

The Feminist Rhythm: Exploring Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher's Poetic Worlds

Jamal Assadi¹, Khalid Sindawi², Mahmud Na'amneh³

1. *The College of Sakhnin Academic College for Teacher Education*

2. *Al-Qasemi Academic College*

3. *Achva Academic College*

Abstract

This study provides a formalist critique of feminist writing in the poetry of three Palestinian poets: Nidaa Khoury, Suad Qaraman, and Mona Daher. By examining their works through a lens that highlights language, structure, and symbolism, the study uncovers the nuanced ways these poets challenge patriarchal norms, explore identity, and assert feminine agency. Central to their poetry is the tension between personal and societal expectations. Khoury critiques societal rituals and the double oppression faced by women in patriarchal and colonial frameworks. Qaraman integrates mysticism and spiritual longing with political resistance, using Sufi-inspired imagery to connect personal liberation with national aspirations. Daher, in turn, oscillates between romantic longing and defiance, critiquing male dominance while celebrating feminine resilience. The male counterpart in their poetry emerges as a complex figure, representing both oppression and transformation. Through vivid imagery and layered metaphors, the poets navigate themes of betrayal, renewal, and existential reflection. Their works are positioned within a broader feminist literary tradition, drawing comparisons to global writers such as Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, and Simone de Beauvoir, while remaining deeply rooted in the Palestinian cultural and political landscape. This study concludes that the poetry of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher exemplifies the transformative potential of feminist poetics. By intertwining personal experiences with broader social critiques, their works contribute significantly to both Palestinian literature and the global discourse on women's emancipation and identity.

Key words: Feminist Poetics, Palestinian Literature, Identity and Agency, Patriarchal Critique, Mysticism and Resistance, Transformative Imagery.

Introduction

The poetry of Palestinian women writers is a powerful blend of personal introspection and collective resistance, interweaving themes of identity, agency, and defiance into intricate works that challenge societal norms and articulate visions of resilience. Among these voices, Nidaa Khoury, Suad Qaraman, and Mona Daher stand out for their innovative use of language, symbolism, and structure to explore feminist concerns within the intersecting frameworks of patriarchy, tradition, and national struggle. Their poetry transcends traditional literary boundaries, positioning these

women as not only artists but also cultural critics who provide profound reflections on the roles of women in Palestinian society and the broader human experience.

The Palestinian literary field has seen significant contributions from women poets who address the complexities of life under occupation and the cultural pressures of patriarchy. As Islah Jad notes in *Palestinian Women's Activism: Nationalism, Secularism, Islamism*, the intersection of gender and national identity often places Palestinian women in a unique position of "double oppression," where colonial subjugation intensifies patriarchal structures (Jad, 2018 75). Nidaa Khoury critiques these dynamics by exploring societal rituals and their impact on women, transforming traditional symbols into sites of resistance. Suad Qaraman incorporates mysticism and Sufi-inspired imagery, merging personal spiritual longing with aspirations for collective liberation. Meanwhile, Mona Daher employs a dual tone of romantic vulnerability and fierce defiance, creating a poetic dialogue between male dominance and feminine resilience.

This study adopts a formalist critique to analyze the feminist poetics of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher, focusing on their shared commitment to challenging entrenched norms while celebrating feminine strength and agency. It draws on the insights of feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous, Adrienne Rich, and Susan Stanford Friedman to frame their contributions within both local and global feminist literary traditions. As Cixous argues in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, poetry "writes the body," disrupting traditional linguistic and cultural confines to reimagine gender dynamics (Cixous, 1976, 875-893). Friedman extends this by asserting that poetry constructs a space where identity boundaries can be questioned and rewritten. She writes, "Poetry challenges the limitations of identity by creating a space for reimagining the self in relation to society and culture" (1998, 121). These ideas resonate with the works of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher, who use language and imagery to navigate the complexities of personal and collective identities.

Comparatively, Palestinian women's poetry engages with global feminist traditions while maintaining its distinct cultural and political context. Adrienne Rich's exploration of the personal as political aligns with the intimate yet socially conscious themes in the works of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher. Their use of innovative linguistic structures echoes Cixous's call for *écriture féminine*, while their themes of resistance and renewal find parallels in the writings of Sylvia Plath and Audre Lorde. For instance, Lorde's assertion that poetry is "the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought" (Lorde, 1984, 36) mirrors Qaraman's mystical symbolism and Khoury's transformative use of ritual.

