her marriage and her pregnancy. She notices that people are talking about the sacrifices of young men who had died for the sake of the country in the national struggle. She believes that dying for the national cause is a noble death rather than dying for marriage. She says “[h]ow sweet it was to suffer for the homeland, how beautiful was martyrdom, while to die for a bogus marriage and a despicable husband was meaningless and draining. It transformed a woman into a mummy addicted to grief” (p. 64). She gets emancipated after meeting Lisa and the fellow women activists who participated in the demonstration against British mandate. She finds an alternative more meaningful, even worth sacrificing her life. Wedad rebels against the bad treatment at the hands of her husband and decides to abandon her marital relationship.

Wedad returns to her maternal home permanently because she comes to know about her husband Rashad’s several affairs which continued even after his marriage with her. Rashad also had relationship with Isaac Shalom’s youngest daughter – Sarah. Wedad becomes mother at a very young age without having any choice to escape from it. Later in the novel, she comes to know the fact that her husband has divorced her and taken a second wife. From then onwards, Wedad develops negative feelings about her motherhood. She acknowledges that her motherhood has become a burden for her because of her economic dependency and lack of education. Wedad faces failure in personal life and she feels disgusted in life. She attempts suicide before delivering a baby. She swallows a whole box of aspirin. Fortunately it does not cause any harm to Wedad. The doctor saves her life and advises the young girl that she should not attempt to die. After the delivery of the baby Wedad gets the wonderful opportunity to join the nursing course at the hospital. The doctor encourages her to join the course where Wedad gains knowledge in English, Arabic, chemistry, and Biology apart from nursing. She learns other skills required for the nursing profession such as dressing the wounds and administering injections. This brings a new ray of hope in the life of Wedad and she involves herself totally in the learning process. Wedad’s resistance entails her making different choices focusing on her education and career. Her resistance is not only against marriage but also on the patriarchal and neopatriarchal values imposed on her

by her husband, uncle and mother. She knows that these values did bring many changes in her life. So her resistance becomes positive. Wedad completely discards these values of patriarchy and neopatriarchy, which crushed her individuality.

On the other hand, Rashad also becomes the victim of patriarchy and male domination but he fails to resist in a positive way. He becomes more violent, depressed and disappointed not daring enough to revolt against his father. He is dependent on his father financially. Instead of looking for a realistic solution for his disastrous married life, Rashad develops a relationship with Isaac Shalom's daughter Sarah after their first meeting in a picnic. He overcomes his frustration by cracking jokes on his father as well as Sarah's father. "His forced marriage was the drop that had made the glass overflow, and he felt exploited and enslaved, despite his father's extreme generosity. He felt that he had been deprived of his manhood and his intelligence" (p. 90). His immature revolt was reflected in childish actions that suited the mood of a girl with a propensity for fun, naughtiness, and love of life and so she got along with her. He could transform any sad situation into a charming promenade, interrupted by jokes, playacting, and tricks. This explained his popularity among fun lovers and Jewish girls, who crowned him the king of the group. He owed the title to his charm, his happy mood, and generosity with money.

In a single evening he would spend lots of money that would support a whole family for a few months. The girls competed to win his favors, despite his ugliness and his big nose. So Sarah got used to his company and his gatherings, and entered the competition with a large group of girls to attract him, though he was married. That was how everybody knew that Rashad Qahtan was deeply involved with the Jewish girl, Shalom's daughter. Though he is unable to resist his father's domination and compelled to obey his father's decision on his first marriage, yet he enjoyed the liberty and freedom to marry again. So in this way he also supports patriarchy because it is ultimately a benefit for him.

CONCLUSION

Sahar Khalifeh challenges the patriarchal oppression of women that is rooted in family, community and society. Khalifeh consciously explores the issue of patriarchal domination to disclose the power or authority enjoyed by men as the heads of the households who oppress women in all walks of life. Khalifeh questions the well-established institutions like marriage and family. She challenges the norms and structures of the society that oppress women through these institutions. Her narratives also critique the way patriarchal values have been supported by women in household. This shows how patriarchy is deep-rooted in the society. Men also encourage such behavior of women in preserving patriarchy because that ultimately benefits them. This also divides women and it hampers the ideology of the empowerment of women. Her approach to gender discrimination is serious with the goal of bringing gender awareness among her community. She feels that it is the most important task to transform the society. Khalifeh questions the imposition of the stringent gender roles on both men and women and treatment of women as second class citizens. Her aim is to depict not only issues connected to Israeli occupation but also to show how gender inequality is in vogue in Palestinian society. Her female characters question the domination of men and express human yearning for freedom from both colonial rule and patriarchal practices.

The main objective of this research article is to focus on how Khalifeh intends to criticize the masculine Palestinian society that ignored the women's roles and sacrifices in the novel *Of Noble Origins*. Furthermore, the novel *Of Noble Origins* is a semi-historical novel which contains the Palestinian history of the past century. This is a multi-layered novel which includes past and present at the same time. This novel depicts Palestinian history of the past century and its encounter with British colonialism, on one hand, and the Jewish settlement project in Palestine on the other. Apart from a feministic perspective, this novel also can be analyzed with the theoretical framework on trauma studies by adopting archival as a research method. The scope of the paper is limited dealing with societal conventions on the occupied land. Moreover, the novel also deals with a society in transition from a traditional agriculture economy to a more modern economy. The economic exploitation is one of the prime goals of the colonizer, who wants to settle permanently on the occupied land without having any intention to return to homeland. Settlers also try to achieve economic prosperity by disturbing the traditional economy. This theme can be analyzed by deploying theories on settler colonialism in future studies. Future studies can be pursued on the recent novels of Khalifeh such as *Passage to the Plaza*, *My first and Only Love*, *Of Noble origins*, and *Memories of an Unrealistic*. These novels can be interpreted with the concept of occupation, home, exile, identity, self-resistance and self-determination to live and survive on the occupied land encountering war and violence till today. The urgency of the liberation of women should go hand in hand with the urgency of the liberation of Palestinians from occupation.

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