

Palestinian and Irish Women in War Literature: A Case of Sorority?

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Abstract: *This paper is situated where a number of discourses, feminism, nationalism, and commitment merge, converge and diverge. It tries to set a comparative-contrastive framework between Palestinian and Irish women in war literature, based on some socio-political similarities and differences. It examines the nature of war literature as a unique genre inspired by nationalism. It also explains the restrictive nature of war literature guided by principles of social realism and commitment. It presents a definition of feminism in relation to nationalism and war in Palestine and Ireland. It discusses the imagery of Palestinian and Irish women in war literature, with focus on the image of motherhood and the role of the mother. The conclusion validates the particularity of war literature, and the depiction of Palestinian and Irish women in the field, confirming the peculiarity of the subject which evokes interest in trying to present a theoretical framework to ground its features.*

1. War Literature: the Genre and the National Ideology

In critical terminology, war literature does not exist as a distinctive genre titled as such; most critics group it under national, nationalistic or resistance literature (Harlow 1987). This classification is not accurate as it fails to account for the neutral and negative overtones voiced in war literature with its three thematic subdivisions: war literature, warring literature and literature under war and its two attitudinal subgenres: pro or anti-war literature. National, nationalistic or resistance literatures are more favorable and positive in tackling their subject matters, including the concept of the nation, the image of the warriors, and the righteousness of the cause. War literature, on the other hand, is categorized as any literary production that depicts the context of war. War literature is set apart from other literary categories, as its very presence is governed by a state of war, actual or fictional, temporary or permanent, past or present, primitive or modern, which affects the configuration of the war story and its themes. The canon of war literature records the adapting of the war story to a set of non-literary parameters incorporating views on nationalism, socialism and commitment, all

of which boggled the minds of the writers and affected the pattern and content of their stories, either by adhering to or rejecting them. These parameters transformed war literature from being the single-handed production and individual vision of an author into a public statement and picture of collective identity at a certain point of time.

As stated, this paper attempts to branch this genre of war literature into three main subcategories. The first is war literature referring to the neutral or biased, impassioned or disheartened, realistic or fictional representation of war. The second category is warring literature, an employment of ideology in literature with no hesitancy in encouraging warriors and mobilizing for war. A third type is literature under war, in which the subject of war is viewed as a distortion of the process of literary creativity, forcing rigid reality and commitment on its themes and imagery. War, in this subcategory, is depicted as an intrusion forced upon the writer and the literary work, with the writer trying to free the subject matter from the compulsion and mainstream vision of society.

These three subcategories are further subdivided into two main divisions reflecting the author's attitude towards the subject matter: pro-war literature, and anti-war literature. Being pro-war and supporting one's nation in war was the state of the art until anti-war literature developed into a literary frontier, especially after the eclipse of nationalism in Europe and similarly the nationalist projects in the Arab world, namely, Pan-Arabism or Nasirism, adopting a revisionist antithesis during the war or in post war periods. Anti-war literature judges its counterpart as obsolete in ideas and representation of heroes and heroism. Andrew Rutherford (1989: i) in his book *The Literature of War*, explains the reduction of the basic values that pro-war literature takes to heart as belonging to "the childhood of the individual or the race...Fortitude is out of fashion as a virtue...the portrayal of courage in the face of adversity, suffering or danger is...positively suspect in the eyes of many readers," writers, and critics "whose unexamined ethical assumptions often predetermine their aesthetic judgments on the literature of war," thus accentuating a sense of delusion and ruination of humanity. Such anti-war writers advocate that "the worst thing of all is to die, no cause is worth dying for... no cause is worth the death of all humanity, or a whole nation, or simply many lives...no cause is worth the death of a man, no cause is worth the death of me" (Fiedler 1965:30). These two war stances of encouragement and discouragement, created some form of literary hegemony dividing the loyalties of writers across a continuum of being for or against the cause of war.

