

Patriarchy and War in Liana's Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror*.

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The truth sometimes shocks, or shakes the tranquility of set ideas. But sometimes a good shake can awaken minds that rest in slumber, and open eyes to see what is really happening around them. (El Saadawi :1980: 3)

This paper examines, through women's literature, the impact of patriarchy and war on women, their traumatic experiences, their roles during the war, and how war can blur the gender-specific boundaries by creating a space for women to negotiate their survival and participate more actively in society. In Liana Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror*, the heroine is victimized by both patriarchy and war. Badr's novel can be read as a deconstruction of the dominant national male narrative by rendering a counter discourse which empowers women and chronicles their experiences during war which would, otherwise, have been forgotten. In other words, by inscribing their experiences and roles in war into a war story, women writers counter those who try to marginalize their war experiences (Cooke : 1994).

In *The Eye of the Mirror*, we find Aisha struggling to assert her own identity by negating her own body as a form of resistance against the social traditions and oppressive mores which tend to suppress her as a woman. Simultaneously she strives to survive and preserve her own life and the lives of others around her during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990),¹ where her husband, Hassan, is killed and her home is shelled during the siege of camp Tal Ezza'tar.² According to Claire Buck, Liana Badr's fictional works revolve around "women and war, women and exile and the plight of women facing not only the national enemy but a massed weight of inhuman traditions and a heritage of male oppression." (1992: 311). Put differently, Badr's literary corpus is concerned with the mutual struggles of Palestinian women and men in exile for survival against the ravages of war portraying how fighting for survival bolsters not only their unity but also transforms gender relationships (Shaaban: 1988). Here, one may say that Badr has been keen to situate women's experiences at the centre of the nationalist struggle not only to record and chronicle the survival of Palestinian people but to keep their identity from disintegration.

However, Liana Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror* specifically sheds light on the plight of thousands of Palestinian women living in exile in refugee camps in Lebanon after being expelled from their historical homeland, in pre-1948 Palestine (Pappe:2006).³ For example, Aisha symbolizes the trauma of Palestinian women living in exile marginalized by society and displaced nationally. Within this context, Fadia Faqir states in her introduction to Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror* that Aisha is marginalized as a young girl in a society "with very fixed definitions of what womanhood entails, and also as a Palestinian who is homeless and whose entire nation has been displaced." (1994:7)⁴

Since early childhood, Aisha has been confined to a Christian convent where she receives her education in return for working as a servant there and later on in her father's house where she is not allowed to move freely due to patriarchal social restrictions imposed by her obsessive and abusive father, Assayed. Nevertheless, we see Aisha develop a kind of self control mechanism to resist patriarchal and political submission. She creates an imaginative space for herself where she can protect herself from her own dual social and political alienation. Her own self protection is motivated by divorcing reality from the imaginative world where she seeks for her own self a protective shelter.

As long as suppressive patriarchal culture and social mores remain in place, the transformed individual woman will be alienated. (Cooke: 1994). This can be noticed in Aisha's emotional tension and bodily reactions in her endeavor to survive her own dual alienation in a patriarchal society which tends to erase her own identity and rob her of her human freedom, patriarchal attitudes and practices "which privilege men, continue to permeate African societies from the level of the family up to the state" (Gordon 1996:7)⁵, and a political situation which perceives her as a Palestinian refugee who may pose a political threat to the sectarian political system in Lebanon, a threat which has to be confined and finally eliminated.⁶

Being a daughter of a Palestinian refugee who belongs to the working class, Aisha, consequently, does not enjoy similar rights like her other Lebanese sisters who are considered to be natural citizens of Lebanon. For instance, her work as a child in the convent in exchange for her education sheds the light on the dilemma of child labor and class discrimination motivated by political and economic reasons.⁷ Hence, she must earn her education through hard work, “she would take the cleaning implements and roam the rooms and corners.” (Badr : 1994 :6)⁸ to compensate for her status of being the “Other,” since the convent doesn’t give Aisha a social space where she can enjoy equal human rights of sisterhood but adopts the policy of confinement and racial segregation through silencing and intimidation. “The nuns had taught her that it was best for her not to talk and not to try to mix with the daughters of the influential families” (6). This intimidating policy prompts Aisha to distance herself from the others, making sure that she doesn’t talk to anyone during her seven year schooling at the convent where she has become used to her surroundings.

