

## Negation of Place in the Poetry of Palestinian Women

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**Abstract**

This article aims to clarify both the function of the negation of place in the poetry of Palestinian women and the feminist thought that this negation generates. For these purposes, it presents “Nuṣūṣ al-makān” [Texts of Place] in the collection *Khārij al-Fuṣūl Ta‘allamtu al-Tayarān* [Out of the Seasons I Learned to Fly] (Hlewa, 2016) by Shikha Hilwā (born 1968).

Criticizing one’s place and leaving it reflects a determination to achieve a specific goal. When talking about the Palestinian Arab woman, it appears that she is in two places; one is the patriarchal society around her, and the second is being part of a national minority in a broader society. The process of leaving one’s place is more complex for her than for her male counterparts; the risk of her leaving her place is two-fold because there is a greater lack of security and confidence in reaching a safe place where her dreams can be realized.

Leaving her place means opening her mind to even broader aspects than either her society or culture dictates. These broader aspects include the search for what is suitable for women and what enables them to grow as full human beings, using all their faculties and actualizing all their dreams.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A distinction must first be made between “place,” which constitutes the immediate environment of a person, and “spatial space,” which represents the space occupied by a body in a place (Casey, 2001, p. 683). This distinction between the two terms is important because the first relates to the speaker/narrator in the literary text and his/her private thoughts. In contrast, the second represents a more generalized matter that is not necessarily personal. Place is one of the elements that make up a person's sense of self, and there is no “self” without “place.” When the place is in chaos, for various reasons, the self turns into a scattered self (Casey, 2001, p. 684).

Places are more than geographical places; they are social and cultural structures encoded through processes formed by an individual or collective memory. They also include many variables, such as knowledge, social values, norms, political conditions, interests, and biographical data. These variables are dynamic, heterogeneous, and occasionally conflicting. Therefore, memory is evidence of the needs and aspirations of the act of remembering and is not a true documentation of the past (Tramontini, 2016). For this reason, in literary works, we find that place is mentioned as one of the basic things that build the identity of the characters and determine their position and behaviour (Bieger, 2015, p.20). In addition, the human experience of place is based on sensations that change along with individuals. Human experiences with place are subjective and not fixed; place changes with circumstances. The

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concept of place is also related to the concept of freedom because commitment to a place limits the individual's freedom because his movement within that specific place might be limited (Noorani, 2016, p. 16, 18; Bachelard, 1994, p. 5). From here, a conflict arises within conservative societies between the desire for self-liberation and adherence to societal customs. Loyalty to the land where one grew up is also an issue of upright, moral behaviour in these societies (Gruendler, 2016, p. 2).

The place fulfils an emotional need for the poet (Gruendler, 2016, p. 6), and this is why many researchers call for understanding a place, not by its geography, but through deep belief in the poetics of poetry and the meanings that emanate from that poetry as revelatory about self, feeling and memory (Al-Fīfi, 2014, p. 40-41).

Place, in the heritage of Arabs, occupies an important position. This can be seen in early Arab poetry, which speaks about the traditional beginning of the classic poem as standing on “ruins.” There the poet stands in front of these ruins of the past, which cause him to suffer a depressing psychological state while he displays his nostalgia for that past and recalls his memories (Stetkevych, 1993, p. 24-25, 50, 54, 103; Sells, 2009, p. 207).

Despite this, in many literary texts in which a fixed place and safe space appear, we find a negation of both place and its function. Exiting from a place means abandoning real facts to make room for imagination and dreams (Bachelard, 1994, p. 45). This abandonment of reality allows one to flourish materially and intellectually (Gruendler, 2016, p. 19), just as leaving a place is a way out of despair and into life (Milich, 2016, p. 115).

Hence, for women writers in conservative Palestinian Arab society, abandoning their place means abandoning the role that society has defined for women over many years. It means liberating women from that role and consequently being subject to criticism, even to the extent of being isolated and leaving one's roots (Gruendler, 2016, p. 22). In this society, not only are women weaker than men through these pre-ordained roles, but women's places within the national minority lead to internal societal aggression because of the confusion that arises from the concept of identity and belonging and the external aggression that surrounds general Palestinian society (Milich, 2016, p. 116). Therefore, women feel exiled within their homeland (Attar, 2016, p. 160). This conflict emerges between the desire for liberation and releases from the emotional spatial constraint along with an unknown road map and an unknown and ambiguous successful resolution.

For this reason, the literary texts of Palestinian women are considered examples of feminist texts that tend to violate the norms imposed by society (Taha, 2007, p. 213). They exist apart from the framework of a conventional place and exemplify the search for a place where women feel belonging. This mirrors the ongoing debate between losing a home and searching for a new one. During this search, the author establishes language as a tool for constructing a compensatory space (Milich, 2016, p. 117, 131).

One of the examples of these revolutionary texts is a section from the collection *Khārij al-Fuṣūl Ta'allamtu al-Ṭayarān* by Shīkha Ḥilīwā. Ḥilīwā's autobiographical accounts in this collection recall personal experiences and memories from the past but do so in a literary and anecdotal style.

## **2. The collection *Khārij al-Fuṣūl Ta'allamtu al-Ṭayarān***

Before analyzing the title of the collection and its relationship to the poems contained within, it is necessary to define its literary genre. After reading the first of its five parts, entitled “Texts of the Place,” one can see a clear mix of literary genres. On the one hand, what first appears to

be prose can not be attributed to any prose literary genre. Indeed, the meanings and styles transcend several genres. For example, the short story genre does not adequately account for a turbulent, ambiguous and dispersed narrative. The flash prose genre is not appropriate because it does not leave the text in a specific framework. Furthermore, although the language approaches the poetic, its ideas, characters, and form sometimes draw the text into prose.