War literature conveys a celebratory tone when nationalism is a strong hold, governing how a nation at war or post war presents itself to a national and foreign readership. At this stage, war literature reflects a mood of celebrating the nation, cause and people, gauging public morale and support, attacking social flaws and offering solutions. This is the moderate presentation of war literature; the more radical version suggests that the conditions of theorizing and writing about war and revolution are no different than starting them if on the verge of war, or inflaming them if they are in progression (Kiberd 1995). The message

and mission of war literature is that "for the survivor, writing is not a profession, but an occupation, a duty to wrench those victims from oblivion; to help the dead vanquish death" (Cooke 1988:134). War literature promotes a distinctive image of a nation united by a common history, language, social and religious heritage, a geographical area and political aspirations. The voice of war literature is mostly that of the collective we, the nation as a whole (Eagleton 2003). On the stage of war literature, individuals rarely feature as leading individual heroes and heroines. Their existence is in relation to a sublime nation and they feature as spokespersons of its ideology. In this sentimental sense, the nation is not only a group of people, "it is a soul, a spiritual principle...the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion...a heroic past, great men...the common will in the present" (Bhaba 1990: 19).

Nonetheless, the adoption of nationalism in war literature can be judged as a shortcoming, because nation and past glories are seen as a source of 'contamiNation' (Ibid.:1-19) to the literary value of texts, a mismatch of aesthetic and ideology, in which the alignment with the concept of nation blinds the writer from depicting inner social mischief and victimization for the sake of the glorious image of the nation. Adopting this nationalistic stance, the value of war literature is minimized into propaganda, which, in critical jargon implies falsification, disillusion, and official views. This is an overstretching of propaganda with its negative connotations that belittles according to George Levine (1994) in *Aesthetics and Ideology* the capacity of war literature to move and engage despite the entanglement between literature and politics.

A more balanced and neutral view is that war literature tries to present the salient narratives and tendencies, approved by society at a certain point in time of its war history, whether they be pro-war or anti-war, giving both sides of the argument similar credibility with an equal degree of nationalistic and patriotic discourse and imagery. This argument enlarges the scope of writing such socio-political concepts as nationalism, morality, commitment and war without being judgmental or prescriptive of what war literature should or should not be in relation to a fixed presentation of nationalism.

Before attempting to scrutinize war literature and the images and roles of Palestinian and Irish women, it is informing to consider the ideology of commitment, from which much of the literary production on war literature stems. It is the understanding of this school of thought in relation to war and the writing of the nation's image that leads to the appreciation of war literature and responds to accusations against it of propaganda and mere didacticism.

2. War and Commitment: Writers as Warriors and Words as Arms

The principle of commitment in arts is an established tradition and school of thought that spread amongst writers in the late fifties and early sixties. It appeared in response to the art for art's sake school and value-free art, which advocated a sense of nihilism in arts and that arts should not adhere to any restraints except those of aesthetics. Founders and followers of the school of commitment believe that words and literature are vehicles of truth and contents

of reality. "A word has the power of fire, it penetrates the blockade. It is a war and a substance of warfare" (Darraj 2002:55).

Sartre in *What is Literature?* (1950) viewed by many critics as the Bible of commitment, preaches the inevitability of commitment in arts. He believes that words are actions embodied with power to change reality. A word in Sartre's doctrine "is not a gentle breeze, which plays lightly over the surface of things, grazing them without alerting them. It is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us about them" (ibid.:11-2). He puts forward an extremely fundamental definition of words, which is in perfect harmony with the subject of war literature, referring to them as 'loaded pistols', and to writers as professional snipers who should shoot to kill or write to change.

The ideology of commitment was exported to the Arab world. Arabic literature cloned Sartre's engagement or commitment, producing the Arabic equivalent of *Adab al-Iltizam*. Commitment in mainstream Arabic literature was a rule rather than an exception. Artistic creation was not an isolated activity and the intellectual had no privileged position above the social entity. The Arab countries were suffering from colonization and critics like Suhail Idris (1953:1) the founder of the Arab magazine *al-Adaab*, summarized the role of writers in "mobilizing all their powers to liberate their countries and raise their political, social and intellectual level." In fanatic support of commitment, the term *al-Adab al-Dall* (the erring literature) was coined to criticize any literature that did not comply with the teachings of commitment. Commitment in this view is a balanced composite of ethics and aesthetics, arts and ideology. The artist is always entangled with some form of ideology, ranging from the collective and public to personal and private agendas, from being pro-war or anti-war.

