

Dichotomous Patterns of the Self-Perception in Palestinian – American Women Writing

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Abstract

The present paper aims to examine the dichotomous patterns of the self-perception as presented in the works of Palestinian –American women writers. By presenting the novel *West of Jordan* (2003) written by Laila Halaby, as a representative work of current Palestinian American women literature, I examine the dichotomous patterns of self-perception, and how the writer handles the theme of split identity. After providing a general description of the characteristic features and themes through which different Palestinian American writers articulate the themes of split identity, I will illustrate the novel's multiplied narrative views, characters, and narrators, focusing on the different Palestinians and Palestinian – Americans perceive irreconcilable Palestinian and American identities and realities.

Keywords: Female Individuality / Collective Identity / Palestinian-American Women Writers / Dichotomy / Split Identity

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the study of Palestinian female literature has become a topic of inquiry. Several studies on the poetic and thematic characteristics have been carried out. However, the study of the Palestinian women's literature in the United States as a branch of Palestinian literature is still in its early stages. To date, there has been no monographic study done, nor is there an outline detailing the emergence and development of the Palestinian – American women Literature. Thus, the character of the Palestinian – American women writing is still insufficiently explored, and many of its themes have not been adequately examined yet.ⁱ

The Palestinian –American literary works investigated in this article, as an example of Palestinian women literature in diaspora (in the Western World), perceive Palestinian and American identities as distinct contradictory sets of cultural, political and beliefs. The Palestinian American identity is portrayed through images of split existence, duality, broken selfhood, and double alienation (Majaj, 2001). Through these works, a variety of dichotomous patterns emerges: diaspora versus homeland, traditional versus modern, present versus past, present reality versus an imagined memory of the past, personal experience versus the collectiveⁱⁱ. They reflect the Palestinian sphere's rejection to the American reality, and various ways of dealing with the challenge of concepts of belonging and assimilation. Therefore, their narratives embody sense of tension and anxiety (Fessenden, 2010).

The loss of homeland, the shifting geographical location and dislocation, and the inability to return integrate these dichotomies with despair that comes with unacceptable personal and collective existenceⁱⁱⁱ. The unfriendly political context of the Palestinian – American relation, and the negative ethnic image of Palestinians in US, generated and deepen the sense of split between the two distinct sides of the self^{iv} (the Palestinian and the American). The dichotomous pattern of the self, as addressed in the literary works of the Palestinian - American women works, is accompanied by feelings of frustration and loss (See Majaj, Suhair L., Sunderman, W. ,Saliba, P. 2002)

Therefore, as one way to handle the complexity of alienation and loss, some writers try to create a sense of belonging to the same national community, they commit to a re- imagined collective memory^v. Because of its irrelevance to the present American reality, the memory of home^{vi} separates the two *parts* of Palestinians and American self instead of reconciling them, or creating and strengthening the notion of their Palestinian ethnic affiliation.

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Other writers try to handle the theme of split identity by establishing a median state in which Palestinian and American cultures are equally expressed and appreciated. However, the complexity of Palestinian and American duality, as expressed and explored by Palestinian - American women writers, is not resolved by this ideal state of duality. As a result, the median state of being neither completely Palestinian nor entirely American emerges, leading to confusing ethnic, national, and individual identification (Abedel-Razek,2007; Amal Talaat, 2007).

The present paper aims to examine the dichotomous patterns of the self-perception as presented in the works of Palestinian –American women writers. By presenting the novel *West of Jordan* (2003) written by Laila Halaby, I examine the dichotomous patterns of the self-perception as presented in the works of Palestinian – American women writers, and how they handle the theme of split identity. After providing a general description of the characteristic features and themes through which different Palestinian American writers handle and articulate the themes of split identity, I will specifically examine how Laila Halaby’s novel *West of Jordan* (2003) articulates themes of a dichotomous split identity. I will discuss the novel, stressing themes of split identity, focusing on the different Palestinians and Palestinian – Americans perceive irreconcilable Palestinian and American identities and realities.

2. Palestinian – American Women Writers: General Review

The complexities of self-perception is a prominent theme in the works of Palestinian - American women writers as Susan Muaddi Darraj (b. 1975), Laila Halaby (b. 1966), Kathyrine Abdul Baqi (b. 1952), and the poet, Naomi Shihab Nye (b.1952). The works of these writers express the stress resulted by the split vision, alienation, dual identities, and shattered lives. They situate this vision within the complexity of intersection discourses of Palestinian and American culture, politics, and ethnicity, when they attempt to prove their ethnic affiliation by establishing an ethnic collective memory or, in some cases, envisioning a situation in which they are both Palestinian and American.