In these texts, there is a simultaneous attraction and dissonance that characterizes the prose poem. However, the nature of a prose poem is difficult to define due to the multiplicity of its forms and the extent of its ambiguities.

Since the sixties and seventies, the prose poem has been a stark model of rebellion and, over time, has become widespread in our current literary texts (Fakhreddine, 2021, p. 147). It is a natural choice that allows freedom to express new ideas and questions without destroying well-known poetic standards regarding content, form and meter (Fakhreddine, 2021, p. 148). Since the difference between prose and poetry in the Arab literary heritage has waned (Moreh, 1988, p. 1), poetry has become an expression of a vision that depicts reality in a subjective manner that is far from ordinary or stereotypical. It is an individual and subjective destination, stemming from human experience and differing from one person to another (Al-Ghazālī, 2007, p. 189).<sup>1</sup> However, contrary to what one might have thought, the prose poem is considered to be one of the most difficult literary genres to follow because it must maintain balance and depth in presenting ideas while writing what is “invisible” from between the lines (Fakhreddine, 2016, p. 255).

The title of this collection is shocking for the reader because it represents a place and its simultaneous negation. The word “out” has an opposing spatial connotation, as “being outside a place,” and suggests not belonging to a place. The “out” indicates freedom from the limits implied by “in” and freedom from the laws that govern a place. In addition, adding the word “out” to the word “seasons” has many possible meanings because seasons are a temporal expression now linked with a spatial one. This suggests a desire to be free from all material constraints that sometimes direct an individual to a specific destination without that person being able to choose. Thus the text reflects a state of rebellion reinforced by the continuation of the sentence: “I learned to fly.” Flight is a superhuman ability; humans do not possess it by nature. Flying symbolizes freedom and the launch into an infinite sky without borders. It signifies a departure from the spatial and temporal framework that limits women's movements and progress in life. Thus it enables her to set out towards achieving her goals and dreams.

When browsing through this collection, which in its very title declares rebellion early on, we find that poems in the collection are divided into five different themes/headings: “Texts of Place,” “Texts of Women,” “Texts of Writing,” “Texts of Self” and “Texts of Family”. Despite some textual overlapping, the reason for this division is the importance of understanding a place’s components to comprehend the collection’s overall picture. These titles, despite their different topics, are central topics for women. The axes presented in the classification of poems are themes of rebellion against the place, gender, customary writing, self and family. Women in different places write about themselves and their families as linked to specific places indicating a lack of control over one’s place of birth or affiliation. This writing is also extended to include a woman’s family because her family is such an important aspect of defining a woman’s self.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite what was mentioned, the majority of critics, scholars and writers of the prose poem do not deny that modern literature is nothing but an extension of the old, regardless of Western and foreign influences (Snir, 2001, p. 60-64).

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The current article focuses on the “Texts of Place” in the collection to explain the crisis of place that has led to rebellion and the negation of place in various forms. This section contains 23 texts, each titled concerning a place. The study is divided into six sections/types of places: *Places of Belonging*, *Places in Nature*, *Public Places*, *Foreign Places*, *Service Places*, and *Parts of Places*. This separation between the types of place is formal, as all texts are, specific and subjective in their meanings. However, some titles seem to generalize a given space and have specific references. This is due to two reasons. The first is the location of these texts in the collection among a group of texts concerned with the place from a specific point of view. Secondly, the poems’ ideas relate to each other, thus forming a single point of view towards the place.

### 3. Places of Belonging

Three texts fall under this category: “*Waṭan*” [homeland], “*Waṭan (marra thāniya)*” [homeland (again)], and “*Qaryatī*” [my village].

In the text “*Waṭan*,” the speaker begins her speech about her homeland with the following sentence:

كنتُ صغيرة جداً. لم يجتهد أحد من حولي كي يحدثني عن الوطن. (Hlewa, 2016, p. 9)  
[I was very young. No one around me tried to tell me about a homeland].<sup>2</sup>

It appears that those around this speaker, including the family and the influential characters in her life, dealt with the concept of the homeland as if it was implicitly understood; it did not need to be explained or defined. Therefore, as a child, the speaker understood incorrect things about her homeland. For a long time, for example, she thought that the nylon bag tied around her and other children’s shoes prevented mud from getting into them. At first glance, the description seems childish, as the girl believes that her homeland protects her from the road dirt. When we contemplate the significance of the image, however, we find that it transcends the literal meaning. This child believes that the homeland protects people from all bad things that can pollute and hinder their lives. It is what makes the child move steadily towards a clean and good future. Her gradual understanding that her childish belief is also untrue renders an adult who no longer believes in this definition of a homeland.

This more mature version of the meaning of a homeland also appears in the text “*Waṭan (marra thāniya)*”. Here we find the speaker moving to a presentation of her ideas about the homeland after she has grown up. She begins her text with these words:

هذا الوطنُ يا سيّدي يحتاج قدحاً من حليب أمّ فاسد وهي فاضلة جداً.  
وصعلوكاً يروي قصّة الذئب الذي أكلته ليلي وبصقت فروته.

...