This ideology from Ghassan Kanafani's perspective, the father of Palestinian commitment, shortened the period of infancy of Palestinian literature. The ruthless destruction, silencing, and the erasing of Palestinian culture drew Palestinian literature to adopt the school of commitment, transcending the extended argument on the scope of creativity in committed arts. Kanafani (1968:33) wrote "that Palestinian literature should be committed is a sine qua non. There was a pact between writers that aimless experimenting is an extravagance that Palestinian literature as a mirror of Palestine and Palestinian people is not ready to pay." In Ireland, Politics and history became inspirational to art (Murphy 2003). The early years of the literary revival were also marked with commitment, viewing literature as a proxy for restoring the Gaelic Irish identity, and reviving the concept of Irish exceptionalism, as a race distinct from the English oppressors. Literature also became an indirect political and revolutionary dialogue between writers and readers, a literary manifesto for the prohibited political agenda. Through the Gaelic League founded in 1893 for the revival of the Irish language, culture and legend, W.B. Yeats (qtd. in Lewald 1972:39) campaigned that "writers must take the lead in the struggle for independence and proceed by other than political means, by creating among Irishmen an intense political spirit."

Although many deconstructing schools of criticism have been in action since the appearance of commitment, nonetheless, commitment in war literature, with its unusual nature as a reflection of an abnormal state of human life, is not outmoded or out of fashion, especially in relation to the Arab political experience in modern times, beginning with Western colonization and expansion in the nineteenth century and culminating in the loss of Palestine which was followed by the even more stunning disaster of 1967. The reality that generated commitment in Palestinian war literature after the 1948 war remains unchanged due to the continuation of war. The political situation intermingles with every aspect of life, literature among them. For many Palestinian and Arab writers, commitment was and still is not subject to question; it is an evidence of loyalty and a contribution to the nation's cause, which may burden their literary creativity with unliterary constraints. In Ireland, "the Irish literary revival of the late nineteenth century sought to redefine the country's present by recalling a past world of nobility and bravery. For writers of the period, recovery of the era of legend was recovery of a heroic Ireland" (Herbert 1991:13). Irish writers were not satisfied with their present, which they saw as humiliating because of occupation, they dug up the great warriors and queens to establish a connection between the ascendants and descendents, to encourage the Irishmen and women follow in the footsteps of their ancestors.

3. Palestinian and Irish Women: the Merits of Sorority

Palestine and Ireland share much in common in terms of their history, politics and social values, which in turn contribute to their literary production. Both countries were subjected to partition and occupation. The history of Ireland was even more turbulent than that of Palestine with the English Occupation starting as early as the twelfth century, culminating in 1800 when the Act of Union was imposed by Britain upon Ireland. Ireland was annexed to the British Empire, deprived of home rule and full citizenship rights for its people. Its original Celtic and Catholic inhabitants became the underdogs of the Anglo-Irish Protestants empowered and supported by Britain.

During the period from 1919-1921, the Irish fought the Anglo-Irish War in defense of the Irish Republic declared in the Easter Rising and endorsed later by the first Irish Parliament (the Dáil). The war ended with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty to create a free Irish state in the South, with the North annexed to Britain. Ireland experienced a bloody civil war in 1923 between the proponents and opponents of the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921, which established the free Irish State in the South, with the six counties in the North, maintaining allegiance to the British crown. The war took on the nature of guerrilla fighting at first, a tit-for-tat strategy; Irish resistance was mainly led by the IRA, which established in 1914 a female faction known as the *Cumann na mBan* (the women's league).

In Palestine, Jewish colonization and emigration increased after the World Zionist Organization declared its intentions to establish a Jewish state in Palestine during its conference in Basel in 1897. The emigration and taking over

of Palestinian lands were made easier under the auspices of the British mandate, which ruled Palestine after the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration pledging to empower the Jews to establish their national homeland in Palestine. In 1947, the UN passed a resolution for the partition of Palestine, granting the 'Jews' more than half of the Palestinian territory for the establishment of a state of Israel, changing the demographic balance in its favor. On the British withdrawal in 1948, Israel waged a war against the Arabs, occupying 78% of the Palestinian lands and forcing out their owners with indiscriminate killings and massacres, namely at Dayr Yasin in 1948, and Kafr Qasim in 1956. In the 1967 war, Israel occupied the rest of the Palestinian territories, the West Bank and Gaza, after a second defeat of the Arab armies. The resistance culminated in the emergence of the first Uprising, the *intifada*, in 1987, followed by the second in 2000, known as *Intifadat al-Aqsa* (the Uprising of al-Aqsa Mosque).

