

SHIFTING DYNAMICS OF EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION: ABJECT LAND, POWER AND ERASURE OF HISTORY- READING SELECTED PALESTINIAN WOMEN NARRATIVES.

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Abstract: The spatial dimension of life in relation to socio-cultural and historical existence is thoroughly political and politicized. Space shapes lives and geographies which in turn shaped by power. The intolerance created in the name of securitization leads to social fragilities and systemic inequalities that result in war, occupation and exclusion of a native community from their own land in Palestine and the squalid conditions of people followed by that, are reflected in the problematic of place and space in the post dispossession Palestinian writings, stemmed from the occupied Land. Mere dwelling in the midst of catastrophe is a political act to register their lives for all Palestinians.

Destruction of homes, home towns, and villages exist as brutal, unnatural tool of authorities to silence people and to erase collective memory which further extends to the erasure of history and de territorialization of a community. Landscapes simply turn into *ruinedscapes* and later in to extinct land/history, questioning the legitimacy of the land.

The proposed research paper explores the operations of power at micro level that exists in the warn torn Palestine, as it is painfully explicated in the works of Palestinian writers with special reference to *Sharon and my Mother in Law* by Suad Amiry and *The Inheritance* by Sahar Khalifeh . The theoretical base of 'geography and power' at various levels, propounded by Michael Foucault and Giorgio Agamben are used for the inquiry of politics of space and land. The paper examines how the individual's right on the land is diminished and superseded by the power and how the process of mere living is a means of resistance through existence.

Keywords- Power, Occupied land, Exclusion and Inclusion, Extinct Land, Extinct History

The spatial theory and its geographical dimensions have proved that, life in any national territory is thoroughly political for the one who inhabits it, when State posits as a determining force over human life, tending every life as a mere bio political mass. The sovereignty of the state thus constitutes a notion of exclusion/inclusion on its beings. The sovereign state and its emblematic existence continuously engage in series of authority induced methods of exclusions to keep up the space of the territory/ nation as an ideal homogenous pure state and it leads to power in varied forms in the socio political physical space of the nation. The birth right, which is always questioned, cannot only sanction the legitimacy to the land then. When borders are always evaporating so as to enlarge the measures of the earth by fully political means it raises the question of inside and outside in terms of land ,which further leads to the dichotomy of exclusion / inclusion.

Overflowing of the boundaries and a mission of sovereign state with sacred blood, perpetuated by Israel creates such a shifting dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the space of historical Palestine which turns the locale of Palestine into abject lands. The space of the territory loses its very existence and reincarnates into a mere geographical space on /in which life for Palestinians become impossible. The exertion of power in the micro and macro levels turns the land and hometowns into a haunting flat space where dwelling as an everyday practice is determined only by chance as Foucault seems power "as a complex strategic situation in a given social setting" (Foucault 1998, 98). The space of Palestine as a Middle Eastern territory / (country?) loses its original sense and sentiments of historical and cultural space in its own way and turns to be an abject land where soil, water and air are overloaded with supreme political and military power in multiple forms . Understanding space in Foucauldian methodology of power, knowledge and space , one can observe in Palestine "disciplinary power is exercised together with other forms of power such as sovereign power" (Foucault 1997, 65) to transform the whole land into a closed prison like system with military checkpoints, road gates, road walls, trenches, observation towers etc.

The problematization of space and place in the Middle East literature in general and in the arena of Palestinian literature in particular is a discourse of re-search which gains momentum in the theoretical array of space and power. Though the discussions on public spaces in these territories have already been carried out, there are considerably a little study in the area of micro level understanding of power and space in the private, everyday lives. Middle East women narratives exhibit the multiscalar geography of this land and the meaning/(meaninglessness?) of life in/on it. How the terrestrial signs of existence such as home, buildings, cultivations, monuments, places of worships etc. have been bulldozed by power so as to create alienation among the inmates of the land, is a major subject of research which would lead to the understanding of complexity of issues of existence in connection with land. The changing geometry of the land and the map of the Palestine are to be correlated with the concept of socio cultural historical and political space of Palestine to delineate the operations of power at various levels.