هذا الوطن يتوسّلُ قيامهً وبعثاً وقيامهً ولا بعث. (Hlewa, 2016, p. 10)  
[This homeland, sir, needs a mug of spoiled mother’s milk, and she is very virtuous. A tramp tells the story of the wolf that Laylā [Little Red Riding Hood] ate and whose fur she spit out.

...

This homeland is begging for doomsday and resurrection and doomsday without resurrection].

<sup>2</sup> The translations of all the poems in this article are my own.

This is a strange description of the homeland and its diagnosis. This homeland, whose origin (mother) is virtuous and good, needs to drink spoiled milk. It needs a tramp to concoct false stories about it instead of real ones. This homeland wishes for contradictory things. It wants doomsday but hesitates between wishing and not wishing to be resurrected afterwards. The speaker intervenes with her opinion:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 10) هو لا يحتاج سوى أن يموت ويُبعثَ ميِّتاً من جديد.  
[He just needs to die and be resurrected dead].

Once again, we are faced with a strange image. She wishes the homeland to die, meaning that doomsday will actually happen, but she strangely wishes for a dead resurrection; resurrections, after all, generally imply a return to life. She does not want this homeland to return in any way, for it is satisfied with its death. With both the first death and the subsequent resurrected death, all the discordant images and the corrupt reality of the homeland die.

We understand that the speaker does not look at the past as one who is waiting to find a “lost paradise.” What was good in the past is no longer valid today. Life continues, and instead of taking what was in the past as it was, this past must be reshaped to fit the present. The past might have had both truth and purity at one time, but that period no longer exists and has been overtaken by corruption that has spread throughout the homeland. Truth has been replaced, and whoever can survive and live with the current reality must have even “impure” tools that help him face the current corrupt reality.

In the text “*Qaryatī*,” the speaker makes her personal experience an example of immunity from fear and nostalgia. This is combined with her unwillingness to return:

منذ سقطت قريتي التي كنتُ أمقتها كسائقي الشاحنات الصَّبَاحِيَّة لم يعد يخيفني سقوط المدن.

....

ما زلت لا أطيق سائقي الشاحنات الصَّبَاحِيَّة غير أنني أرى في منامي ربيع قريتي لا يشبهه أي ربيع.  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 15)

[Since the fall of my village, which I hated as morning truck drivers, I no longer fear the fall of cities.

...

I still cannot stand the morning truck drivers, but I see in my sleep the spring of my village, unlike any spring].

The speaker's experience of losing her small village through the displacement of its residents fortifies herself against the fall of large cities and makes her strong in the face of life's problems. The speaker hated her village, similar to her hatred of morning truck drivers. Yet, it seems that the experience of displacement was enough to erase this hatred. She now sees solutions in nostalgia for the village's spring, which she views as special and different in its beauty from spring in any other place.

It should be noted that her hatred of morning truck drivers is permanent, but her hatred of her village seems based on the despised conditions under which she lived in her village. This hatred, unlike that directed at the truck drivers, dissipated as the only image of the village that remains is one that focuses selectively on the best aspects of the village.

The texts of this section clarify the speaker's anger at her homeland and place of belonging while still displaying nostalgia for it - especially in light of her presence in her land, which remains under the control of others and deprives her of the freedom to dispose of it. She was forced to leave without a choice, and it is not possible to know what would have happened and whether she would have stayed there, because this option was not available to her.

#### 4. Places in Nature

Three texts fall under this category: “*Nahr*” [river], “*Nahr (marra thāniya)*” [river (again)], “*Al-nahr dhātuh*” [the river itself].

The text of “*Nahr*” begins by mentioning all the things about the river in her village that do not concern her: its name, location, and surroundings. In the context of the poem, we read the following sentence:

لا تعنيني القرية اليهودية التي وراء النهر (كنت أكره أضواءها الساطعة ليلاً). Hlewa, 2016, p. 11  
[I do not care about the Jewish village beyond the river (I hated its bright lights at night)]

The mention of the Jewish village beyond the river jolts us because it indicates the duality of her feelings of oppression both within patriarchal Arab society on the one hand and within the country's ethnic Arab minority on the other. Describing the hatred of the bright lights of the Jewish village at night refers to the darkness of the speaker's village and the unequal conditions of life, even insofar as the presence of electricity.

The end of the text, however, shocks us with its sudden assertion of what does matter to her:

يعنيني أن أتذكر لماذا كنت مرة سأغرق فيه؟  
(ولماذا لم أغرق؟) Hlewa, 2016, p. 11  
[I do care to remember: why was I once going to drown in it?  
Why did not I drown?]

She is interested in her seemingly distant personal experience with this river. She finds it difficult to remember an incident during which she almost drowned in the river but yet she does not know what saved her.

The river seems to be a demarcation line, a place she cannot cross to get out of her village. We understand from the drowning incident that she does not find it an obstacle to her leaving. But the true question, “Why did not I drown?” implies that she really did want to drown. She did not want to survive, not for the sake of dying, but to get out of her village's confined place.