These political upheavals in the history of both peoples brought about permanent changes in the status of women. Their participation in the nationalist movements and war effort was gradual and in harmony with social codes, ranging from the role of mothers assisting with the upbringing of their sons and daughters to serve the country to the ultimate militarization of women as soldiers in guerrilla fighting. It must be said that Palestine and Ireland have become known to the world through their national struggles, but surprisingly "within the academic world, the associations between Ireland and Palestine often take the form of specialized ...discourses on terrorism" (Cleary 2002: 6). These misconceptions negatively foreshadow the role of women and men in both countries, which may be quite humane and noble in the circumstances of war, if analyzed without prejudice or bias.

The position of women in Palestine during war is parallel to their Irish counterparts. In both countries, there is great emphasis on the family as a bastion for the preservation of the 'Palestinianness' and 'Irishness' of the respective nations, championed by women as mothers and wives. In Northern Ireland, the idea that "the proper place for a woman apart from the convent is the home, preferably rearing sons for Ireland," has developed from a social practice into an article in the constitution of 1937 (Holland 1993: 82). On the Palestinian side, motherhood and wifehood with their sacrificial nature are two emblematic roles for Palestinian women in a society that stresses collectivity over individuality, picturing women as holding the gun in one hand and rocking the baby's cradle with the other. Ann Weeks (1990) in *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* pinpoints another similarity concerning early marriage that had been the pattern in Northern Ireland up to the sixties and seventies, a social practice, which finds a parallel in Palestine pre the 1948 war, and in post war times, when Palestinians wanted to compensate for their human losses and preserve the chastity and honor of their daughters through marriage.

In both countries, women's involvement in war and politics came as a reaction to protect their homes and families and provide for them in the absence of men, not as a result of growing political awareness. The two nations depended

on their women to 'keep the home fires burning' in the face of the occupation that aimed to destroy them by targeting the male bread winner of the family. Femininity itself was successfully invested as a weapon in both countries. "There was a general belief that women were more protected than men, especially because the British and Israeli forces deemed them less suspect than their male counterparts" (Sharoni 2000: 85). This opened space for women to take on more substantial roles both publicly in their everyday roles, and underground as spies and soldiers.

The women's call for national liberation in Palestine and Northern Ireland was joined by a call for gender equality, though not with the same intensity, importance and priority being given to the national cause. Some feminist writers may view this act of delay as victimizing women's emancipation and rights, and threatening their individuality. Cynthia Cockburn (1998: 38) objects to this, stressing that in reality "women found it hard to deny the value of a collective sense of nationhood...the self-respect it generates, the hopes it offers of ending subordination and winning rights." Generally speaking, calls which pursued the feminist line of the superiority and immediacy of the women's cause in wartime were deemed separatist and sometimes treacherous. Palestinian and Irish feminists and writers were expected to postpone their campaigns for emancipation until liberation, as did other feminists in wartime, such as the Pankhurst sisters, Vera Britain, and Storm Jameson during WWI in Britain, and the Irish women MPs, who were known as the "silent sisters" (Scannell 1988: 123) for not showing the slightest opposition to the constitution that made no mention of the franchise or women's rights.

In Palestine, and before the 1948 war and the series of tragedies that subsequently occurred, the majority of Palestinian women had been domestic beings confined to their homes and children. Palestinian society was mostly an agricultural society. Rural women got married at an early age, and lived with their extended families. Opportunities of education were very few for both men and women, and only elite families could afford to send their children to schools and universities in Cairo and Beirut. Even Palestinian families who resided in the city favored the education of their sons to their daughters. There has been a prevalent dogma sustained by men and institutions of patriarchy and adhered to by women, either by consent or force; that being a woman implies sensitivity, sentimentality and moodiness. These 'unreliable' traits offered women a position at the margin of society, always attached to men as their mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters.