This article contributes to the growing recognition of Palestinian women's poetry as a significant cultural and feminist force. By examining the recurring motifs and poetic techniques of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher, it highlights how their works navigate the intersections of personal and political struggles, offering new insights into the transformative potential of poetry. It also situates their voices within a broader feminist literary tradition, drawing comparisons with global writers while emphasizing their unique perspectives rooted in Palestinian experiences. Through this analysis, the article affirms the critical role of Palestinian women poets in reshaping feminist discourse, providing a nuanced understanding of how their works articulate identity, agency, and resilience in the face of complex socio-political realities.

Nidaa Khoury: Deconstructing Societal Rituals

Unveiling Patriarchal Constructs

Nidaa Khoury's poetry stands as a defiant critique of the deeply entrenched societal rituals that confine women to rigid roles. Her collection *Zinnār al-Rīḥ* (*The*

Wind's Girdle) transforms these traditions into sites of resistance, laying bare the gendered constraints embedded in Palestinian cultural norms. In her poem *Rituals of the Woman*, Khoury writes:

The night tears through my window,
Slipping into my depths,
Drawing my veins
To a barren surface,
Tickling the slumber.

Here, the "night" symbolizes the invasive societal forces that strip women of autonomy, entering the intimate spaces of their existence and laying claim to their identities. The imagery of veins drawn "to a barren surface" conveys emotional barrenness, a condition imposed by the relentless pressures of tradition. Khoury condemns the cyclical nature of these societal rituals, which, while preserving cultural identity, also serve as tools of oppression that stifle personal freedom and individuality.

This exploration of confinement resonates with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's analysis of the "universal sisterhood" in her essay *Under Western Eyes*, where she asserts that patriarchal systems impose a collective set of expectations on women, yet these systems manifest uniquely in different cultural contexts (Mohanty, 1988, 66). Khoury's critique is deeply situated in the Palestinian experience, where the intersection of patriarchy and colonial subjugation creates what feminist theorists have termed twofold persecution. (Ahmed 1992 189-207). This dual layer of marginalization is intricately woven into her poetry, as she delves into the complexities of personal and collective struggles. Her work masterfully merges the internal emotional landscape of her characters with the external societal pressures they endure, creating a profound commentary on resilience and entrapment.

Through her evocative use of language and imagery, Khoury explores the paradoxical roles imposed on women. Her poems transform the personal into the universal, highlighting the tension between the nurturing force women embody and the constraints that limit their agency. The resilience of women, often celebrated in her verses, is juxtaposed with the psychological and physical toll exacted by societal expectations and political realities. This intricate interplay between strength and confinement emerges vividly in her works, where each image and metaphor carries layers of meaning, connecting the individual to the broader narrative of resistance and survival.

In "Thirst from Women's Bodies" (*The Story of a People*, p. 156), she writes:
The water drinks me, it whets its appetite
It moans then it thanks its God who
Created thirst from women's bodies.

Water, a recurring motif in Khoury's work, represents both sustenance and exploitation. The act of being consumed reflects the paradoxical role of women in society—as both the givers of life and objects of societal appetite. The imagery evokes the societal expectation of women to be self-sacrificial, nurturing others at the cost of their agency and identity.

This theme is also present in *When the Sea Laughs* (*Hubb al-Bahr*, 2010, p. 43), where Khoury employs natural imagery to evoke renewal and endurance:

Waves rise with the dawn,
Carrying the songs of the earth,
Whispering dreams of return.

The cyclical rhythm of the waves symbolizes the resilience of women who, despite the relentless forces of patriarchy and colonial oppression, continue to rise and persist. This motif aligns with Adrienne Rich's assertion in *Of Woman Born* that women's lives are often defined by a tension between endurance and the hope for liberation (Rich, 1976, 11–14). Rich emphasizes that this duality—bearing the weight of societal expectations while aspiring for personal freedom—captures the essence of the female experience, particularly within systems that marginalize women. This tension resonates with the broader struggles faced by women in colonized and economically disadvantaged nations, where the intersection of gender, race, and class intensifies the struggle for autonomy.