The next text, “*Nahr (marra thāniya)*”, supports this understanding. In it, she views the river as the boundary between “here” and “there”:

كلهم يرتاحون لل(هنا) وأنا أحلم بال(هناك). Hlewa, 2016, p. 12  
[They all find rest in (here), and I dream of (there)]

This is not a text with multiple poetic interpretations. Rather, it is a statement highlighting her longing to be rid of her place and go to another place where her presently confined self will be free to realize her dreams. This dreamy soul is like a fish whose longing and ambitions push it to do the impossible:

... يحمل أسماكًا تمشي فوق الماء  
(حين تموت تنام فوق الماء). Hlewa, 2016, p. 12  
[...Carrying fish walking on water  
When it dies, it sleeps on water]

The speaker is like a fish. Even if a fish cannot fulfil its wishes or circumstances prevent it from achieving them, it will attempt to leave “here” even if it does not reach “there”. It will remain on the borderline between its permanent place and its dreams; it will sleep silently on the water despite the death of its dreams. The sacrifice is worthwhile for the speaker

because, despite the odds, even trying to cross the river gets her one step closer to fulfilling her goals.

She adds:

...العبور للهناك لم يكن يحتاج ختمًا عشائريًا أو يدًا ذكورية تقصم ظهرهك وهي تسحبك لك هناك المجنون.  
النهر غير المناسب لا يغوي الطفلات.  
بعبرنه بسلام.

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 13) ويضحكن.

[...Going over there did not need a clan seal or a male hand smashing your back while it was dragging you to the craziness there.

The non-flowing river does not tempt girls.

They pass it peacefully.

And they laugh].

Instead of dwelling on the dangers and difficulty of moving from here to there, the speaker negates the need for either a permit to cross the river or for a man to accompany her. She calls the place crazy because it contains adventure, which is different from everything she has known until the present. Unlike the nature of rivers, this river, which does not flow, facilitates crossing. It does not tempt innocent girls to stop during the crossing so that they can cross safely without obstacles. They also laugh in the process, expressing their bodies' safety after crossing and the peace and happiness of their souls. That indicates that the barrier that prevents women from crossing the river is a psychological one built by society over many years. The crossing of the girls is safe but not permanent. They inevitably return because the place has viewed their dreams as childish. The real danger befalls those who intend to leave forever. They do not do so temporarily with societal approval but rather do so to fulfil their dreams. We see a reflection of this in the text "*Al-nahr dhātuh*":

... ولو كانت أعين الرجال في عائلتي مغمضة في النهار. أقول لو.  
كنت حتما سأحزم بعض الأحلام والأكاذيب وأقنع خالتي الصغرى بأن النهر ليس بحرا ونسرق القارب ليوم واحد فقط.

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 14) كانت هي ستتولى موضوع الخوف وأنا سأتولى تسيير القارب وتأليف الحجج بعد العودة.

[...If the men in my family had their eyes closed during the day. I say if.

I would definitely pack up some dreams and lies, convince my younger aunt that the river is not a sea, and steal the boat for just one day.

She would take care of the fear, and I would take over steering the boat and makeup excuses after I got back.]

The event presented in the above text does not materialize due to the presence of the word "if." This suggests that the eyes of the family men were never closed during the day. At night, the speaker can dream while she is sleeping, but she wants to leave her place while awake. This cannot be achieved due to the control of the family's men. She cannot deceive them with some lies and leave to achieve some of her dreams outside the river borderline of the village. The aunt seems to have become a co-conspirator in this desire. The speaker's confidence appears in her ability to convince the aunt to participate in the adventure by not fearing the small river; this river, after all, does not require much effort to cross and therefore is much less risky.

The speaker is also confident that she will be able to steer the boat towards her dreams and that her aunt's fears will dissipate. However, in the end, we see that her return is certain. This suggests that the courage to leave a place is incomplete and that audacity and curiosity exist only temporarily. The speaker has no ability to face the consequences of leaving the place forever if she wants to examine beyond the borders and yet still leave open the possibility of returning safely.

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The river in these texts represents the boundary between reality and dreams. Crossing over this boundary does not carry definite results but leaves hesitation, confusion, and the inability to take a final decision.

#### 5. Public Places

Four texts fall into this category: “*Maq‘ad khashabī*” [wooden bench], “*Jisr*” [bridge], “*Shāri‘ nā‘im*” [sleeping street], and “*Shāri‘ ‘Ispinūza*” [Espinosa Street].

The text “*Maq‘ad khashabī*” begins with a description of the municipality’s removal of a seat from the public park and the nearby crying of an old man and a tree. It is as if these old people/things are fixed in place and have no ability to leave. In this text there is a description of the tree as if it were a mother leaning on both a seat and on other things in this park. Then comes the sentence to clarify that this tree is not the mother of this seat, even though it is made of wood. There is sympathy and sadness not because this seat is part of or stems from this tree. As for the old man, this describes one of the three times he has cried. The importance of the seat for him is described by the following sentences:

اليوم كان سيبير لمقعده الجميل أنّ الحياة خدعة كبيرة.  
بكي العجوز.  
هو حين عرف ذلك لن يجد من يسمعه سوى شجرة.  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 26)

[Today, he whispered a secret to his beautiful seat: “Life is a big trick.”

The old man cried.

When he knew this, he [knew that he] would find no one to hear him but a tree,  
A sad and bereaved tree].

This place seems to be the repository of secrets for the old man who has only recently discovered that life is dishonest and a great hoax. That it has taken this old man a lifetime to draw this lesson is shocking and points to the absurdity of life, and all that accompanies it. With this pessimistic view and the need for someone to be supportive, he has only found a sad and bereaved tree that has lost the seat and was like its son who accompanied it for a long time. When a sad person hears another sad concern, however, he may not be able to console him or reduce the intensity of sadness and pessimism.

In the text “*Jisr*,” the speaker expresses her desire to leave her place:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 30)

[I wish a glass bridge would suddenly spring up between start and end].