War came as a revival, a rebirth, and a trial in which old beliefs were challenged and labeled as effete; among these were female marginality and stereotypical femininity. War was more of an earthquake that not only changed the Palestinian land, but much more the mentality of Palestinian men and women. It has been viewed with ironic positivism as the compulsive emancipator. Having lost all manifestations of stability and security, land, home and family, women were forced to outgrow their fixed roles and the stagnant social frames in which they were protected, cloistered, provided for, and

sometimes manipulated. They were allowed to pursue higher education, to join resistance movements, and to have their shares of family inheritance. Maternalism and paternalism were replaced by nationalism; there has been no war between the two genders, rather a war for the survival of both. Any call for women's rights, was regarded as utterly bizarre (al-Khalili 1977); all efforts were directed towards protecting lives without guarantee of quality or equality. With war engulfing Palestine and uprooting people from their homes and homeland, women could ill afford to watch as theatre spectators. The protective mode and sheltering mentality has been gradually abandoned by men and women together. Men needed women to complement, and sometimes initiate their struggle. al-Hindi (1995: 29) records that

When the partition resolution became a reality, or a nightmare, in 1947, relief work and mostly headed by women of bourgeois families. They helped nurse the wounded, cooked and clothed the injured and the refugees, provided tents for families, planned marches. Although these roles have been very much revolutionary to the family farm or home confinement, most women have been used to; they still esteem the social norms which cannot yet picture women in the battle field.

On the other hand, the place of Irish women in war is disputed between two extremist trends. The first such as the Irish critic Margaret Ward (1991: 4) believe that "men have written women out of history...women are not seen as a part of Irish history, and neither are the causes they fought for." In the *Missing Sex*, she points out that Irish women are partially accountable for their forced absenteeism and dislocation of women's contribution to war, since they accept to give precedence to the male dominated national movement. Even when Irish women writers record the war story they do not put up much of a fight for correcting the wrong done to women; "they have been content either to efface or play down their own personalities and identities to be absorbed into symbolic constructs such as *Erin*" (Innes 1993:4) The second trend defends the presence of Irish women, arguing that the core concept of Irishness has always been mirrored in relation to women, claiming that "Ireland has always been a woman, a womb, a cave, a cow, a *Rosaleen*, a sow, a bride, a harlot" (O'Brien 1976:11). Despite postcolonial feminist objections of marginality and victimization, never was the position of Irish women peripheral or superficial. Irish women are never absent from the scene of events, but their presence seesawed between reality and myth, passive and active roles, succumbing and confronting the patriarchal society and the male dominated war.

4. Writing the Image: Meeting and Separation Points

Before drawing the similar characteristics in Palestinian and Irish female imagery, it is essential to explain that there are also some differences in female depiction between Palestinian and Irish literature. The imagery of Palestinian women in Palestinian literature has developed to cover all the spectrum of female agency from domestication to militarization. This is due to the fact that

Palestinian war literature can be considered as war literature in progression, with the continuation of the Palestinian-Israeli war, which allows for more development of themes and images as a reflection to real life developments of an ongoing war, while Irish war literature, especially after the signing of the peace treaty, is war literature in retrospect and a revision of rights and wrongs, acceptable and rejected images and roles of Irish women, since the war has come to an end, and the war support ideology has on the whole ceased to exist. Palestinian writers in the twenty-first century continue to celebrate images of sacrifice and suffering just as they did after the 1948 war, with a more ideological and conscious view of the nature of the struggle. Palestinian literature has had a 'make believe and behave' effect on the audience, who applied the themes and roles in their actual lives as a natural part of the ongoing dialogue between the text and the readers, the intentions of the author and the expectations of the readership. While Irish literature adopted a nihilistic approach to war, calling on women and men to define their identity and individuality outside the national axis, Palestinian literature urged readers to further service and loyalty to the larger collectivity of the nation. Although both Palestinian and Irish cultures have suffered from a long process of elimination, traditional Irish literature and folk literature acted until the twentieth century as a reservoir of national memory, but moved on to a more critical genre of postcolonial literature, in which memory had to be abandoned for a futuristic peaceful outlook. In this aspect, Palestinian literature remains positively consistent in reviving the past events, believing that holding on to the memory of past Palestinian life and tragedies is the rubric to any form of future life.

One typical and celebrated image in Palestinian and Irish war literature is the image of the mother. The persona of motherhood is largely uncontested in most works of art. At the social level, the exploitation of the institution of motherhood is a must if any society at war is to reach its goals. Mothers are the fuel of war in terms of production, upbringing of children and sacrifice. The concept of nation itself derives etymologically from 'natio' meaning to be born, and as giving birth to humans is the role of mothers, so is giving birth to the nation. In literature, motherhood is iconized into many images blessed with a spiritual drive to act not only as an individual mother of flesh and blood, but also as the mother of the nation, the symbolic motherland, and the mother of martyrs. All these concepts are highly esteemed, and attained with a great deal of sacrifice. Writers choose to emphasize the mother figure aware of her effect on bringing up the future generations, being acceptable to both men and women.