Furthermore, Aisha’s work as a child deprives her even of the opportunity to live and enjoy her innocent childhood by playing with the other girls. “Over there, games would stretch across the red arc of the aurora at sunset, running with the sound of the girls’ laughter in the playground. There she would do her chores” (5). Aisha’s classmates at the convent would wonder how she could “sweep lightly and daintily without twisting the discs in her back as she bent. Oh! How could she touch the ice-cold water that could cut like a saw without shivering?” (6). Here, one may contend that Aisha’s labor reflects on the hard working conditions of Palestinian women in Lebanon as the only means left for them to survive after the loss of their homeland, and their will to live in spite of all odds, supporting themselves and sustaining their own communities.

But Aisha’s work and her hopes of becoming a teacher are dashed by the incident of the bus where many Palestinians are killed while going back to Tal Ezza’tar camp, signaling the beginning of the Lebanese civil war.⁹ Consequently, her mother, Um Jalal, has to take her out of the convent expressing panic at the extent of the catastrophe which will befall the lives of the Palestinians. “We have become refugees, without a country, without

dignity, without a home. Our honor was lost long ago and now our children are dying. The bus. The bus. Woe is me. We have such ill- fortune”(8). Consequently, Aisha has to go back to camp Tal Ezza'tar where she used to visit home “only three times a year” (8) but this time she is confined at home and struck by the miserable conditions of the lives of the people and their stark poverty aggravated by the blow of the bus incident and its political consequences.

She heard the moaning of women and the crying of children as she walked along the roads. She saw the faces of women who had not caught her attention before, struggling under the burden of a heavy blow which had changed their features and mutilated their bones. Their misshapen faces overflowed with grief and anger. (9)

However, at home, Aisha falls in love silently with George, a Palestinian fighter and a family friend. Fighters have been a source of attraction for girls and that sheds the light on the image of the Palestinian fighters respected and adored among their people who view them as freedom fighters (Petet :1991), defending their lives and honor during the inhuman siege of Tal Ezza'tar camp. “Old men considered him as an heir to their wisdom, women treated him as the most intelligent son, and men looked up to him as their ideal because he was a fighter” (75). For instance, Aisha's adoration for George can be observed in her physical reaction when she sees him, forgetting everything around her, “she sees nothing but him. She hears him only, and feels him alone” (21), though, on the other hand, he fails to reciprocate these emotions.

Aisha's spiritual love for George cannot be expressed because of the limitations placed by patriarchal culture which leaves her in a state of mute longing: “All she had left was the longing alone, manifesting itself in long mute waiting” (49). Here, longing and silence for Aisha become means of silent forms of communication which has left its painful psychological and physical toll on her body as she walks, “the pain moves from her heels to her spine, and she is unable to lift her body, as though her joints are being pulverized by stone weights” (47). Aisha's silent love cannot only be construed as a resisting act to survive in a destructive warring situation which denies life but also as a

rejection of suppressive patriarchal traditions, in the guise of societal and parental authority, imposed on women where they are not allowed to speak, feel, act and dream like human beings. In other words, this is a male dominated culture which promotes submission and identity nullification for the sake of pleasing societal expectations, at the expense of one's own individuality. Within this context, Sherifa Zuhur states that the Arab society clings to "a patriarchal system in which women's position within and duties toward the family precede their rights as individuals" (2003:17).

War and national dispossession have also contributed to the patriarchal imperative to impose social restrictions on women in the face of communal displacement where women have been looked upon with high esteem when they keep their chastity intact. One can observe the connection between the concept of female virginity and national dispossession which facilitates the migration of large groups of Palestinian refugees and the consequent territorial occupation of their lands by Israel. In this regard, Halim Barakt shows how Israel took advantage of the 'sexual sensitivities' of traditional Palestinian Arabs to stir up the waves of emigration during the successive wars, 1948 and 1967 and their desire to protect the "honor" of their womenfolk. (El Saadawi :1980).¹⁰ Hence, chastity is considered essential for women where family and community honor is associated with female virtue which, henceforth, leads the patriarchal society to resort to different means from gossip to honor killing to enforce the honor code to avoid the collective communal and national shame (Rubenberg 2001).

The patriarchal emphasis on the honor code is reflected through Aisha's embarrassing reaction to her bodily changes by hating her own body and seeing it as an embarrassing burden.

Her body spoke, and she became agitated. She shivered before her mother's inquisitive gaze as it searched her body inch by inch, and the intrusive stare of her father, who would never stop gaping at her. She was forced to hunch her back when she walked to hide her growing bosom. (14).

Aisha's self-loathing of her body can be seen as an internalization of how patriarchal society looks down upon female sexuality as a threat and a source of *fitna* (a religious concept denoting social disorder or chaos). According to Nawal El Saadawi, woman was considered by the Arabs as "a menace to man and society, and the only way to avoid the harm she could do was to isolate her in the home, where she could have no contact with either one or the other" (1980:136). Her self-loathing also portrays Aisha's consciousness of her new heavy responsibility to keep her virtue from being violated. In this regard, Fatima Mernissi argues that the preoccupation with female virginity and chastity becomes a major obsession for men who do not hesitate to subject women to violence and abuse in an attempt to keep them in their place.