She hopes for the appearance of a bridge of glass, transparent and invisible, that will transport her from her current place to her place of dreams, departure and freedom. Then, she says, she will walk barefooted on the bridge twice. The first time is to test the sincerity of bridges; will this bridge help her cross calmly so that she may realize her intentions, or is the bridge assisting her while hiding goals and intentions that would offend her? The second walk on the bridge is to test the potential “scratch” places that could injure her feet. Once again, she is testing her ability to contain her slips without causing hurt, the ensuing responses to pain, the reactions to new realities and the ability to accept mistakes. This is important because when she leaves her current place, her safety zone, she will not be able to return. She must be confident in finding a sure opportunity to start and build a better reality in her new place. But it is not easy to achieve this.

As for the result of this virtual crossing, a “faint dress of sadness” hangs behind her. Her sadness may be from her leaving her place and the nostalgia for it. This sadness is faint because she wants to continue forward towards her dreams. Her society may be sad about what she has



done and left the only place society deems open to her. It is also a faint sadness because her anger is greater:

...حكاية مشطورة إلى وجهين  
وسرُّ تداعت جدرائه  
فسقط معشياً

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 30).  
[...A tale divided into two sides  
and a secret whose walls crumbled  
falls unconscious  
on me].

The community tells the story of this speaker and her leaving her place in its own way. In anger, the community considers her leaving her place as a betrayal of societal heritage; she, however, views it as a new beginning that allows her to move forward and set out.

After she leaves her place, she no longer needs to hide, as she has followed her hidden dreams. The walls of the secret fall unconscious over the speaker as a sign of the intense anger that followed her departure.

In the text “*Shāri ‘ nā’im*,” the fate of the remaining women is determined by location. The street is softer at night and more bearable for what happens; this may be because it is tired of following everything that happens during the day or perhaps because the dreams hidden in darkness are as yet unimplemented:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 33).  
[And it softens even more when a woman bows down, taking her fallen heart with  
two apples and a rose].

The apple is a symbol of sin, and the rose is a symbol of dreams. Dreams outside the place's framework are forbidden, which is why the woman who is robbed of her dreams for a moment hurries to retrieve her heart. She does not want her heart to chase these dreams and drag her down because of them; this is irrespective of whether it is because of her inability to change reality or to follow an audacious pursuit of her dreams that society deems illegal.

The street follows an old woman with a bent back who puts empty bottles in her basket. The street expects to see the old woman's heart fall in line behind the societally-approved dream like the rest of the women, but this does not happen:

ينام الشارع وامرأة بظهر محنيّ تعود إلى بيتها بسلة عامرة بزجاجات فارغة  
وقلب ميّت. (Hlewa, 2016, p. 33)

[The street sleeps, and a woman with a bent back returns to her home with a basket  
full of empty bottles  
and a dead heart].

This old woman's heart is dead because she has spent her life collecting empty bottles. She is devoid of her dreams and what fills herself with contentment. Her heart has died because it no longer feels or follows her dreams.

This comparison between the women whose hearts have fallen and the old woman suggests a bleak atmosphere devoid of hope. No matter how much these women dream, their lives are empty of meaning and feeling because they do not seek to change their reality.

In the text “*Shāri ‘ Ispinūza*,” the struggle within the woman appears as a double-edged sword: being a woman within a patriarchal society and being an Arab woman as an ethnic minority.

The indication from the beginning of the text that this is the name of the street mentioned in the municipality tax lists is a hidden indication that the name has been rejected and replaced by its original name.

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Although the woman who lives on first street pays her taxes before her due date, she stammers and demonstrates her shame for two names: the name of the street and the name of her late husband:

( ) Hlewa, 2016, p. 34( الأُول، تهمس لجارتها، يشبه الشَّتِيمة. والثَّاني يشبه الوجع. )

[The first, she whispers to her neighbour, like an insult. The second is like pain.]

This woman feels that the names are alien to her. It is an insult, and she indicates her distaste for it. She is not accustomed to it and, consequently, is unfamiliar with this occupation and the accompanying psychological struggle. Similarly, her late husband stutters his name, indicating a kindred pain. This memory of his overpowers her, making her feel ashamed. She feels pain because of the torment and emasculation he has dealt with all his life.

### 6. Foreign Places

Three texts fall into this category: “*Jūrjiā*” [Georgia], “*Ma ‘bad*” [temple], “*Maṭār*” [airport]. The text “*Jūrjiā*” begins as follows:

حينما أصل إلى سنّ المعاش القانوني قبل أن تُلَقَّ لي المخابرات تهمة التَّحرّش بالوطن غير الموجود والتَّأمر  
على نصوصٍ معدّة بعناية لتَهريب الفكر من مسامِّ البطن...

( ) Hlewa, 2016, p. 16( إذا وصلتُ إلى سنّ المعاش وأبقت الحكومة على معاشي... )

[When I reach the legal retirement age before the intelligence services frame me for harassing the non-existent homeland and conspiring against carefully prepared texts to smuggle thought from the pores of the stomach...

If I reach retirement age and the government keeps my pension...]