Honoring fellow women is a guiding principle in the code of ethics Palestinian writers hold. In his critical analysis of the human aspects in Palestinian novels, the Arab critic Nabahani (1990:172) underscores with some exaggeration that Palestinian novels are equally fair to women. "Women are no different to men. They are assigned the same roles on all levels of resistance as prisoners, martyrs and freedom fighters and are depicted to exert a similar behavior of heroism and steadfastness." Such depiction is essential to show that patriotism and national commitment are not exclusive to men, but extends to the

other half of society, women. In Palestinian literature, the image of the mother adopted a more dynamic and sacrificial role as the resistance progressed. The image of the Palestinian mother was elastic and writers stretched it to accommodate all the realms of self-denial, heroic service, and mobilization according to the necessities of the war field. The mother of martyrs (*umm al-shuhada'*) was pictured as the ultimate role model for Palestinian women. The image was shown as divine and noble, urging mothers to seek such acclaim by encouraging their sons and daughters to fight. This honorary role was achieved by exemplary behavior, regarding the patronage of fighters, the reception of martyrs, and the determination to overcome the suffering.

Ayn al-Mir'a (The Eye of the Mirror 1991) by Layana Badr addresses the noble role of the mothers of martyrs through the character of Umm Hasan, who lost two of her sons in war, the first in Palestine, and the second in war with the Phalangists. This role received more focus after the 1967 war with the evolution of the revolution, the mass enrolment of Palestinian youth within political factions, and their martyrdom. With the authoress Badr, the reader is given a social account of events and characters. Badr is a nationalist feminist. She tries to juggle her demands for women's rights with her commitment to the cause of liberating Palestine, considering occupation as the supreme victimizer. Unlike other Palestinian feminist, Badr is not radical in calling for the freedom of women before or as a prerequisite to freeing Palestine. A political activist and a journalist herself, Badr grafts her political views onto her literary creativity and journalistic observations, maintaining the fine line between calling for individual rights and advancing nationalist interests. To have rights, you need a country in which you can practice and enjoy them; so let us agree on securing the freedom of the country and the rest will come in due course is her underlying message in most of her works.

The novel is the story of the women of Tal al-Za'tar refugee camp in Lebanon and how they are able to sustain the camp for a whole year in the Lebanese civil war during the siege of 1975-6 by the Christian militias, which ends with the massacring of the camp's inhabitants. The massacre results in four thousand deaths, the flight of twelve thousand people to other parts of Lebanon, and the razing of the camp. In the story, Umm Hasan, is the mother of two martyrs. She realizes after crying her eyes out that she and all women need to shed their femininity and instincts and take on the role of warriors by helping in relief work, cooking, and providing shelter to fighters and families who lost their homes. Badr gives Umm Hasan limited space to express her motherly grief as part of making her believable to other mothers, who are expected to follow in her steps. As a source of pride and determination to the camp, all the women look up to her for support and blessing; at her son's funeral she declares her readiness to sacrifice more for Palestine. As she kisses her son farewell, she pledges, on behalf of other women, to be strong and defiant. "My child, we shall all become strong women. Have they left us any other choice? They take everything from us. Marriage, children, homes, stories, old people...everything. So, all the time, we defend ourselves as though we were not women, but soldiers

standing in the trenches” (Badr 1991:260). Mothers are caught between their instincts and their ideology, between emotionalism and steadfastness, all given opportunity to be expressed, but with limits not to tarnish the national image and expectations. It maybe seen as a message to an ‘outsider’ audience to clear the Palestinian image of fanaticism and hard-heartedness, to which they have been forced as a result of the ruthlessness they have had to put up with. Badr is true to reality by highlighting the immense tragedy of the Palestinian life, the bare bloody description of events. Her writing envisions a dystopia, in which there is no relief for Palestinian women, in which suffering is a system of life; Palestinian women are not to wait for the light at the end of the tunnel.