The discourses on place and space in the Palestinian women narratives of post dispossession- post 1948 or post *Nakba*- era , clearly reflect the angles in which the political refugees of Palestine are created and tortured in the homeland who, as a result of that , are always in the trauma of voluntary or forceful exile. The military power lies in the bottom of all personal and social practices. Operations of power are visible on the biological and social bodies where power controls the body curtailing various kinds of freedom including the freedom of movement and everyday practices.

'The sovereign's great power over the individual' (Foucault 1980, 187) takes shapes to control the body and to undo the land with erasure of all that seem to be creating a memory of being in the minds of locals. This is the case one can observe while locating the literature of native Palestinians. The so called normalization is imposed through abnormalities where the ultimate aim of authority is to deport people and what so ever is there as their own, resulting in complete traumatic haunting situation as Foucault observes: "governmentalisation of the state" [1979, 20] and the execution of its orders lead to manage every actions of the day to day, disciplined as he further adds: "power in conduct – it both conducts or leads, and is a conduct or form of behavior" (1980, 221). When everything is taken out from the natives nothing is left than the abject land. Why and how the Palestinians live as refugees in their own land? Why the land is characterized with voluntary and enforced migration? How the evasions of boundaries though being a thoroughly postmodern concept with mush positive note work upside down in case of Palestinians? How and why the memories and fictions are equally important in reading Palestinian literatures of place? This paper is an attempt to explore such questions of power - space relations and their effect on land.

SHARON and My Mother- in- Law, Ramallah Diaries by Suad Amiry, architect, founder and director of RIWAQ: the Centre for Architectural Conservation in Ramallah, provides both a longitudinal and transverse analysis of everyday locale and life of Palestinians/ refugees in the occupied territories. The cutting of the umbilical cord with the mother is becoming symbolic in the birth of every Palestinian whose ties with the motherland seem to be cut on their birth itself, since they are always in the threat of an ejection from mother land which evokes a sense of devastating feeling of exclusion within the inclusion. A necessity of repulsion from motherland becomes unavoidable else life is in question for every Palestinian.

The personal is political, declares Amiry in *SHARON and my Mother- in- Law Ramallah Diaries* through its witty and realistic account of siege of Ramallah as it is reflected in the very title of the work, which echoes the necessity of Amiry to save her mother in law from Sharon's missiles since the mother's dwelling place near to Arafat's headquarters was going to be demolished. The narrative style with juxtaposition of past and present, terror and humour itself registers the means of resistance upheld by the writer, to keep her sane in the midst of absurdities of everyday life, imposed/ propagated by the hegemony of Israeli sovereignty.

The incidents in the book oscillate between 1980 and 2002. Back and forth memories range from Amiry's decision to return to Berzeit University in the West Bank as a faculty of architecture in 1980 to the two month long siege in Ramallah during spring 2002. *SHARON and My Mother- in- Law Ramallah Diaries* is a lens adjusted to the cities and lives of Palestine that vividly shows what is ludicrous, brutal, ordinary and fantastic about situations of Palestinians in Palestine. The humiliations and vindictiveness of Israeli military occupation take lion's share in the book. The seemingly casual style echoing dairy writing employed by Amiry reflects the casual life to show the micro level powers operating in the public, private and personal spaces.

Amiry's compassion and love for her country and for her people with her purely personal episodes such as her journeys, relationships, love resulted in marriage, profession, telephonic calls etc. lose its mere personal existence to imprint their political relevance in the current context. The heavy shocking scenes such as rally of tanks, long queues, gun points, vanishing of places, bombing etc have been lightened in presentation with the an uncanny humour , which work as a language therapy to live through the indignities of occupation and pangs of social and political exclusion. The evolution of the book from the personal mails offers an additional understanding of the pains of an insider.