The speaker begins to imagine what she will do after her retirement. She doubts that time will arrive without her being held accountable for expressing her political views even though these thoughts emanate from the “pores of the stomach;” this means that her political expression is only mentioned indirectly and needs to be analyzed thought about to extract meaning. She is in a place that does not tolerate freedom of expression, even when speaking about a stolen homeland that no longer exists except in memory and occasional lapses into nostalgia. This speaker’s plans rely on two conditions: the first is that she lives until retirement age and the second is that the government not punish her for her texts and ideas by taking away from her the retirement pension needed to realize her plans. In her eagerness to leave the country, the speaker plans to travel with nine other women to Georgia, a place she knows nothing about and whose only attraction is its name. Number nine is a mystical number considering it is composed of three times three, three being the sign of perfection. Three threes indicate the number of months of pregnancy for a woman and which results in a new life being brought forward. Going abroad with nine women to a place with a name is as if the meeting between her dreams and their realization is finally complete.

The poem ends with the speaker’s schemes as follows:

في جورجيا التي لا أعرفها لن أوهم نفسي أنني في الأربعين.  
سأجعل من الستّين فرحًا مؤقتًا قبل أوّل عمليّة تجميل أجريها.  
( ) Hlewa, 2016, p. 17( قد أكون عندها أفرغتُ كلَّ أسراري وخسرتُ أصدقائي الأتقياء. )

[In Georgia, which I do not know, I will not delude myself that I am forty.

I will make sixty a temporary joy before my first plastic surgery.

I probably will have emptied all my secrets and lost my godly friends.]

The speaker plans to be her true self in Georgia, both with others and alone. This truth and the liberty to be who she is will give her joy from contentment and a feeling of freedom. However, the joy will be temporary despite this because returning home is inevitable. Once returning to her place, she will perform her first cosmetic surgery; this means that she will hide the reality of what she feels and thinks about in public by superficially beautifying that reality. Furthermore, she will be unafraid to bear the consequences of returning to the false and misleading image for the sake of others. However, she thinks she might be too late by then, for she will probably have emptied all her secrets and shown what she thinks, losing all her

religious (“godly”) friends in the process. There is a certain irony in the word “godly,” because it seems that she does not really believe that they are godly; however, they, too, like the speaker, put on a good show while harbouring many shocking thoughts and secrets.

In the text “*Ma’bad*,” the speaker describes a scene of children drawing amazing deities on the temple floor. These children and this temple are located on the highest plateau in the world, the Tibetan Plateau.

Life there is known for its simplicity. This is shown in the text by the tools used for drawing and the time the children spend drawing and praying in the temple. Children use ten colours to draw the deity, about their differences concerning their understanding of this deity.

After this effort and work, the children clean the temple's floor, and there is no paint left. The monk says to them:

الله في التفاصيل لا في العمل المنتهي. غداً تبحثون عنه مرة أخرى.  
في الليل قبل النوم يحصي الأطفال كل الألوان التي يعرفونها استعداداً لمسيرة البحث "عن إله ملون."  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 18)

[God is in the details, not in the finished work. Tomorrow you will look for Him again.]

At night, before they sleep, the children count all the colours they know in preparation for the search for a “coloured god.”]

The freedom to search for a god in all the colours that children know reflects an understanding that everyone sees things from his own perspective. In this case, it is a god who accepts everyone. This freedom of divergent views does not seem to exist in the speaker's lived reality, and her presentation of it is actually a criticism of the speaker's reality.

The view of the monk that God and his reality are present in the details and not in the completed work is a view that calls for the enjoyment and contemplation of the details of life as well as the merits of living and not being satisfied with the result. The children dream of finding a colourful god that contains all the colours they know and is in the most beautiful form of heart and mind. It is a god they accept and love themselves and a god who accepts and loves them all. Perhaps this is a reference to the society in which some of its members confine their god and his love to a certain group rather than others. The creation of a “god of one colour” who accepts one group without the other in an absurd struggle between the different religious communities over the correctness of one's approach over another's.

The text “*Maṭār*” begins as follows:

طائرة تنقل كذباً مُحتملاً وطائرة محمّلة بكتاب قيد التّحليق.  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 19)

[A plane carrying a possible lie and a plane carrying a book are in flight.]

Landing in bare cities. Not promiscuous as we think.]

The text begins by talking about two planes, one carrying a possible lie and the other carrying a book. Lying may refer to the beliefs and information that travellers have internalized from their communities without examining them or forming their own opinions. The book may reference the information that travellers carry with them from their own places. Traveling has two perspectives. The first either denies or proves the truth of the information regarding the destination in people's minds, and the second allows a traveller to learn about a new civilization.

This poem invites its readers to investigate and explore another place without relying on preconceptions or rumours. The two planes land in cities described as naked, meaning they are exposed and open to exploration.

But this discovery of the truth requires daring:

طائرة تعود وطائرة تأتي ولا تسقط في البحر إلا تلك التي بلا قلب. (Hlewa, 2016, p. 19)

[A plane returns, and a plane comes and does not fall into the sea, except for the heartless.]

Whoever wants to see the truth must leave his place constantly. He must leave his safe and known space and search for the truth himself. He, who is not bold, never reaches his goal; he drowns in a sea of doubts and possibilities and is forced to accept what he is told.

## 7. Service Places

Five poems fall into this category: “*Bayt al-jamāl*” [House of Beauty], “*Maqhā Sūzānā*” [Susanna's Cafe], “*Maqhā (laysa maqhā Sūzānā)*” [Cafe (not Susanna's Cafe)], “*Matjar*” [Shop] and “*Sūpir mārkit*” [Supermarket].