Like honor, virginity is the manifestation of a purely male preoccupation in societies where inequality, scarcity, and the degrading subjection of some people to others deprive the community as a whole of the only true human strength: self confidence. The concept of honor and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman (1992: 183).

To control female sexuality, the male menacing gaze is used by Aisha's father, Assayed, whose threatening gaze is meant to control the movement of Aisha's body while she is sweeping the house, cleaning the dishes, and serving tea: "he follows her with his eyes, casting an invisible chord that traces her movement between the kitchen, the room and the roof" (21). Her father's abusive behavior persists when he asks her:

"Why are you always wearing that pink dress?"
 "That's my dress, Yaba... I haven't got another one."
 "Why d'you say Yaba the way spoilt kids do?"
 "..."
 "You think you're one of the nuns' girls, don't you?"
 "..."
 "What a catastrophe this is. What am I to do with you in future." (22)

This statement highlights how keeping female sexuality under surveillance constrains women to certain social roles, drawing well articulated spatial boundaries which women cannot trespass out of fear that they will bring shame to the family and the community, respectively. For Cheryl Rubenberg, familial patriarchy, with its discourse of honor and

shame, its relations of domination and subordination, and its myriad punishments, controls women's bodies, minds and behaviors and their entire lives (Rubenberg: 2001). What make things worse is when Assayed vents his own sufferings and loss as a humiliated Palestinian refugee on Aisha when he calls her one day and she replies, "What is it , Papi?" (23). Her answer provokes him to scold and taunt her angrily, "You, shame on you. We're Palestinians," (23) as though he has nothing to do but to look for any flimsy excuse "to humiliate her." (23)

For patriarchy to survive as an oppressive system its ideology must be instilled in society and force must be used when that ideology has not fully been imbibed. For example, Aisha has to flee to the kitchen fearing that Assayed would pull the belt and beat her as he did before when he took the golden chain given to her as a gift from the nuns at the convent, ("A small shining chain with a small cross on it. It had caused her enough kicks and slaps from her father to last her for a lifetime") to sell it in order to buy " more bottles of *arak*, of which he couldn't drink enough." (23).¹¹ Within this context, Brinda Mehta contends that "the father's abusive behavior shows his political emasculation and helplessness as a castrated patriarch who loses his authority in the process of migration" (2007:45).

However Badr's deconstruction of patriarchy continues by exposing how the concept of arranged marriage is seen as one of the salient manifestations of patriarchy where women become economic goods for exchange in a way that consolidates patriarchal control over women. This can be evidently observed in the marriage contract concluded between parents on behalf of their children where control is transferred from father to the new husband. For instance, Assayed has concluded the marriage of Aisha without her consent and even slight knowledge. "He called to his wife in his usual noisy manner: 'Prepare her, Um Jalal. Prepare your daughter because her fiancé is coming tonight!'" (83). A patriarchal action which propels Aisha to resist by fighting for her own rights, speaking to her mother angrily, "What is up? What is going on? Has that husband of yours gone mad? Who told him I want to get married?" (84). In return, her mother , Um Jalal, acting as patriarchal agent, tries to persuade her by reinforcing the patriarchal suppressive

culture that it is a wish for every woman to get married, “All young girls wish for marriage....and that will make your father happy, Let him experience one happy day in his life. He has not had the pleasure of marrying off his son... so let him have the pleasure of marrying you off.” (84, 85). Here, we find women are discouraged from expressing their own ideas that contradict parents' admonitions where parents decide for them what they should do depriving them from the basic human right to decide and choose for themselves.¹²

Marriage for women is the only means of acceptance in the community and if they remain unmarried, “they are, socially viewed, so much wastage .This is why mothers have always eagerly sought to arrange marriages for them” (Beauvoir 1989 :427). This may explain the behavior of Aisha’s mother, Um Jalal, in her confrontation with Aisha’s resistance. Um Jalal has sometimes tried to frustrate Aisha psychologically by telling her that the ultimate goal of any woman’s life is marriage, “what else would you do then, my dear? ...Become a university professor? or a teacher of French?” (84), or in other times by warning her that being unmarried will be a social stigma to the family and society: “I hope you are not intending to become an old maid and remain at home so that people will say my daughter could not get a husband” (84).