In her novel *Ghost Songs: A Palestinian Love Story*,(2000) Kathyrine Abdul Baqi (b.1952) optimizes the state of dual alienation Palestinian American women writers experience. Abdul Baqi examines the cultural and racial issues that exist across American's ethnic life. She examines the ways in which racial and cultural concepts divide and define American and Palestinian societies. Through recognizable cultural markers, the novel implies the domestic inscription of Palestine into immigrant households: Palestinian food, names, and places.^{vii}

Palestinian American women writers usually perceive memory of their ethnic past in terms of characters that provoke stress, and negatively affect the writers’ relationships with their current realities (Hammer, 2001). Such characters are frequently portrayed as dead parent figures. The poetry written by *Naomi Shihab Nye* (2011) in particular, expresses repeated attempts of reconstructing and re- envisioning the historical and personal narratives of the first generation as a basis for their own current, personal definitions of identity. *Naomi Shihab Nye* in her Poem Collection *Transfer* (2011) argues that by remembering and identifying with the past of first generation, Palestinian – Americans will be able to establish their ethnic affiliation and national community, which would lead towards a more coherent self -definition. However, these inquiries eventually have led to a deeper sense of a split – self and an ambiguous identity.

The first generation of Palestinian- American writers, however, couldn’t consolidate their ethnic affiliation. The deep sense of despair and disappointment resulted from the failure to become completely “American” complicates their senses of belonging. At the same time, being separated from their homeland, unable them to claim the United States as their own country. As a result, their literature largely stress the complex definition of their national and individual identity.

Susan Muaddi Darraj (b. 1975), like the other women Palestinian-American writers, involved in reconstruction of a memory to overcome the ambiguities of the state of being. In her novel about four Palestinian American young women and their mothers, *The Inheritance of Exile* (2007), Darraj expresses a lot of past and current historical, cultural, and political information and events about the Palestinian Americans, either in their homeland or in America. She provides the reader with important information about the historic Palestine and Palestinians.

The shifting patterns of territorial location and dislocation, the cultural change and political alienation of the present reality, all perceive Palestinian and American experience as a dichotomous pattern of opposing past. Attempts to define national, ethnic, and gender belonging through reconstructed collective and personal memories only serve to increase the split. Having median states of being or cultural changes leads to uncertain definitions of identity, as seen in the works of the investigated Palestinian American.

3. “West of the Jordan”^{viii}: A Dichotomy of Self-Perception

Laila Halaby's novel *West of the Jordan* (2003) illuminates the pattern of dichotomy in the perception of Palestinian American identity. The novel attempts to reconcile the split vision of the self by reconstruction of a collective and personal memory or transition between cultures. Some characters within the novel try to resolve the dichotomy through envisioning a median state of being both Palestinian and American. Such visions, however, rather than assisting in the reconciliation of identity, as depicted in this novel, they serve to deepen the split of identity.

West of the Jordan examines the Palestinian diaspora and its resultant personal and collective implications; it describes the complicated, shattered lives of first, second, and third generations of Palestinian immigrants in the United States, focusing on their national, ethnic, and gendered struggle for identity.

West of the Jordan is mainly a story that takes place in two places: *Nawara*, the Palestinian village some of its people have left after 1948. Some of them immigrated to the United States. The character's movement, location, and dislocation between these two distant geographical places are heavily embodied with the cultural double alienation, cultural oppositions, and political complexities. These two geographical narrative spheres intensify the dichotomous patterns that *Laila Halaby* portrays as inherent to Palestinian American identity.

What complicates the dichotomy of home and exile in *West of the Jordan* is the existence of the third place *Jordan*. Some of the characters immigrate to Jordan, as testified in the novel. The cultural implications of such migration may be less dramatic than those of migrating to the United States (Al-Assadi, 2020). Jordan is a Middle Eastern Muslim country, represented in the novel as both Palestinian and Jordan village, remains, as opposing to America, as one cultural and political pole. However, the Palestinian immigrants to Jordan who were unable to return to their homes in *Nawara* define Jordan as exile.