Early revivalist Irish Literature is similar to Palestinian literature in terms of national commitment and honoring of the female role. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Ireland was going through a stage of numerous political upheavals, women were in the main domesticated and confined to performing household chores and family nurturing. At this stage, a most powerful and effective image dominated Irish culture and iconography inspired by maternalism and religious reverence. The image of the patriotic mother, the womb for war, and the role of motherhood were presented by society and religious institutions, as the role most fit for Irish women. The mother was expected not only to bring up and care for her children, but also "to guide the first faltering steps of her children's spiritual odyssey...This static creature sitting by the fire, unwilling to venture out into the great world, fixed in her domestic sphere, is iconized ...into a secular Irish Madonna. Her world revolves around the Twin Poles of Altar and Hearth...Good Irishwoman was the Good Mother...transmitting Irishness to her children" (Herbert 1991:24). Richard Kearney (1984) in *Myth and Motherland Derry* states that the more colonially dominated the Irish became, the more attached they were to the myth of Motherland and Mother Ireland. He argues that women do not exist in their own right, but are exploited as a channel for male-contrived schemes. The choice of the female sex as an emblem of the national Irish struggle has been intentional to incite the typical male instinct of protector and defender of mothers and sweethearts. This engendered the struggle into victimized homeland and feminine womenfolk in the custody and care of male warriors. The equation of war and women was internalized in the Irish consciousness as evoking passion for maternal or romantic and sexual love, more service by women on the home front, and more sacrifice by men on the war front.

Eugene McCabe (2006) in his collection *Heaven Lies About Us* presents the fanatic devoted Irish mother, a written version of Pearse's poem, *The Mother*, to which his Mrs. McAleer, this 'mother of the rebels' figure resorts for consolation as she sends her sons to fight:

I don't grudge them Lord I don't grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few
In bloody protest for a glorious thing
And yet I have my joy

My sons were faithful and they fought (Pearse qtd in McCabe 2006:157).

Mrs. McAleer, the poor old Irish woman figure, is the brain washed mother, who sacrifices her two sons for the liberation of Ireland. Although bed ridden and alone, she figures as the Spartan mother, who shows no hesitancy in offering her sons for Ireland, and prefers them dead rather than defeated. This mother of the rebels is so dogmatic that she expects the death of her two sons without a change of heart. She tells another female protagonist: "I wouldn't be the first, nor the last, it's the price of freedom." (McCabe 2006:159). Mrs. McAleer is a custodian of the conventional social order. She advises one of the female fighters to leave the war zone to men to avoid harassment by the British and Protestant soldiers. She attributes the change in Irish women and deviation from the national path to too much learning; she advocates that "all a body needs is faith in God, his Blessed Mother, faith in your people, and faith in your country" (Ibid.:160).

5. Conclusion: Particularity of War literature, Sorority of War Feminism, Contextuality of Reading

The understanding of the particularity and distinctive features of war literature is a prerequisite to evaluating its ability to achieve a state of 'literariness' in comparison and contrast with other genres and schools of literature. War Literature can be seen as the matrix of compromise between the two other opposite subcategories: warring literature, and literature under war. Palestinian literature with its divergent canon covers these three subdivisions, acting more emphatically in the capacity of war and warring literature, haunted with the past and occupied by the present, both related to war, with little exploration of an imagined future after war. Irish war literature, on the other hand, is narrowing the scope of war representation after its cessation in real life Ireland, with some works totally eliminating it or foreshadowing it as the loathsome past, which Irish women and men are surrendering to move on to a better life. On the other hand, the continuation of the Palestinian war on ground ushered its continuation in literature, giving way in contemporary times for a degree of variance and split opinions, unimagined in early war literature. Post war Irish literature moved to a different mise-en-scene taking on ordinary, everyday life subjects and dismantling the war support and war imagery. It is possible to disqualify contemporary Irish literature from war literature, and present it under the general heading of Irish literature written on Ireland or the Irish life by Irish and non-Irish writers, with total disregard to war and the warring past of the Irish. Palestinian War literature, whether described as such or not, is still pondering on this theme, even if the literary treatment of writers varies in emphasis.