One can notice the painful psychological struggle women have to go through, either asserting their own subjectivities or living to meet the expected social roles imposed on them by a male-dominated society. “Aisha imagined that the whole thing was a punishment for her, while the others saw it as an honor and cause for joy”(85). We also see the role of the mother, Um Jalal, who upholds the patriarchal image of women and plays the role of the victimizer through reinforcing an oppressive male culture on her daughter, Aisha, who just wants to have a proper education and enjoy the right to choose her future husband as an equal human being.

Failing to convince her mother, Aisha tries to speak to her father, Assayed , who inreturn, throws her back a threatening look which makes her speechless and shiver in fear.

With his honey-brown eyes, he looks like a wolf ready to pounce on its prey. He put out his cigarette as he watched her. He crushed the burning stub on the floor as he looked into her face. He began to undo his belt. He pulled it off and laid it on the floor next to him, determined to show her the hiding that she might get with the leather belt... Actually, she did not forget. It was her tongue that was unable to speak. Did one speak to a monster? And if she spoke. What would she tell him? Would she tell him that she did not wish it? But he did wish it. Her knees felt loose and her leg joints became shaky and unable to support her. Her vision clouds over, and she runs up to the roof. (85-6)

Feeling helpless after seeing that the option of escape where she can work as a servant on the western side of Beirut is impossible due to the fact that “the camp’s exits and entrances are blocked by barriers and fortifications” (90) , and because there is “ blood, war and clashes.”(90). Yet she wishes that “the clashes would end so that she could leave the Tal and take charge of her life” (87). To face injustice imposed on her, Aisha resorts to her own self mechanism of silence and indifference, alienating herself from all suppressive elements which try to rob her of her own will. “All of them had frightened her, and she could do nothing more than bow her head and say yes to her funeral.” (96)

On the wedding night, Aisha resists by refusing to let her body be painted by *Henna*¹³ as fingers “stretched out at her, making a sugary lemon paste, examining her body, intruding between her organs as though she were a doll made of dough available to every hand to sculpt and remodel her into something different.” (99) Painting the body with henna is a cultural ritual meant to decorate the female enhancing her sexual desirability to the male, perpetuating patriarchal social conventions that women are sexual objects who can be manipulated and penetrated. In an act of resistance and revolt against social conventions which degrade women and place them in an inferior position, Aisha hides in the bathroom inflicting pain on her body by making herself ugly, cutting her hair on her wedding night.¹⁴

In the bathroom... Her eyes fell on a pair of scissors that had been left on the window sill. She picked them up and began cutting off her hair in front of the broken mirror...She cut off her hair in terror as her sobbing rose, drowning out the ululating and chanting outside. (101)

We may argue that the scene of Aisha cutting her hair can be construed as a subversive act against patriarchal customs imposed on her in an attempt to assert her own identity, while, on the other hand, it is an act painfully viewed by her mother as an act of madness “her insanity had prompted her to do”(102).

Being married now, Aisha has to face the ugly face of patriarchy represented by males and senior females where she is expected to obey them, especially her mother in law, Um Hassan. For Suad Joseph, the structure of patriarchal familial culture means the privileging of the assertions of desire by males and female elders and the responsibility of girls to comply accordingly (Joseph 2005). Furthermore, it is only through the birth of a male heir that Aisha can gain respect in her own community. The need for children is strongly reinforced by the national loss and death of many males fighting defending their communities. For instance, Um Hassan’s son, Fayeze, was killed during a raid of the Lebanese army on the camp.¹⁵ “Two years ago in May, the army came and began shelling the people in all the camps. Fayeze was martyred.” (110). Since Fayeze’s death, Um Hassan has been so keen to get her only remaining son, Hassan, married, and have children to compensate her loss of her late son, Fayeze. This is manifested in Um Hassan’s speech to Aisha:

If one is ruined, broken-hearted and homeless, away from one’s brothers and sisters, can one be happy? I have put one young man under the ground. We were dragged around and made homeless. We’ve become nothing more than some flour and a bit of water that never runs out. Yes... those who are dead are dead. Things will inevitably calm down and you will have children. One’s grandchild gives more pleasure than one’s child.” (111)

This statement reflects on the culturally expected role of women during war to be productive mothers of the nation and preservers of cultural identity which unfortunately situates women in a passive position linked with childbirth (Shabban:1988).¹⁶ It also portrays the extent of how essential issues like pregnancy and mothering are for the Palestinian community to survive nationally and politically, and how essential reproduction is as a means of compensation for the loss of the people and land.

However, Aisha's political consciousness reaches its climax after the death of her husband, Hassan. "The news seeped through her being. It reached her consciousness. Breathing became difficult, and she leant back onto the floor where she had been sitting. Then she collapsed in a faint." (177) Later, we find her reflect on her personal tragedy of losing her husband, Hassan, who has been killed during the war on the camp.