Nonetheless, the larger dichotomy of Palestinian and American is still clear throughout the novel. Within these narrative poles—Palestinian and American—the stories of the first, second, and third generation are told. Palestinians in *Nawara* and *Jordan* tell their stories to establish national history and ethnic memory as a basis for personal identity. The stories of Palestinian Americans, depicted in the characters of Soraya, Khadija, their parents, immigrants grandparents, and cousins, along with the stories of Hala and Later Dhalia, prove how irrelevant the memory of national history preserved by Palestinians in *Nawara* is daily survival in the States. When Palestinian national history is remembered and enlivened in the context of the United States, conceptions of personal and ethnic identities and realities become more complicated. The existence of *Jordan* as a third place, not culturally far from the Palestinian village, complicates the notions of both home and exile within the novel *West of the Jordan*.

4. The Notion of Memory in Creating National Identity

Mawal—means a sad song—tells the story of the young Palestinian American woman who goes back home because she doesn't want to raise her children in a society where women are only 14 and boys shoot real guns at each other. She assumes the significance of culture and history in preserving national collective identity. However, while emphasizing the significance of remembering the Palestinian national history and the physical ties to the historic homeland—Palestine—as foundations of national identity, she creates a split between Palestinian and Palestinian American identity. Despite her desire for Palestinian Americans to recover their national past, she rejects being Palestinian Americans, it is not completely and "truly" Palestinian (See: Cooke, Miriam, 1990; Badran Margot, 1990). As a result, it's unclear whether the essentialist national narrative *Mawal* tells and maintains is still relevant to Palestinian Americans.

The Palestinian Americans that Khadija (illuminates religious conservatism and male angst in her story) and Soraya (represents the amoral waywardness of the U.S. and the conflicts over individuality and community in her story) represent in their narratives have other complex political and ethnic issues to deal with. The dichotomous structure of Palestinian American identity is strengthened by contrasting narrative perspectives and opposing national history to Palestinian American reality.

“because of what was happening all over the country,” *Mawal* tells the reader, in “the fifties and sixties there was a huge exodus of men who went abroad not just to become wealthy, but to survive” (Halaby, 2003, 98). In this section called “America” *Mawal* maintains: “*Nawara* could have a smaller version of herself in the United States, which is like an army calling all able-bodied young men away and then never returning the bodies” (Ibid, 15).

Mawal continues, “you would think our village was in love with America with all the people who have left, like America is the best relative in the world that everyone has to visit. America is more like a greedy neighbour who takes the best out of you and leaves you feeling empty. No matter what our difficulties, it is better here” (Ibid, 97). Mawal compares Palestinian fertility to selfishness in the United States.

From Halaby’s perspective the irreconcilable character of the two identities (Palestinian and American) come from a loss. Palestinian identity is defined by the loss of the land and Palestinians who immigrated to America, while Palestinian American identity is defined by the loss of the land as well as the loss of the dream they wished to fulfil in America. Mawal’s historical and national narrative serves in Halaby’s ideal vision as a substitution for this loss (about the historical and national narrative that serve as a substitution for the loss of homeland) see David, 2003; Majaj, 2001).

The narrative perspectives presented by narrators from both Nawara and US are in direct conflict with one another. The Palestinian and emigrant narrators tell the same story with opposing contents and messages. Mawal, Arab narrator who claim the role of cultural and historian preserver, states that “I know every one’s stories (Halaby, 2003, 16). However, when these stories about those who immigrated to America are told from the perspective of Soraya, the Arab American narrator, different dimensions of the stories are revealed.

Mawal, for example, tells the story of “Um Radwan,” her “nosy next door neighbour,” who “is one of those women who is grieving over being forgotten.” Her sons all have left to America. “One died, one doesn’t want to come back, and the other two come only every once in a while. They haven’t forgotten her completely, though, and whenever someone else is coming home, they send suitcases full of presents” (Ibid, 15- 6). Um Radwan tells Mawal about her son who is “far away living in Los Angeles where they have a new disaster every time I return on the television, but he is successful, a jeweller. A mother can be proud of a boy who owns his own store and lives in a house that overlooks the beach, even if he doesn’t bring her for a visit – but who would want to be troubled by such a journey anyway” (Ibid, 65). Here, in this context, Mawal’s story of immigration is the story of mothers who are proud of their successful sons in diaspora. These mothers in Mawal’s narrative symbolize the land.