Arab and Palestinian writers frequently draw on similar themes to depict the dual forces of endurance and liberation in women's lives. Fadwa Tuqan, for instance, writes in *Enough for Me* about a woman's bond with her homeland as both a source of sustenance and a site of struggle:

*Enough for me to die on her earth
Be buried in her
To melt and vanish into her soil*
(1990 74).

Here, Tuqan intertwines personal identity with national resilience, portraying the woman's connection to the land as a cyclical renewal of strength despite adversity. Similarly, Suad Qaraman's work often presents women as symbols of both hope and sacrifice. In her poem *For a Child* (*Mawāqif*, 1994, p. 32), the maternal figure is both a nurturer and a mourner, reflecting the dual burden women bear in maintaining familial and societal coherence under the pressures of displacement and conflict.

From a global perspective, the works of Kamala Das and Gabriela Mistral echo these themes of cyclical endurance and longing for liberation. Kamala Das's confessional poetry examines the internal conflict women face, particularly in traditional societies where their roles are often confined to domestic and reproductive functions. Her poem "An Introduction" dooms the societal imposition of gender roles, revealing a desire for self-definition amid the constraints of tradition (Das, 1973 19–21). Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poet and educator, explores similar ideas in her collection *Tala*. Mistral's poem *Pan* (Bread) uses the motif of bread-making as a metaphor for the labor and endurance required of women, which simultaneously sustains life and limits personal freedom (Mistral, 1938, 45).

This thematic continuity across cultural contexts underscores the universality of women's struggles against patriarchal and colonial oppression. In the Palestinian and Arab worlds, these struggles are magnified by the realities of occupation and displacement, as illustrated by Mahmoud Darwish's exploration of the female figure as a symbol of resistance and renewal in his poem *Rita and the Rifle* (2008). While Darwish centers his narrative on love and loss, the female figure often embodies the enduring spirit of Palestine, navigating the tension between oppression and resilience.

The cyclical rhythm of Khoury's waves thus situates her within a lineage of writers who use natural and symbolic imagery to articulate women's experiences of resilience and resistance. By engaging with both local and global traditions, her poetry affirms the shared struggles of women across cultures while offering a distinctly Palestinian perspective. This intersection of personal, national, and universal themes enriches the feminist literary discourse, connecting the enduring rhythm of her waves to a broader narrative of hope and liberation.

In this poetic framework, Khoury extends her exploration of resilience to the intimate and deeply symbolic realm of the female body, portraying it as a site where resistance and societal control intersect. Her works often illustrate how the body becomes both a vessel of strength and a battleground for the imposition of patriarchal and colonial forces. This tension is vividly encapsulated in "Dialogue between Eternity and the Body" (*Zinnār al-Rīḥ*, 1992, p. 15), where she reflects on the existential toll of systemic oppression:

Time polishes me,
Memory tries to mend me,
But I am the mute needle.
Patience eats away at me,
Desire tries to whiten it,
But I have rusted from deprivation.

The "mute needle" symbolizes silenced voices, capturing the way societal expectations reduce women to passive instruments rather than active participants in their destinies. The imagery of rust conveys the erosion of agency and individuality, illustrating the cumulative impact of enduring oppression. This thematic parallel underscores the universality of feminist concerns across cultural and temporal boundaries. It lines up with Mahmoud Darwish's exploration of resistance and identity, particularly in the ways she intertwines personal and collective struggles. In *Rita and the Rifle*, Darwish uses the figure of a woman to symbolize the Palestinian struggle, a motif that parallels Khoury's portrayal of women as symbols of resilience and defiance. Khoury's viewpoint is paralleled to Hélène Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*, where the body becomes a medium of expression that disrupts patriarchal language and thought (Cixous, 1976, 886). Khoury's depiction resonates with the idea that the body is not merely an object of control but a site of rebellion and self-definition.

This perspective also finds echoes in Sylvia Plath's writing. Plath's *Ariel* harshly assaults societal expectations and explores themes of identity and resistance; her poem *Metaphors*, where she explores the female body as a vessel, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. Plath writes:

I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
(Plath 1981)

In these lines, the body is reduced to its reproductive function, likened to objects that lack agency yet carry immense symbolic weight. Like Khoury, Plath denounces societal expectations that define women through their roles as vessels of life, stripping them of individuality and self-determination. Both poets use vivid imagery to challenge the traditional narratives imposed on women, asserting the body as a space for both critique and reclamation. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, however, addresses the dichotomy between women's societal roles and their personal agency. She argues that women are often reduced to functional roles within society, stripped of the freedom to exist as autonomous beings (Beauvoir 1949). Kamala Das's confessional poetry, too, exposes the emotional toll of conforming to traditional roles. In "The Old Playhouse" (1973), Kamala Das writes:

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea
And to offer at the right moment
The vitamins.