So what was left to her? All that was left her was the black dress she would wear for the rest of her life, and those weak pulses against the wall of her abdomen of a foetus which meant nothing to her now that its father was dead. (182)

Her initial indifference to what is going around her has been transformed by her ultimate acceptance of an unwanted pregnancy and her role in helping her community during the days of war. "Despite the difficult circumstances, she accepted her condition with an indifferent resignation akin to the resignation with which the people of the camp faced the successive disasters befalling them." (154) The death of Aisha's husband can be seen as a moment of realization that her struggle for her own identity cannot be separated from the national struggle of her own people who are seeking to survive and live freely as human beings too.

The camp was being turned upside down. People were being forced to leave their homes, cramming themselves into already overcrowded shelters. The hospital was unable to cope with the phenomenal pressure of casualties. There was almost no water to be had. The medical centre was unable to offer first aid unless patients brought water from their own houses. No anti-tetnus vaccines were available. Nothing was available. (155)

We find Aisha think of "the flimsiness of the tile-covered metal roof of her parents' house. She had only become aware of this as the clashes had escalated." (115) In this regard, Brinda Mehta argues that "Aisha's survival locates itself within the politics of the home front represented by the search for more dynamic roles for women within restrictive patriarchal codes of conduct" (2007:54) .

Aisha's role during the war is manifested through helping her community, taking care of children living in bomb shelters and looking for sources of survival like food and water for her family during the siege, thus exposing her life to danger. "The thrifty women, who had cooked the frozen meat and preserved it in glass jars for bad times, had roamed around in groups looking for new sources of food." (138)

Commenting on how war affects women and temporarily suspends patriarchal structures, Nadine Puechguirbal argues that "between 60 and 80 percent of women are single heads of households. Shortages of food, wood, water, and health care have created great burdens for them. Women and girls often have to travel long distances to find resources" (2003: 1273). This can be seen through the words of Amneh revealing the great dangers she faces every time she goes to fetch water under the shelling and sniping:

She would ask herself at length, every time she had to go and get water, whether or not she would complete the mission. One died a thousand deaths in seconds. Every time would pass that spot, she would stop there for more than twenty minutes and think: would she be able to finish her journey without dying. (151)

Furthermore, for Julie Peteet, war and nationalist struggle may operate as "catalysts for change, breaking down traditional barriers between men and women and "undermining the operation of extant asymmetrical gender relations and exposing them to scrutiny" (1991, 6). One may also argue that war suspends and destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. "In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings" (Turshen 1998: 20). For instance, it has been a shock for Aisha to see the deconstructive impact of war on her father, Assayed, whose abusive and patriarchal role has receded into the background. "The overpowering, capable man had turned into a rag.... He resembled a blind man, and the grand awesomeness based on his physical strength and cruelty had disappeared from his features... It was hard to believe that this man was Assayed"(181). Within this context, war has created a space for women like Aisha, helping people in bomb shelters, "Aisha, who had never before visited a shelter, experienced everything imaginable and unimaginable" (155). While Um Jalal sold candles, "During that period,

Um Jalal began making candles at home to augment her livelihood”(144) and Hana worked as a wireless operator and Um Hassan, baked bread: “Her work for the young men, baking tens of bread loaves for them, helped her to forget half her problems and to ignore the sound of half of the shells raining down on the camp as she worked.” (149). Meanwhile Khazneh nursed with the Red Cross. We may contend here that women are seeking work outside home as a means to survive and simultaneously assert their own identities taking into account that many Palestinian men are not allowed to work, in some cases, they are either jailed or killed during the war which has created a new situation where women take the responsibility to feed their families and help them sustain themselves during hard times.¹⁷

For example, we find Aisha helping Georgette, a Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian fighter, give birth and take care of her newly born child, who suffers from weakness and dehydration due to lack of milk during their stay in the bomb shelter with other women and children protecting themselves from the deadly daily shelling. “Aisha tried as hard as she could with the child, who had calmed down, and was no longer screaming as he had been during his first days... His mouth remained closed, his eyelashes hanging over his eyes as though he had gone into a coma” (187). The child’s worsening health condition makes Aisha’s pray to God for help.

She would not have asked that God give her a long life and bring back her husband, Hassan. She would just have asked for one moment to go out onto the beach with this baby, expose him to some fresh air, put him in the breeze, and offer him a dose of the air which was so absent in this place.” (188)

Watching the torturous slow death of Georgette's infant, “the baby was frozen, his limbs rigid, keeping a silence that none but the dead knew...” (195) and the ensuing madness of Georgette after losing her son brings Aisha closer to finding her own place within the struggle to resist the siege imposed on the camp (Rastegar : 2006).