The torturing interrogations that every Palestinians must have to face during their movements are echoed in the opening chapter, "I was not in the Mood", of the book which give clear insight to the feeling of ashamedness that every Palestinian carries in the backdrop of their minds. The denial of explanatory answers for Israeli officer's questions elucidates the agony and the weight of memory of losing of the land and identity and history which is unexplainable as she put: "I was not in the mood to tell the Israeli officer that Damascus is not as he seemed to imagine , a huge military base filled with Sam-1 and Sam 2 missiles but rather a vibrant city especially our neighborhood in the old town where my grandfather's home still stands" (Amiry 7) She is jealous towards her own grandparents for having a life worth living in the cities where "travelling is not big deal" (8) . It recounts how far the freedom of movement to one's own ancestral roots /towns has been curtailed by the power which was followed in the later years.

When Salim Tamari, her lover who became her husband, replies Amiry on her enquiry of Jaffa city as: "our home is just up the hill from here. It is now being used as recruitment centre for Israeli army" (24), the extend of occupation is clear. Amiry gives us personal insight on the British mandate in Palestine that ended in 1948, *Nakba*/ catastrophe for Palestinians in 1948 that made the declaration of Israel as a supreme country of settlers, post *Nakba* alienation and exile, Palestine-Israel war of 1967, Palestinian intifada (uprising), means of resistance employed by natives, ugly faces of chain massacres, the micro level entangling of powers and the construction of Separation Wall, through her travel narratives, in the work.

"Return to Jaffa" signatures the effects of occupation on the land that changed the towns as she says "narrow alleys of what was once flourishing Arab old town" (25) and is now an Israeli artist's colony. The funny but loaded expressions explicate how the legal person turn to be illegal in the case sheets just in the name of power shifts. Amiry admits "just like the other one hundred and twenty thousand Palestinian wives (with children) living in occupied territories, legally we had rights, but in reality we were illegal" (33). The seven years stupid waiting for a Ramallah ID when her dog Nura could possess a Jerusalemite passport very easily, bounds in her mind regarding the mere (non) existence of a being in the occupied land as a woman/ human in "The seven Year Epic of My Identity" and in "A Dog's Life".

Total alienation from the city and the hometown that carries the memories of life and the isolation followed by the curfews and other disciplinary actions are the ways that the power employ in Palestine to erase the memory and the history of natives. The contempt that Israeli soldiers keep towards old aged people is in a way shows their intolerance with the memory of Palestinian community and the teasing way of using the word *Hajjeh*(old woman) can be taken as the insulting method of soldiers to make Palestinian shameful about their existence as it is made clear in "A Shopping Spree in Anticipation". When Amiry gets out with her old mother in law for shopping while curfew is lifted for some days, she remembers her mother replying: "Hajjeh,

motherfucker, it is true that I could be of your mother's age or even older, but I am definitely not a *hajjeh ya hayawaan* (not an old woman, stupid) (67), when a soldier addresses mother *Hajjeh*, in his condescending tone.

Amiry balances between her personal as well as national memory. Her ancestral home is a site of nostalgia for her and the journey towards it is a report of national memory including the writing of power on the land. The denial of spatial identity within the physical identity, exposes the issue of inclusion in the midst of centripetal forces of exclusion in the forms of everyday operations of power where meeting friends, telephonic calls, eating, shopping, travelling etc are personal and political acts in a power ridden land turning it into abject land with no present and not the past, as she wonders: "When is this nightmare going to end? When will they stop destroying our historic buildings, erasing our cultural heritage?" (165).

The personal account of everyday realities in pure authentic, sometimes witty and sarcastic voice can be taken as a desire of the subject to cross the limitations / boundaries at least verbally. What Foucault observes becomes right here: "Government did not refer only to political structure or to the management of the states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individual or groups might be directed" (Foucault 1979, 343). The politics of military over the everyday activities is clear reflection of what Foucault observes.