Das's portrayal of domestic servitude resonates with Khoury's critique of rituals that confine women to predefined roles. Both poets highlight the psychological toll of these expectations, using vivid imagery to evoke the weight of societal impositions.

For Khoury, however, the body is not merely a passive recipient of societal impositions; it is a site of rebellion, where endurance transforms into defiance. Khoury's poetic language embodies feminist resistance by challenging the rituals and structures that perpetuate women's subjugation. Her disapproval extends beyond the domestic sphere to encompass broader societal structures, including cultural and political systems that reinforce patriarchal norms. In her poem "The Original Tree" (*The Story of a People*, 155-56), she writes:

The apple ripened
It fell on my head
The fruit that is forbidden
Sacred above me.

Here, the biblical reference to the forbidden fruit symbolizes the societal policing of women's desires and aspirations. The "sacred" fruit represents the unattainable freedoms denied to women under patriarchal and religious constraints. By invoking this imagery, Khoury aligns her work with feminist critiques of the ways religious and cultural traditions are used to justify the subjugation of women. In the Arab world, **Nawal Al-Saadawi** is a prominent figure whose writings delve deeply into these issues. In *The Absent One*, as discussed by Assadi in *Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature* (2024, p. 57), Al-Saadawi attacks two sectors of society: the religious community and husbands. She portrays the religious public as deceitful and twofaced, serving people of power rather than upholding genuine moral values. Husbands, on the other hand, are represented as merciless and devoid of affection, reinforcing patriarchal dominance within the private sphere. Through these portrayals, Al-Saadawi exposes the systemic nature of women's oppression, rooted both in public religious institutions and in private domestic relationships.

Similarly, Fatema Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* dissects how Islamic traditions have been manipulated to control women's bodies and behaviors, arguing for a reinterpretation of these teachings to emphasize equality. Mernissi highlights the discrepancies between the egalitarian principles of early Islam and the patriarchal practices that have since been adopted. By challenging these distortions, she advocates for a cultural shift that recognizes women's rights and agency (Mernissi, 1987, 85).

Many writers in the Western world have commented on the use of religious ideology as a tool for controlling women. Notable examples include Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland*, where societal structures enforce gender inequality; Kate Chopin in *The Awakening*, which explores the constraints of patriarchal morality; and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood's dystopian masterpiece offers one of the most profound critiques of how religious ideology can be weaponized to strip women of their rights and agency.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the fictional society of Gilead uses religious justifications to enforce strict gender roles, turning women into mere vessels for reproduction. Women are robbed of their individuality and autonomy, reduced to defined societal roles such as "Handmaids," "Wives," and "Marthas." The narrative

starkly illustrates the silencing and subjugation of women under the guise of moral and religious righteousness. Atwood's work underscores how dogma, when wielded by those in power, can be manipulated to justify oppression, making it a chilling cautionary tale relevant across cultures and times.

In situating these criticisms within a broader literary tradition, Atwood and others highlight the pervasive nature of this phenomenon, emphasizing the need for vigilance against systems that co-opt religious teachings to deny women their agency and humanity.

Thus, by weaving such attitudes into her poetry, Khoury positions herself within a global feminist tradition that interrogates the intersections of religion, culture, and patriarchy. Her use of symbolic imagery provides a Palestinian perspective on this universal struggle, emphasizing how women's resilience can challenge and transcend oppressive norms. Through the shared themes highlighted by writers like Al Saadawi, Mernissi, and others, Khoury's work contributes to a broader discourse on liberation and the reimagining of women's roles in both society and literature.

This engagement with broader feminist traditions extends to Khoury's exploration of renewal and resilience, often depicted through nature. Her poetic landscapes are imbued with the possibility of regeneration, offering a counterpoint to the themes of confinement and oppression. In *Blueness Mixed with the Blue (The Story of a People)*, p. 156), she writes:

The color becomes faint
Transparency comes over
It cheats nakedness.