Witnessing the death of Georgette's child and the massacres which are committed by the phalangists against women, children and the elderly after the camp's fall¹⁸ makes her reject the painful logic of war: "Rancid smells were still rising from the piles of corpses she had passed on the road behind her" (259), and wonder why all this takes place. "Why are we here? Why death? Why don't we live normally like other people? Why won't they leave us alone?" (260). For Julie Peteet, the logic behind this gruesome strategy is "to sow panic in the refugee community and precipitate a Palestinian flight to neighboring Arab countries, as well as to demoralize men ...by revealing in stark grotesqueness their inability to protect their families and homes" (1991: 37).

Here, Aisha's reflections on the cruelty of war pose serious questions about the futility of war.¹⁹ Aisha's feelings towards the child's death can, furthermore, be viewed as a symbol of her solidarity and collective political consciousness of her Palestinian community as she thinks of the unabated sufferings of her own people.

If death were death, why had her parents not accepted dying there, and why had they not committed suicide where they were? Why had they been driven by their fear to what they had imagined would be life outside? Why had they not known that they would face what they were facing now, at the end of the bitter, wearying journey. They had destroyed their lives to build the lives of their children. And now it had caught up with them!
(258)

After Tal Ezza'tar's fall to the Phalangists, Aisha is driven along with her people out of the camp. "Everyone fleeing like prey. Everyone? No. Only the women. The only men left were a few old men. The only boys left are a few children. Out of each family, only half or less is left." (257) As Aisha looks at the families, mainly women, gathered, she remembers what Um Hassan told her once:

My child, we shall all become strong women. Have they left us any other choice? They take everything from us. Marriage, children, homes, stories, old people...everything. So, all of the time, we defend ourselves as though we were not women, but standing in the trenches.(260)

This statement deconstructs the concept that war is only a male story and suggests that women also have their own stories of participation, sufferings and survival too. Put differently, Aisha's story gives voice to the voiceless majority of women whose stories are either ignored or neglected and also personalizes the suffering and trauma of her own Palestinian people in exile. Aisha accepts her dual role as a mother and as a participant in the national struggles of her Palestinian community for survival and freedom. "Her hand touched her belly in a movement of spontaneous recognition. Staring at her mother with an unaccustomed boldness, she said: 'That is my responsibility ...I don't want any one else to take it instead of me.'" (264) .The boldness of these final words marks Aisha's potential for a transformed community with herself having a new role. The trauma of suppressive male culture, war and dispossession, narrated by Aisha, results in a liberating potential for Aisha to rethink her relationship to her world and accept the challenge of changing it. Though her life is represented through sufferings and resistance to patriarchal social restrictions symbolized by feelings of alienation, her pregnancy can be viewed as an assertion of the continuation of life and her own will to survive despite the destructive war. "She owned nothing anymore, except for what was within her." (259) Aisha's pregnancy, under siege, is not only defiance of death but also a political testimony for the rights of human beings for creation and self- preservation. "The siege had destroyed her confidence in everyone around her except for herself." (261)

Conclusion

To conclude, Aisha is victimized by both patriarchy and war and is left with no option except resisting the patriarchal oppressive male culture which seeks to erase her own identity and simultaneously fighting for her own survival as a human being who has the right to live in dignity and peace. Yet, *The Eye of the Mirror* ends with a sense of empowerment and hope for women who survive the painful and horrific terrors of the siege and ensuing massacre. This is seen with Aisha's eventual acceptance of her role as a mother which the coming birth of her daughter symbolizes - a promising hope for a creation of a Palestinian society where women and men can have equal roles, rights and opportunities based on respect and understanding. It also deconstructs the male war narrative by giving the platform for women to share their own experiences, feelings and

roles during the war, an important role which gives a voice to the voiceless majority. The traumatic experience of war and destruction can be, furthermore, seen as a warning bell that societies cannot be built by excluding women and survival has no meaning without the active participation of women. For example, Aisha , Hana, Um Jalal, Um Hassan , Amneh , and Khazenh respectively have shown their effective leading roles in the processes of survival and self-preservation in their defense of their community, children and lives in spite of all haunting destructive forces in the guise of patriarchal domination, the misuse of religion and blind nationalism. Within this context, Liana Badr states “ my struggle for emancipation as a Palestinian is inseparable from my struggle for genuine liberation as a woman; neither of them is valid without the other.” (Shaaban 1988 , 164).²⁰

Notes:

1. For more about the Lebanese civil war , please see Fisk, Robert. *Pity the Nation of Lebanon*. New York : Atheneum ,1990; Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987.
2. According to Fadia Faqir, Tal Ezza'tar, a huge refugee camp sheltering 50,000 Palestinians and Shi'ites from the south and situated in the eastern Christian sector of Beirut became the site of the bloodiest incident of the civil war , with 4000 casualties; 12000 Palestinians were driven out, mostly into Muslim west Beirut. (1994: 5). Please see the introduction by Faqir to Badr, Liana. *The Eye of the Mirror*. UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994. For Rosemary Sayigh , Tel al-Zaatar (1975-76) is a testament to the Palestinians' will to survive against overwhelming odds. By giving life to the “ ordinary people who sustain the cause and suffer its setbacks.” (1994: 9). Please see Sayigh, Rosemary. *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books, 1994; Shaaban , Bouthaina. *Both Right and Left Handed: Arab women Talk about Their Lives*. London: The Women's Press, 1988; Brynen, Rex. *Sanctuary and survival: The PLO in Lebanon*. London: Westview Press Boulder & San Francisco Pinter Publishers, 1990.
3. Driven from their homeland in 1948 by Israeli forces, 800,000 Palestinians settled in neighboring Arab countries. After the 1976 war, they were joined by another 400,000 refugees from the West bank. See Pappé , Ilan . *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. One world : Oxford, 2006; Sayigh, Rosemary. *Too Many Enemies : The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books, 1994; Fisk, Robert. *Pity the Nation of Lebanon*. New York: Atheneum ,1990;

Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987; Peteet, Julie M. *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

4. Please see the introduction by Fadia Faqir to Badr, Liana. *The Eye of the Mirror*. UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994.
5. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett establishes that patriarchy is a system where male domination is achieved through ideological means. She argues that it is the patriarchal system characterized by power and dominance that oppresses women. Please see Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday, 1970. For El Saadawi, "the patriarchal family, therefore, came into existence mainly for economic reasons. Please see El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980, p 41; Mann, Michael. "A crisis in stratification theory." In *Gender and Stratification*. eds. Crompton, Rosemary and Michael Mann. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986.40-56; Zuhur, Sherifa. "Women and Empowerment in the Arab World." *Arab Studies Quarterly*.25.4. (2003): 17; Kandiyoti , Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy." *Gender and Society*. 2. (1988) : 274-90; Rubenberg . A. Cheryl . *Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.
6. Palestinians were perceived by the Lebanese Phlanagists (a rightist Christian group founded by Camille Chamoun and the Guradians of the Cedars) as a threat to the political and demographic sectarian system of Lebanon. The Palestinians "'have ruined our country' was a charge often leveled against the Palestinians, despite their relative weakness within the power asymmetry in Lebanon and elsewhere" (Sayigh 1988:25). Please see Sayigh, Rosemary. "Palestinians in Lebanon: Status, Ambiguity, Insecurity, and Flux." "*Race & Class*, 30:1(1988):13-32; *Palestinians : from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history*. London: Zed, 1979. *Too Many Enemies : The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books, 1994; "Palestinians in Lebanon: Harsh Present, Uncertain Future." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25:1 (Autumn, 1995): 37-53.
7. Barred from being citizens, "most Palestinians couldn't get work permits and were reduced to working illegally and at substandard wages in low-grade jobs. All Palestinians were barred from trade –union membership and the protection provided by the social security system inaugurated in the mid-1960s." (73-74). Please see Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987, Rynen, Rex. *Sanctuary and survival: The PLO in Lebanon*. London: Westview Press Boulder & San Francisco Pinter Publishers, 1990. "Tel al-Zaatar was the source of cheap labor to Lebanese capitalists who located their industries nearby. UNRWA , under pressure from the Christian bourgeoisie, acted to secure a plentiful supply of cheap labor by transferring refugees from other parts of Lebanon to Tel al-Zaatar in 1951 and

again in 1955” (1987 : 74) . Please see Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987.