Nonetheless, attempting to define the genre does not deny that the nature of war literature is as unstable and oxymoronic as war itself, changing through time in content and characterization, presenting in the words of Barbara Harlow (1987:xvi) "a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the

theory and the practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the West.” The history of war literature testifies that as war is in progress, war literature assumes a supporting role, aiming to implant a collective sense of nationalism and nationhood; Palestinian literature exemplifies the argument. In both cases, literature called on individuals for an engagement in public, and a delay of private rights. In relation to the task of image preservation, war literature adopts an eclectic approach to depict a state of uniformity, conformity, and sameness in themes and characters, with minimal opposition. Some war literature has the effect of psychological conditioning, bringing the people at war or under occupation to believe in their unity, uniqueness, and a common cause. Images like the mother of martyrs in Palestinian literature and the mother of rebels in Irish literature with their code of behavior, actions and ceremonies did not appear suddenly out of the blue. It took the writing of a great number of literary works with subliminal pedagogical messages on how a mother is expected to act in war, supporting her children and rejoicing in their sacrifice. These images grew in the subconscious of both Palestinian and Irish women and their nobility and reverence were immense and unquestionable.

In Palestinian war Literature and early revivalist Irish literature, there seems to an agreement on the definition of nationalism as devotion to cause and people, and depiction of female heroic characters, mythical in the Irish culture, endowed with bravery and commitment to the justness of their cause, before Irish literature moved on to an opposite terrain, adopting the mock-epic and post-heroic style of ridiculing historical and esteemed entities to free the Irish from the inheritance of war and war heroes.

Palestinian and Irish women share much in common. First, they are second in line in a male dominated war, culture and literature. Due to house and family confinement, it is the invasion of their private home spheres that sparked their national commitment. Another similarity pointed out by Sharoni (2000:91) "involves the use of conventional conceptions of womanhood and femininity as a secret weapon in the struggle." The Palestinian war has carried on later than the Irish. The roles and images of Palestinian women have developed beyond their Irish counterparts reaching the ultimate of acting as martyrs. The development of roles and images of Irish women was halted with the signing of the peace and the disarmament of military factions. Consequently, Palestinian war feminism has not reached a fixed definition and image, but rather swings backwards and forwards governed by the upheavals of war. Irish war feminism has matured to a stage of political feminism battling for equality, and civil rights since 1970.

Gender issues in Palestinian and Irish war literature are presented in the traditional pattern of female followers and male leaders, females weakened by their femininity and males empowered by their masculinity, house women and battlefield soldiers. At the early stages of Palestinian and Irish war literature, these images were difficult to defy as writers produced their version of war literature, more in compliance with the dominant view, less in initiating opposition, judged unsuitable to the state of solidarity and steadfastness

promoted by war literature. Both Palestinian and Irish women are depicted as positive heroines working, according to the principles of social realism, to reflect a positive conclusion and message.

Commitment, didacticism, and national discourse infiltrate in various degrees and at different periods of time most literatures, most apparent at times of war, as a part of the evolvement process to maturity and independent unconstrained writing. This package of commitment should not hinder the literary appraisal and appreciation of war literature as a 'phasic' literature to be judged in this light. To appreciate the literary value of these texts, covering different political periods of the history of war, readers and critics need to adopt a 'read-in-read among- read beyond' strategy. In other words, have a historical, comparative and conceptual readings of texts which involve analyzing texts in relation to the period they are written in to evaluate how progressive or regressive, emancipating or confining the images and themes are at a specific point of time and in comparison with other national and international works on war. It is difficult to appraise a Palestinian or Irish work written in the nineteen seventies expressing extreme nationalism, with the critical mentality of the late twentieth century, when people worldwide relapsed back on nationalism considering it a phase of human infancy.

In conclusion, war literature, both pro-war literature and anti-war literature, is a literature in the making, and so are its characters and themes. Its features are governed by socio-political changes. War literature succeeds in acting as a register; it preserves socially sanctioned images and roles. Nonetheless, pro- and anti-war literature is expected to meet the expectations of the readers to what constitutes a war story at a certain period of time. This reader-writer interaction is what leads the authorial process of writing, and the scholarly process of criticism. Without this reader-writer contract, to borrow from Rousseau's social contract, genres of literature and schools of criticism would not have had features and frameworks through which the writer can maneuver, and by which the critic can judge the value of the literary work. It is true that literature is a creative process, but many feel that creativity should involve some sort of standardization in studying the literary work, placing or dismissing it from the canon of war literature.

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