At the very outset of Ariel Sharon's tanks, when Amiry struggles to get her mother in law back home hurriedly, neglecting and rejecting the mother's desire to take jewelry and cloths, the question raised by mother stumps Amiry, though she was initially provoked at mother's actions: "That is what is we said in 1948 when we left our home in Jaffa, it was May then" (149). Thus one cannot get away from the overburdened memory in the memoir of Amiry where all the discourses are coated with pain of authorial power.

The inheritance by Sahar Khalifeh, the Palestinian writer, evolves through the excessive desire of Zayna, the protagonist, daughter of Palestinian father, lives in Brooklyn, to flee into the romantic stories of her father's home, Wadi Al Rihan, in the West Bank. Born into a diverse cultural identity with Palestinian immigrant father and American mother who became divorced during her growth into maturity, the story moves through the point of view of Zayna whose early childhood days and youth were spent in Brooklyn, from where she shifted to Palestine later in search of her paternal cultural and geographical roots which was in the occupied city of West Bank. Khalifeh paints the nightmarish realities of everyday world in occupied Palestine through the journey of Zayna that is characterized with road blocks, kidnapping, tortures, exiles, dislocation, riots etc.

Through the search for identity carried out by Zayna, Khalifeh pictures every Palestinian's search for his/her own self, identity and nationhood, in the ruptured land and ruined scapes. Zayna is only a representative of many who are torn between the two worlds but at the same time unable to catch the history by making a tense free travel. Ejection from the mother (father?) land turns to be a wound in her which was being tried to resolve.

Novel explores the consequences for Palestinian women of the years of *Nakba* (1948) while life became impossible due to financial burden as the lands were lost forever. Through the experiences of *Nakba*, Khalifeh points out how the first generation women of *Nakba* period sacrificed themselves to make their sisters and brothers educated. Their dislocation from families due to financial crisis and terrors of war which denied them the opportunities of return, framed pain of exiles in them. This gendered experience of disposition is a major thought in the novel as the opening sentence in the first section, "Without Heritage", reports: "I went to the West Bank looking for him, looking for them, searching for my own faces in the land of exile (The inheritance1) The story of her paternal home town is only known to her through the stories that her father narrated to her one after another.

"My father used to tell us stories, all kind of stories, sometimes he would talk about Jarusalem and sometimes about another cities (9)". The pain of exile was visible in the stories of Zyana's father that reflected his desire to return. The romantic memory built through the stories of the father was found fading when it comes to the post *Nakba* realities that Zyana visualizes in her return to the land of West Bank when she was informed of the father's impending death by her uncle. The clash between the dream and the reality about the cities of Palestine make her a true traveller to her own roots.

The fact and fiction are intervened each other while a post Oslo picture of Palestine takes a major part of the book particularly focusing on Palestinian women. The sarcastic comment that Sith Amira, the mother of Zyana's step mother, gives while handing over the grandson to Israeli army since her daughter bled to death due to the blocks in the roads that delayed timely treatment. The artificial insemination done in the Israeli hospital which ultimately ended with desolate hope is also visible in the words of Sith Amira: "Thank you very much this is your share" (213). Khalifeh's portrayal of reality makes her conscientious as it is made clear: "The Israeli Palestinian conflict has not been simplistic two state solution... there is a long history between Israel and Palestine which is at backdrop of Khalifeh's book. This turmoil still exists" (Koy 4).

There is no scope for naturalization or repatriation in the case of Palestinians since they are with the abject land forever in their lives as the words of Agamben echoes: "Israeli views every citizen as a political terrorist" (Agamben 92). The erasure of history and of people continues as it is observed: "As long as Jews try for homogenous national identities the space of Palestine would emanate micro levels of power resulting in controlling personal public and political spaces that affect even the most private aspects of life. Only in a world in which the spaces of state have been thus perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizens have been able to recognize the refugee that he or she- only in such a world is the political survival of home land today thinkable" (Agamben 95).

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