8. All references will be henceforth taken from Badr, Liana. *The Eye of the Mirror*. UK: Garnet Publishing, 1994.
9. In April 1975 , Phalangists attacked a bus carrying Palestinian passengers across a Christian neighborhood, killing about twenty-six of the occupants in retaliation for a failed attempt on Pierre Jumayyil's life, leader of the Phalangists, an incident which sparked the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975-1990. For more information please see Fisk, Robert. *Pity the Nation of Lebanon*. New York : Atheneum ,1990; Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987; Sayigh, Rosemary. *Too Many Enemies : The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books, 1994; Brynen, Rex. *Sanctuary and survival: The PLO in Lebanon*. London: Westview Press Boulder & San Francisco Pinter Publishers, 1990.
10. Concerning national dispossession and female honor, Bouthaina Shaaban argues that men “ were obsessed with protecting their honor (women) from the Israelis. Even when they fought they fought to protect their women rather than their land; land did not matter to them at all. It was all a plot meticulously woven by the Israelis who understood the Arab way of thinking and made terrible use of it. (1988:152) .See Shaaban, Bouthaina. *Both Right and Left Handed: Arab women Talk about Their Lives*. London: The Women’s Press, 1988. For Peteet, honor was lost because the community was unable to defend itself, lost autonomy, and ended up dependent on International charity and as strangers in a foreign country, women were exposed to strangers. Peteet, Julie M. *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 .
11. *Arak* is an alcoholic drink made out of Anise.
12. For Rubenberg “women are not encouraged to think independently. Parents rather decide for them what “they will eat, when they will eat, what they will wear, how they can plan”(2001:82). Please see Rubenberg, Cheryl A. *Palestinian women : Patriarchy and resistance in the West bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2001; El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab world*. Trans. Sherif Hetata. London: Zed Books, 1980.
13. *Henna* is the oldest and most widely used vegetable dye utilized in hair and hand coloring.

14. Aisha's cutting her hair at the wedding night making herself ugly can be seen as an act of resistance against patriarchal concepts of female beauty. Please see Wolf, Naomi *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1990.

15. On the behavior of the Lebanese Army and the Lebanese internal secret service department towards the Palestinian refugees from 1948 to 1970, please see Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987; also see Sayigh, Roesemary. *Too Many Enemies : The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books, 1994.

16. In regard to gender and nationalism, Benedict Anderson argues that "in so many contemporary political movements, women are assigned the role of bearers of cultural values, carriers of traditions, and symbols of the community. If the nation is an extended family, then women's role is to carry out the task of nurturance and reproduction (1983:15). Please see Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. "The tendency of anti-colonialist nationalisms to construct an "inner level" or "inner domain as sanctuary against alien domination has implications for women, identifying them with home and cultural authenticity." (Sayigh 1988 :166) . Please see Sayigh, Rosemary. "Gender, Sexuality, and Class in National Narrations: Palestinian Camp Women Tell Their Lives." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 19: 2 (1998) :166-185 . The conflict and resulting polarization encourage a return to traditional values. Women are thus relegated to the role of "mother of the nation" (King : 2002, Yuval-Davis : 1997). Moghadam, Valentine. ed. *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*. UK: Zed Books Ltd , 1994; Kumari, Jayawadena. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Books, 1986; Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. London: Zed Press, 1986.

17. Commenting on the emerging roles of women during war, Abdo says that there is no doubt that war creates spatial re mappings which can provide "a space for women's emancipation by unsettling existing power structures" (1991:22). Please see Abdo, Nahla. "Women of the Intifada: Gender, Class and National Liberation." *Race and Class*. 32: 4(1991):19-34.

18. In 1976 during the Lebanese civil war, "the Phalangist militia launched a military campaign to clear East Beirut of Muslim-inhabited slums and Palestinian refugee camps. During the ensuing nine-month siege of Tal Ezza'tar camp, hundreds of women were killed attempting to bring water to their dehydrated children under heavy artillery fire and sniping. Hundreds more were indiscriminately slaughtered when the camp was overrun." (Peteet: 1991: 37). Please see Peteet, Julie M. *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press,

1991 . The camp fell on August 12 ... Entire families were killed. There was hardly a male between the ages of ten and fifty among those who managed to reach West Beirut. Boys of eight and ten were summarily executed. Girls no older than that were raped before being dispatched. All sixty camp nurses, women and men were lined up two by two, marched out , and machine-gunned (Tabithat: 1987). see Petran, Tabitha. *The Struggle over Lebanon*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987.

19. In her protest against war, Virginia Woolf says, " (w)e daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea... The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings that is, who wish to prevent war?" (1966: 39) . Please see Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. London, New York and San Diego: Harcourt, 1966.

20. On the dilemmas facing Palestinian women's efforts to develop a feminist agenda in the context of national struggle, see Giacaman, Rita and Penny Johnson."Palestinian Women: Building Barricades and Breaking Barriers," in Lochman, Zachary and Beinlin , Joel. eds. *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*. Boston: South End Press, 1989; Jad, Islah. "From Salons to the Popular Committees: Palestinian Women, 1919-1989." in Nassar, Jamal and Heacock, Roger. eds. *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*. New York: Praeger, 1990; Amireh, Amal. "Between Complicity and Subversion: Body Politics in Palestinian National Narrative." *The South Atlantic Quartely*. 102:4 (2003):747-72.

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