Here, the imagery of transparency and color reflects the process of renewal, suggesting that women's resilience allows them to reclaim agency even in the face of systemic oppression. The interplay between vulnerability and strength defines Khoury's poetic vision, offering a feminist narrative of hope and transformation.

In a nutshell, Nidaa Khoury's poetry offers a profound critique of societal rituals and patriarchal constructs, positioning her as a key voice in Palestinian feminist literature. Through rich symbolism and evocative language, she deconstructs the constraints imposed on women while celebrating their resilience and capacity for renewal. By situating her work within both Palestinian and global feminist traditions, Khoury bridges personal and collective experiences, creating a poetic narrative that resonates far beyond its cultural and historical context.

Mona Daher: Romantic Vulnerability and Fierce Defiance in the Feminist Rhythm

Mona Daher's poetry resonates with a distinct feminist rhythm, oscillating between romantic vulnerability and fierce defiance, articulating the complexities of identity and resistance in a patriarchal society. Her poetic works, such as *Coyness*, *A Nightmare on My Chest*, *From the Depths*, *On the Seine*, and *The Storming of Wind*, create a vivid tapestry of emotions that navigate gender dynamics, societal constructs, and the broader Palestinian national struggle. By employing rich symbolism, Daher critiques male dominance, celebrates feminine resilience, and intertwines personal longing with collective aspirations for liberation and renewal.

Central to Daher's poetic voice is her critique of societal constraints on women, which she examines through deeply personal and emotional experiences. Her work highlights the struggles faced by women as they navigate societal expectations and the resulting tensions between vulnerability and strength. In *Coyness*, she writes:

“I wear coyness like a rose
And the she-wolf in its savage fashion
Again comes to life.”
(*The Story of a People*, p. 71)

Here, the rose becomes a symbol of socially enforced delicacy and passivity, while the “she-wolf” represents suppressed primal strength and rebellion. The tension between these two contrasting symbols encapsulates the dichotomy women face in patriarchal societies: the expectation to conform to ideals of grace and fragility while possessing untapped strength and resilience. Daher challenges these constructs by exposing the fragility of these imposed identities and celebrating the resurgence of women’s agency through the figure of the she-wolf.

Daher’s romantic vulnerability often intertwines with the theme of betrayal, as seen in *A Nightmare on My Chest*:

“Scatter your papers
Let them disperse
Let them reveal the secrets
You used to hide.”
(*The Story of a People*, pp. 73–74)

The act of scattering papers becomes a metaphor for exposing hidden truths, a rejection of illusions, and a reclaiming of agency in the face of male betrayal. This poem reflects a defiance against relational imbalance, where women often bear the emotional burden while being subjected to deceit. The speaker’s resolve to confront these hidden truths underscores a broader feminist critique of the emotional labor expected of women in patriarchal systems.

Daher extends this critique through her use of rich symbolic language, exploring the tension between submission and rebellion. In *From the Depths*, she writes:

“Come to me
Take me to a colored world
Take me far from my isolation
Carry me into your world.”
(*The Story of a People*, 74-75)

The “colored world” evokes a longing for liberation and transformation, contrasting with the isolation imposed by societal norms. This plea for connection reflects the desire for a more vibrant and inclusive existence, free from the constraints of tradition. The symbolic use of color becomes a metaphor for the possibility of renewal, aligning with feminist aspirations for equality and self-determination.

In *On the Seine*, Daher merges personal longing with national imagery:

“The feathers of doves
Embroider tales
From violets.”
(*The Story of a People*, 72)

The doves, traditional symbols of peace and freedom, reflect a yearning for national and personal renewal. The act of embroidering tales from violets ties the feminine craft of storytelling to the broader Palestinian struggle for liberation. This intertwining of personal and national narratives highlights the dual role of women as custodians of cultural memory and agents of change.

Through this lens, Daher's poetry turns a critical eye toward gender dynamics, particularly the emotional detachment and self-absorption of male figures. In *The Storming of Wind*, she writes:

He stood in front of the window showing the height of his figure
He let his fingers feel his hair.
(*The Story of a People*, 90)

The male figure's preoccupation with his own image and introspection symbolizes relational imbalance, where women are left to navigate emotional voids created by male detachment. This critique challenges traditional notions of male authority and emotional restraint, advocating for mutual vulnerability and connection in relationships.