In the text “*Bayt al-jamāl*,” the adornment and concealment of original features is noted to be both false and fleeting. This place does not beautify souls; in fact, it destroys them without ever even acknowledging their existence of souls. Outward beauty is the foundation on which this place is built. This beautification is not for the sake of the client but mainly for the sake of the husband, even if he has abused her:

تلك التي ضربها زوجها أمس صالحها على رزمة جمال تتأبطها اليوم وتتمتع بها حتى فورة الغضب القادمة  
(أو تبتهت الألوان ويذول سحر الجمال المعذب). Hlewa, 2016, p. 21

[The one who was beaten by her husband yesterday is reconciled with him because of a bundle of beauty that she wears today and enjoys until the next outburst of anger or the colour fades and the magic of packaged beauty is gone.]

Beauty is temporary, as is its effect on the husband; his anger also temporarily subsides until his next tantrum comes or the effect of the cosmetics wears off.

In the text of “*Maqhā Sūzānā*,” an ugly old man appears:

يبتسم ببلاهة لرفيقتة الجميلة وهي تلتقط له صورة. Hlewa, 2016, p. 22

[He smiles stupidly at his beautiful girlfriend taking a picture of him.]

The image appears to be a familiar stereotype. It is a public place that combines a beautiful girl with an ugly old man. Questions arise about the reason for their meeting and the link that binds them together. The link appears to be one of matrimonial interest; the marriage of a girl to a considerably older man. This is one of the tragedies that still exist in some conservative societies. Elderly men exploit the material poverty of a girl and her family, while her parents exploit their daughters to lessen or extinguish their financial hardships.<sup>3</sup>

The name of the coffeehouse suggests that the scene is in a public place outside the country. This makes the scene appear distorted because it is removed from its original environment. It is in an environment that does not understand what is taking place, which gives the impression that the scene was the focus of attention from the other customers.

In the text “*Maqhā (laysa maqhā Sūzānā)*,” the public space appears everywhere, as if it deprives the individual of his truth and sincerity. On the one hand, a person is in a public place, appearing in front of others and chatting with them, but on the other hand, his innermost thoughts need to be hidden from viewing and hearing. The waiter likens them to papers that chatter; papers and conversations are just ink on paper that can be torn up. That is why the waiter says to himself:

أصدقهم؟ تلك الجالسة وحيدة تنتظر ورقة لن تأتي أبداً. Hlewa, 2016, p. 23

[[Who is] the truest one of them? That [woman] sitting alone waiting for a paper that will never come.]

In the waiter's opinion, the most honest person sitting down is a woman who sits alone. She does not wait for someone to talk to her or lie to her and push her to be someone different from who she is. Talking to herself is honest talk without masks.

In the text of “*Matjar*,” vendors try to sell different products. What is strange is the frankness of those who point out their goods. One of them says, for example:

ربطة عنق أنيقة لحفل كذب صاخب. Hlewa, 2016, p. 24

[Chic tie for a loud lie party.]

The text ends with the following sentence:

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the concept of coffeehouses in literature see: Camera, 2019-2020.

الحرب؟ تفتح كلّ الأبواب.  
 أه الحرب ليست  
 عندنا. (Hlewa, 2016, p. 25)  
 [The war? Opens all doors.  
 Ah, the war is not New Collection  
 over here.]

These sentences directly show the falsity of social appearances and events. The entire text reflects an atmosphere of veiled criticism. At the end of the text, it appears as if one of the customers wants to buy “war.” The seller answers him, referring to the advantages of the product that war does indeed open all closed doors and achieves the goals of the buyer. The merchant notes that this product is not new, has been around for a long time and has been tested. War seems to be the way to achieve goals, whatever they are, and the same applies to rebellion against one’s place. Every change and desire to open new doors and search for a new path requires war.

In the text “*Sūpir mārkīt*,” the speaker escapes from the noise of her day to the supermarket and says of her shopping cart:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 35)  
 [Accommodates my purchases, my trifles, and my secrets.]

A person’s purchases. What he consumes reveals his hidden side and says a lot about him. The speaker buys:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 35)  
 [Nabulsi halawa in a Zionist box and Dutch bread.]

The mingling of identities and the chaos of affiliation appear clear. Things from different places show the conflict of self with identity. This conflict appears clearer at the end of the text:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 35)  
 [...And I exchange my convictions that coexistence is possible only on the shelves.]

It seems that the speaker is not convinced of the possibility of coexistence amid a huge conflict between belonging to the land and losing the land as a result of the occupation. She is convinced that the only possible coexistence is on the shelves of the supermarket where people consume a myriad of products; similarly this mixture of identities, nationalities and national affiliations is only theoretical and on the shelves.

## 8. Parts of Places

Five poems fall into this category: “*Hā’it*” [wall], “*Zill jidār*” [wall’s shadow], “*Zill ’aswad*” [black shadow], “*Hāffa*” [edge], and “*Jidār la’in*” [damn wall].

In the text “*Hā’it*,” the wall listens to what the speaker has to say and then falls on her. It seems to do this because it is horrified by her speech. Even when she whispers to the void, curses fall on her. Everything is pushing her to keep quiet:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 27)  
 [This is how I cut my tongue and threw it to the dogs.]

No one around her accepts what she says, so silence is safer for her. She cuts off her tongue and is no longer in contact with it, leaving hungry dogs to gnaw on it. In this way, her thoughts and deepest convictions are silenced.