When Soraya, the Palestinian American narrator, tells above story, she focuses on Walid, immigrant son (second generation), rather than on the mother, Um Radwan (first generation). In the novel, Palestinian and Palestinian American narratives of immigration are contradicted and opposed, constructed and deconstructed, showing a dichotomy between narratives and counter-narratives of Palestinian immigration history and the establishing a tense relationship between Palestinian and Palestinian American realities. The Palestinian and Palestinian emigrant narrators tell the same story with opposing contents and messages.

The narrator, Soraya (the Palestinian emigrant), in this story summarizes the history of Palestinian immigration to the US. From her own perspective, this history is not familiar to or acknowledged by Mawal (Palestinian narrator). Walid, according to Soraya’s narrative, started out as “Student Visa who made friends with America. He went to technical school, and now he repairs copy machines and pretty much works his ass off” neither his mother, Um Radwan’s son, as Soraya relates, “tries to avoid the Arab community because they are too expensive to be around.” He looks like a Mexican and has the tastes of a White Man. He feels protected around white people,” Yet, ironically, although Walid tries to pretend that he is white, one time he is hit and harassed in a bar because he was suspected of being a Mexican. He and Soraya shouted then, “we’re not Mexicans,” but that only makes the situation worse.

These stories of uncertainty and harassment are not known to Mawal and the Palestinian villagers, whose experience is that of occupation and abandonment. The story of Palestinian American, on the other hand, is that of alienation and racial prejudice.

5. The Dichotomy of Palestinian National History and American Reality

Mawal might have managed to establish a reliable historical narrative, or memory of the land of Palestine, as a mode of return. She is true to the codes of her tradition; she undermines the legitimacy of Palestinian migration to America and supports her tradition; she supports her narrative with the personal accounts of history provided and experienced by the first generation. This produces the effect of the past preserved and revitalized in the present, and establishes the right platform their return to the historic homeland, either physically, or within the narrative.

It might be expected that all the first generation of Palestinians and Palestinian immigrants to diaspora in general and US in particular should be the tellers – mostly orally - of Palestinian history and providers of true historical accounts (Howell, 2000; Majaj, 2001).

However, the picture of the oldest immigrants Halaby draws is in contrast to those who stayed in Nawara, and hardly affecting the life of second and third generation of Palestinian Americans. This proves that, when transferred to America, collective memory of the Palestinian historical past becomes less relevant.

In the section “Long Distance,” Khadija, a third generation Palestinian American, describes her grandfather (*Siddi*- father’s father) - a first generation Palestinian immigrant to America. “He is very old and sometimes smells of going to bathroom, but he tells us stories and pats our heads and sometimes gives us candies. He even says nice things to Baba for us, but it takes him some time to get the words out, and by then, my father loses his patience.” (Unlike the grandparents who still living in Nawarra, the grandfather in America is still unclear; the stories he tells are significant to his grandchildren). Khadija says “he tells us stories,” but ever remembers nor retells the contents of these stories. Not knowing Arabic, Khadija is also disconnected from her grandmother who is living in Nawara; “ I want to call Sitti and tell her that I’m sorry that I never met her,” she says, “ but Baba won’t let me stay on the phone, “ She won’t understand you anyway,” the father tells Khadija (Halaby, 2003, 192). As a third generation of Palestinian American, Khadija has no memory of a collective past, nor is familiar with the language articulating it.

Khadija disconnection from and ignorance of Palestinian history and language is as totally opposed to Mawal’s nostalgic discourse that longs for a world before 1948. Mawal warns against the split in the Palestinian peoplehood caused by the immigration. However, the geographic distance and inability of the third generation Palestinian Americans to speak Arabic render the collective memory she is advancing as an imaginary and irrelevant to American reality.

For Khadija, the Arab name she was given by her parents challenges her ability to claim a unified (American) identity. Their choice of this name suggests their desire to strengthen their daughter’s national and religious affiliation. “Khadija, in Islam, was the prophet Mohammad’s wife,” Khadija relates, “in America my name sounds like someone throwing up or falling off a bicycle. Usually they say Kadija, though , which sounds clattering clumsy. It never comes out my mother’s soft way; she makes it sound pretty. “I hate my name, “she admits. “Dying to have an American name”, or to have a “different Arabic name”(Ibid, 36). As expected, she has selected a western name (Diana), which represents a typical western manner of femininity.