Mona Daher shares thematic commonalities with many writers across cultural traditions, exploring the emotional toll of patriarchal expectations and the relational imbalance between genders. Writers such as Kamala Das, Nawal Al Saadawi, and Margaret Atwood have similarly addressed these issues, weaving narratives that critique the emotional detachment and societal constraints imposed on women. Daher's poetry reflects this shared feminist ethos, emphasizing the cost of male introspection and relational detachment while advocating for greater empathy and equality.

Building on this assessment, Daher introduces a spiritual layer to her exploration of identity and resistance, engaging with mystical imagery that blends the personal with the cosmic. In *In the Shades of Paradise*, she writes:

"I found him leafing through the forgotten notebooks
Looking for a memory tucked into the folds of forgetfulness."
(*The Story of a People*, 72-73)

The act of searching for a forgotten memory reflects a spiritual yearning for clarity and renewal. By invoking mystical elements, such as "the King of the Genies," Daher locates personal longing within a broader cosmic narrative, intertwining individual struggles with a universal quest for truth and transcendence. This alignment with the Sufi tradition adds a profound dimension to her feminist account, highlighting that liberation is a process requiring both internal reflection and external change.

Building on this spiritual framework, Daher seamlessly connects the personal with the collective, emphasizing the intertwined nature of individual struggles and national aspirations. She portrays women as embodiments of resilience and renewal, their experiences reflecting broader societal and political realities. In *On the Seine*, she writes:

"The cherries wave in the lips
And shine like corundum."
(*The Story of a People*, 72)

The imagery of cherries and corundum evokes the richness of Palestinian culture and the enduring spirit of its people. By situating her personal reflections within a broader cultural context, Daher aligns the feminine experience with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. This intertwining of personal and national narratives echoes the works of Fadwa Tuqan, who portrays women as bearers of both personal and collective resilience.

Daher's exploration of maternal imagery further underscores the connection between gender and nationhood. In *From the Depths*, she pleads:

“Take me far from my isolation
Carry me into your world.”
(*The Story of a People*, 74-75)

This plea reflects not only a personal desire for liberation but also a broader yearning for a world that values and nurtures its women. The maternal figure, often a symbol of nurturing and continuity, becomes a metaphor for the nation itself, embodying both vulnerability and strength.

Mona Daher's poetry echoes deeply the works of other feminist writers such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich, examining themes of identity, resistance, and transformation. Plath's *Ariel* explores the tensions between personal longing and societal expectations, while Rich's *Of Woman Born* assaults the institutionalization of motherhood. Daher's distinctive voice lies in her ability to intertwine these universal themes with the Palestinian experience, creating a poetic narrative that bridges the personal and the collective, offering unique insights into the layered realities of women's lives.

Within the Palestinian literary tradition, Daher's exploration of emotional labor and relational dynamics complements the works of Nidaa Khoury and Suad Qaraman. While Khoury focuses on deconstructing societal rituals and Qaraman delves into mystical imagery to explore themes of national hope and resistance, Daher centers her poetic lens on the emotional and relational imbalances that women navigate. Her focus provides a multidimensional perspective on feminist concerns, adding richness to the broader discourse on gender, identity, and agency.

Daher's poetry embodies the feminist rhythm of rebellion and renewal, using personal narratives as a powerful medium to review societal constructs and imagine new possibilities. Her vivid imagery and symbolic depth illuminate the challenges and triumphs of women's lives, offering a compelling critique of patriarchal norms while celebrating the resilience and agency of her subjects. By situating her voice within both Palestinian and global feminist traditions, Daher demonstrates the transformative power of poetry, reaffirming its role as a vehicle for resistance, reflection, and liberation.

Suad Qaraman:

Mysticism, Motherhood, and National Hope in the Feminist Rhythm

Suad Qaraman's poetry occupies a unique position within Palestinian feminist literature, intertwining themes of mysticism, motherhood, and national aspirations. Her works serve as a poignant critique of societal inequities, while simultaneously offering a vision of resilience and renewal through deeply symbolic and emotive language. The child, the mother, and the land are central motifs in Qaraman's poetry, embodying vulnerability, resistance, and hope. By exploring these themes, Qaraman creates a feminist rhythm that navigates the personal and the collective, challenging the structural forces that shape Palestinian women's lives while affirming their enduring strength.