In the text “*Zill jidār*,” the speaker kisses the inclined wall demonstrating her preference for that wall over any man. This goes against a common Arabic saying: “The shadow of a man and not the shadow of a wall.” This saying indicates the necessity and importance of being associated with a man, whatever his nature. Her mother convinces her to be patient and to bear her daily suffering; her situation is made very clear:

في المساء ترديد مثل العامة.  
 (Hlewa, 2016, p. 28)  
 [In the evening, she repeats like everyone.]

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In the morning, she does not forget to kiss the leaning wall.] This is why this woman returns every evening, convincing herself that the shadow of a husband, her man, is better than being alone and staying in the "shadow of a wall." Then, from the intensity of her daily suffering, she returns to kiss the wall in the morning. The woman neither dares to leave and remain without a man nor does she find the courage to confront her husband and the society that expects her to exhibit a life-long patience. She is to act like her mother, a woman who has encouraged her to stay and accept her status even though it seems her mother encourages her to leave. The desire to leave is daily felt, but the decision to leave is never acted upon.

In the text of "*Zill 'aswad*," a non-Arab woman passes by:

بركبة مكشوفة وكتف مشرقة.

...

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 29) عامل سوداني مهرب عبر صحارى الخوف ينظف المربع النظيف.

[With an exposed knee and a bright shoulder.

...

A Sudanese worker smuggled through the deserts of fear cleans the clean square.] The worker watches the woman's knee silhouette intently but is horrified when the shadow turns completely black. The text ends with the sentence:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 29) حتى الظلال تسود حين يحبها.

[Even shadows prevail when he loves them.]

The present reality of this worker, who was smuggled across a border, is a bleak, black, fearful and broken presence. That reality has nothing good about it. Although this worker has left his homeland to better his life and eliminate his fear, the reality is otherwise.

The speaker who describes the scene seems to be making a hidden comparison between the woman in the previous text and this worker. There is no assurance that this woman's reality would improve if she left her current place and living torment. Leaving one's place, even if it is a hope for the deceased, may not fulfil one's wishes. Indeed it may become a reality similar to the current situation even though the place has changed.

The text "*Hāffa*" begins with the following sentence:

امرأة تقطع المسافة بين عمرين على رأسها جرّة من أكاذيب ووعود. كتفها تنوء بالأساطير. تنهها. تنهها.  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 31)

[A woman who crosses the distance between two ages on her head has a jar of lies and promises. Her shoulder is full of legends [that try to] crush her. Shrugs her shoulder.]

A woman's life passes by while she carries a jar of lies and promises that are not fulfilled. On her shoulders is a fear of legends that are not real. This is represented by the consequences of taking that jar with her in as she decides her destiny. A woman believes what she has been told all her life and does not dare to confront these sayings or question them. But there is another kind of woman too:

... امرأة أخرى تجعل نار الفرن لعبتها. تنفخ فيها الروح. تراقصها وتحرقها. تنتقم من نار لا تنطفئ في قلبها.  
(Hlewa, 2016, p. 31)

[Another woman makes the oven fire her game. Breathes her soul with it. Dances with it and burns it. She takes revenge on an unquenchable fire in her heart.]

Unlike the first woman, this woman has a burning fire in her heart. But she does not find the courage to confront. She ends up torturing herself through many actions without actually leaving her place. In the end:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 31) تموت نار الفرن وتبقى على قلبها ميتا.

[The fire of the oven dies and keeps her heart dead.]

Instead of fighting her reality, this woman struggles with her heart and herself until she overcomes all her doubts and any desire for confrontation. The text ends with a description of the shadow of a woman:

(Hlewa, 2016, p. 31) نزلت قلبها ورهنت رأسها.

[[She] tore her heart out and pawned her head.]

She keeps her eye on the road and its edge. Women in society become like each other. They have “pawned” their heads and think only what is dictated to them. Without independent thought, they have removed their hearts so that they do not rebel. These women focus their eyes on the road leading to the edge, to the end of life and die without ever having been able to fly.

## 9. Summary and Conclusions

Places appear in the “Texts of Place” section in Ḥilīwā’s collection in various forms. The common denominator underlying all these texts is the dissatisfaction with the living reality of Palestinian Arab woman who lives under the shadow of men on the one hand and the shadow of occupation on the other. This reflects a double bitterness that limits women's freedom. The first bitterness stems from being a woman within a patriarchal society that restricts women’s freedoms. The second bitterness stems from the occupation that increases feelings of oppression, tyranny, and the inability to realize their dreams.

Allen suggests in his article to stop generalizing the term "Arab," as this term glosses over other divisions and characteristics (Allen, 2007, p. 247). Hence, if the challenges are difficult in the general context of Arab women, the matter is more complicated for Palestinian women who live in a conservative society on the one hand and under occupation on the other. Repression here is twofold; they are repressed because they are women and are also repressed for being Arab women.

Studies on this subject are very few (Kulczycki & Windle, 2011, p. 1442), which explains why it is important to pay attention to the feminist point of view and the injustice to which women are subjected. Shedding light on the suffering of the Palestinian woman through her own testimony, her own expression and her point of view confirms that the rise of women and their growth begins first with the self-recognition that their situation is unsatisfactory and needs to be changed. This recognition may be direct and may be found in texts using different literary analyses. Following this recognition is a decision to rise and strive without waiting for anyone to do it on behalf of women.

However, Ḥilīwā’s texts also acknowledge that despite the existence of these thoughts and the desire for liberation, there is no actual implementation of these thoughts and desires for self-realization. This means that the path towards achieving a new reality is not yet upon us.

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