Khadija surrounds herself with American friends. She wants to invite her friend Patsy to dinner at her home, “but there are things that an American wouldn’t understand, like my mother’s language or my father’s yelling. I invited Patsy over for the dinner anyway, but I hope Ma cooks American food because I don’t think Patsy and her blond hair like our food too much.” (Ibid, 114). That dinner invitation symbolizes a significant point for Khadija (self-identification) when she realizes “some people can’t hide which they are, can’t lie and paint a prettier picture, because who they are is smeared on their faces. I can’t pretend that I’m fourth – generation Italian –American because my hairs are too thick and my eyes dance too much. Losing a country is what makes your eyes dance, is what my uncle Haydar told me once. That works for him because he has lost his country” (Ibid, 115).

Although Khadija and her uncle belong to the same country of origin, the loss of a country is not relevant to her too. For Khadija, the Arab heritage represented by her name is a burden that she is obligated to carry. The heritage that the second and first generations have brought from the old country is strange for her. “ Even though we came from the same place , and I am from the grandfather who was his father,” Khadija maintains , “ I have been for too long with a father who wants to be too successful for my country to be lost” (Ibid, 114) Ironically enough, becoming Italian American means, for her, becoming more acceptably American. Having failed to become “Diana,” Khadija sees her attempt to pretend to be Italian American as a substitute for her Palestinians American identity. Italian American is not and far to be either Palestinian or American.

The father’s past and his unfulfilled dreams are only a burden to Khadija. The second generation represented by the father offers Khadija no additional connection to the tradition of the homeland. Khadija’s “father has many dreams that have been filled with sand. That what he tells “her”. “This country has taken my dreams that used to float, and you can’t even see what they are anymore”. Khadija, as a third generation, is harassed by her father’s paralysis and impotency. Tolerant of the cultural legacy he carries with him, she says, “I try to be understanding, but I with my father wouldn’t tell me these things. I feel empty and scared and have that stomach feeling like something awful will happen. Sometimes my father loves my mother – and the rest of us- so much that he becomes a kissing and a hugging machine. Sometimes, though, he is an angry machine that sees suspicious moves in every breath. But most of the time he is sad, his thoughts is somewhere I cannot visit.” The “scariest thing is; when he drinks” he practically abuses his family.

But when he is sober he explains, “My ache comes from losing a country is too painful, the collective memory carried by the second generation becomes a source of harassment to the third generation (Ibid, 37-39)

6. Conclusion

As discussed in *West of Jordan*, Palestinian women writing in United States articulates a personal and national need to create harmony in a reality where Palestinian and American cultural identities are received as dichotomous, as two oppositional entities. The attempts of the writers to imagine a collective and personal memory of the character's historic and national homeland fail to rectify the split self-identities they experience. This memory is presented in the investigated novel as irrelevant to the daily reality of the Palestinians in America, especially as women who admire and wish to be Americans. And, finally, the attempt to create a median state of being; result in profound senses of loss and alienation for the character.

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Notes

¹For further information see Jazmawi, D. (2018).

²Lisa Suhair Majaj, in her article: *On Writing and return Palestinian American Reflections* (2001), addresses the concept of “return” resulted by the land loss dichotomous applications. She situates the concept within several Palestinian – American contexts (the struggle for women's human rights ; writing by Palestinian– American women, whose literary responses to displacement offer new perspectives on exile and homecoming ; and personal reflections) as a means of collective identity re-construction.

³Maja (2001) argues that because Palestinian – Americans, like other Palestinians , are banned to return to their historical homeland , and hence to their own history, their literature in many ways chart an attempt to “return” through writing. Return to Palestine the homeland becomes a metaphor to return to the self – a return that occurs through language.

^{iv}Majaj argues that Palestinian - American writers write in the form of understanding the personal as political and the political as personal. (Majaj, 2001, p 115)

^vMajaj (2001) argues that homeland is one rooted in history and in imagination, grounded not just in the past, but also in the future

^{vi}Patterns of images and ways of memory – see Abdul-Baki, K. (1991)

^{vii}For more information about this pattern of memory see:

Kadi, Joanna (ed)(1994). **And** Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Words Under the Words*. The Eight Mountain Press: Portland, Oregon, 1995.

^{viii} Laila Halaby- *The West of Jordan*

The West of Jordan is a novel by Laila Halaby, an Arizona-based writer of Palestinian Jordanian writer. She was born in Beirut to a Palestinian father and an American mother. She grew up mostly in Arizona and traveled and lived for a certain time on the East and the West coasts, in the Midwest, and in Jordan and Italy. She has an undergraduate degree in Italian and Arabic and two master's degree in Arabic Literature and in Counseling. She currently works as an Outreach counselor for the University of Arizona's College of Public Health. She has written two novels, *West of Jordan* (winner of the PEN/Beyond Margins Award), and *Once in the Promised Land* (a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Authors selection; it was also named by the Washington Post as one of the 100 best works of fiction for 2007) and *My Name on His Tongue*. In her writing, Halaby focuses on a range of sociopolitical issues involving Arab American identity, civil liberties, racism, and xenophobia, and the effect of September 11, 2001 on America society.