In Qaraman's poetry, the child emerges as a profound symbol of innocence intertwined with societal vulnerabilities. Through her evocative language, she portrays the fragility of childhood against a backdrop of conflict and displacement. At the same time, the child symbolizes a beacon of hope, a potential for renewal amidst adversity. This duality allows Qaraman to investigate the failures of societal systems while envisioning a future of resilience and transformation. For example, in her poem *For a Child* (*Mawāqif*, 1994, pp. 32–35), Qaraman reflects on the juxtaposition of innocence and the harsh realities imposed on the young, using vivid imagery to amplify the emotional weight of her message.

For you, O dove of peace,
I sing—
For a child who died in the wilderness,
His eyes piercing the horizon,
Gazing at distant lights.

The child here symbolizes the most vulnerable members of society, whose innocence is marred by the harsh realities of displacement and conflict. The imagery of the “dove of peace” serves as a poignant reminder of unfulfilled promises of safety and stability, while the “distant lights” reflect a yearning for a better future that remains out of reach. The juxtaposition of innocence and suffering in this poem underscores the profound impact of societal and political failures on the lives of children, positioning the child as both a victim and a symbol of potential transformation.

This focus on the child aligns Qaraman's work with both local and global literary traditions, enriching her poetry with a universal resonance. Her use of the child as a symbol of innocence and societal critique is reminiscent of Langston Hughes's *Children's Rhymes*, which critiques systemic inequalities shaping children's futures through racial and class disparities. Hughes writes with a similar urgency, addressing the deep-seated injustices that hinder the dreams of the young.

Locally, Qaraman's themes find an echo in Tawfiq Zayyad's poem *The Singer*, where he declares:

And I will give the first half of my life to him who
will make a weeping child laugh,
And I shall give its second half to protect
A green flower
Against ruin....
(*The Story of a People*, 227)

Zayyad's powerful lines, like Qaraman's, intertwine a vision of hope with a commitment to shielding the vulnerable, emphasizing the transformative power of joy and protection in the face of adversity. The image of a green flower against ruin powerfully encapsulates the resilience and hope that Suad Qaraman's poetry often evokes. This metaphor serves as a striking contrast, symbolizing life and renewal amidst destruction and despair. In her work, the green flower becomes a testament to the enduring spirit of the marginalized, a symbol of steadfastness that thrives despite adversity. Such imagery aligns with Qaraman's broader themes, where vulnerability and resistance coexist, creating a poetic narrative that both criticizes and aspires, much like the persistence of life against the backdrop of devastation. This connection highlights Qaraman's poetry as a vital contribution to a broader discourse, one that bridges Palestinian struggles with global and local voices advocating for justice and renewal. Moreover, Qaraman's perspective meets the global literary traditions. For instance, Langston Hughes's *Children's Rhymes* denounces systemic inequalities that shape children's futures, particularly through racial and class disparities. Hughes writes:

By what sends
The white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
Be President.
(1990, 94)

Both Qaraman and Hughes use the figure of the child to illuminate societal injustices and provoke critical reflection. However, while Hughes's critique focuses on systemic racism in the United States, Qaraman sets her child within the Palestinian struggle for identity and survival, emphasizing the intersection of national and personal narratives. The child is not only a symbol of vulnerability but also a connection to the larger tapestry of resistance and resilience that defines Palestinian life.

In parallel, Qaraman's exploration of motherhood enriches her poetic landscape, intertwining the nurturing role of the mother with the collective grief and endurance of a community. In *For a Child*, the mother is described as a "dove of peace," embodying both the tenderness and the strength required to sustain life in the face of adversity. This maternal imagery amplifies the emotional resonance of Qaraman's work, offering a deeply feminine perspective on survival and hope:

And you, with your wings, hold the cover,
You flutter with generosity
And move farther, farther away from me.
(*Mawāqif*, 1994, 33)

Here, the mother embodies warmth, protection, and resilience, but her inability to shield the child fully reflects the limitations imposed by structural oppression. This duality is in one line with Adrienne Rich's analysis of motherhood in *Of Woman Born* (1976), where she asserts that the loss of a child's potential is one of the deepest forms of grief, highlighting the failures of both nurturing and societal systems. Qaraman's portrayal of the mother as both a source of strength and a witness to suffering underscores the multifaceted role of women in sustaining life and bearing witness to its destruction.