Summary of the novel: West of Jordan

West of Jordan discusses four young women, all first cousins, who narrate the novel: each young woman represents a different cultural, historical, and economic situation. Although each narrator's personality is distinct, all the women share the presence of Palestine as a crucial source of their identity. *Hala* is arguably the novel's main protagonist; she has lived with her Uncle Hamdi and his American wife, Fay, for three years and she returns to Jordan to see her mother one last time before she dies. Her mother dies from cancer. She has two sisters, Tihani and Latifa, who take care of her family and the house chores, and one brother, Jalal. *Hala* has a close relationship with her mother. The narrator describes *Hala's* village Newara (flower), the way women wear embroidered dresses- *Rozas* or *Thobes* (Arabic word); she tells a lot about women meeting in her house with her mother whom they trust and tell their problems to, their loneliness, and their pain. Also, she tells a lot about the bad condition of the village, the small amount of body they have, and the rain and the mud, etc. *Hala* always tells about her parent's marriage. Her father is a Jordanian businessman (works with her grandfather and has properties in Ramallah) and her mother is a Palestinian.

Khadija, illuminates religious conservatism and male angst. She lives in the U.S. with her parents and little brother. Her father is a "religious" person who usually abuses her (he whips her, especially when she talks with a boy at school), shouts at her mother, drinks, and sometime forces her to drink. Through this story, tells about *Khadija's* pain, despair, suffering, and embarrassment. She loves her father but she can't bear his treatment and behavior. She feels bitty for him (her father doesn't have much success in the U.S., therefore, he is frustrated, and as a result, he treats his family cruelly. *Khadija* tells the reader about his beating her little brother and grandfather when her mother travelled to Palestine to see her dying mother).

Soraya (*Hala's* cousin), who lives in the U.S., represents the amoral waywardness of the U.S. and the conflicts over individuality and community. *Soraya* wants to live as an American but she also wants to represent as a Palestinian. She likes to dance. Her friend, *Ginna*, is of mixed background (Russian, Kurian, and Chinese). She is divorced woman living with her mother and her small daughter. *Soraya's* mother doesn't like *Ginna's* "loose" American behavior.

Soraya has a Muslim friend, *Walid*, who behaves and dresses like Americans. On Fridays, instead of going to Friday prayers, he spends time in a bar drinking. He dresses in a neat jacket like Mexicans. one day, while he is sitting with *Soraya* in the bar, talking in Arabic, one white American man tells him to talk in English, thinking that they are Mexicans. When *Walid* refuses to talk in English, the American starts to beat him, *Soraya* feels angry, wishing *Walid* could beat the American and teach him a lesson, especially when they have heard the police respond (they are luckier to be considered Mexicans than Palestinians).

Mawal is a metaphorical anchor, the culturally grounded, responsible keeper of stories. She writes three stories told by three taxi passengers (she has heard these stories on her way to Jerusalem on her summer visit). A Palestinian American man tells about his children, his ex-American wife who has refused to raise her children with *Patroleos* (what Arabs are called). Now he is married to a young Palestinian woman. *Farah*, a young divorced woman with four children, is returning to *Jineen* to live with her children.

Mawal also tells the story of the young Palestinian American woman who goes back home because she doesn't want to raise her children in a society where women are only 14 and boys shoot real guns at each other. Also, *Mawal* tells the story of *Umm Khalid*, whose husband and two sons were killed in a car explosion, and who had an affair with the village butcher, *Abu Jaafer*. She also tells the story of *Umm Radwan*, whose son lives in Los Angeles, and her own story when she was young (the bike story her uncle brought her from U.S. and what happened to her friend *Hanan* when they rode it down the hill- they fell and *Hanan* was injured and lost her virginity. Her mother wrapped up her pants for her future husband. *Hanan* never got married). Then there is the story of *Shahira* (*Khadija's* mother) when she went back to *Nawara* to see her dying mother, and finally the story of a young Palestinian man who was chased by Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem and hidden by a woman in soapy water.