The maternal figure in Qaraman's poetry also serves as a metaphor for the nation itself. The mother's nurturing and protective instincts mirror the collective yearning for security and identity, while her grief reflects the broader Palestinian experience of loss and displacement. This connection is evident in Fadwa Tuqan's *Enough for Me*, where the maternal bond with the land symbolizes a cyclical relationship of life, death, and renewal:

Enough for me to die on her earth
Be buried in her
To melt and vanish into her soil
Then sprout forth as a flower
Played with by a child from my country.
(1990, 74)

While Tuqan emphasizes the cyclical and eternal relationship between the land and its people, Qaraman focuses on the immediate suffering and resilience of women and children, situating her maternal imagery within a more urgent call for justice and transformation. This focus on the personal and collective struggle extends beyond the physical realm into the spiritual, as Qaraman's poetry often draws on mysticism to deepen her denunciation of societal inequities and her vision of resistance.

Through her use of spiritual imagery, Qaraman infuses her work with a sense of transcendence and hope. In one of her evocative poems, she writes of an *eternal prayer*, blending the mystical and the earthly to highlight the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of oppression. This spiritual resistance becomes a cornerstone

of her poetic voice, offering solace and empowerment amid the challenges faced by her community. In *The Eternal Prayer*, she writes:

Whispering dreams of return,
I hear hope in the rhythm,
A promise to bloom again.

The invocation of divine imagery reflects a yearning for both personal and collective liberation. The cyclical rhythm of her poetry mirrors the elasticity of the Palestinian people, emphasizing the enduring power of hope and struggle. This mystical approach is linked to Qaraman's work with the mystic tradition, where spiritual transcendence becomes a pathway to navigating earthly struggles.

The integration of mysticism in Qaraman's poetry also connects her to the works of Rumi and Hafez, whose verses explore the interplay between earthly and divine love, but Qaraman adapts this mysticism to the specific context of Palestinian struggle. Rumi's poetry often transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, such as when he writes, "Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form" (Coleman Barks, 1995 125). This sentiment reflects a cyclical understanding of loss and renewal, which Qaraman echoes in her portrayal of resilience and regeneration amidst destruction.

Similarly, Hafez's verses intertwine earthly strife with spiritual aspiration, as in, "Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions" (*The Gift: Poems by Hafiz*, trans. Daniel Ladinsky, 1999, p. 5). This interplay between critique and hope resonates in Qaraman's poetic voice, where the "dove of peace" becomes both a spiritual symbol and a tangible plea for justice and transformation. However, while Rumi and Hafez often universalize human struggles, Qaraman situates her mysticism within the Palestinian context, making her critique more immediate and her imagery more urgent.

This interplay between earthly and divine love also characterizes the Renaissance period, where poets like Petrarch, John Donne, and others followed a similar path in intertwining human affection with spiritual devotion. Petrarch, in particular, is renowned for his sonnets that juxtapose the idealized love for Laura with a longing for divine grace, creating a poetic tension that reflects both personal and transcendent aspirations. John Donne, in his metaphysical poetry, explored similar themes, blending physical passion with divine union, as seen in his *Holy Sonnets*. These connections demonstrate how Qaraman's poetry draws from a deep well of mystical and poetic traditions, aligning her work with both global and historical literary movements.

The recurring motif of the "dove of peace" in Qaraman's work exemplifies this duality, embodying both spiritual transcendence and a concrete vision of justice. By channeling the spiritual legacies of poets like Rumi, Hafez, and even Renaissance figures, Qaraman deepens her critique of societal failures while simultaneously inspiring collective action and renewal. Her poetry thus serves as a bridge, connecting the mystical traditions of the past with the lived realities of contemporary Palestinian resistance.

Qaraman seamlessly entwines her exploration of personal struggles with broader national aspirations, creating a poetic landscape where women and children become enduring symbols of fight and hope. Through vivid imagery and evocative language, she portrays these figures not only as victims of conflict but also as bearers of a sacred hope that transcends their suffering. In *For a Child*, Qaraman poignantly contrasts the sacred hope embedded in Biblical narratives with the harsh realities faced

by contemporary Palestinian children, emphasizing the stark disparities between idealized visions and lived experiences. This juxtaposition amplifies the urgency of her call for justice and transformation.

For a child beyond the borders,
Homeless, unsheltered by a cave,
For whom no stars shone in the sky,
Dreaming of bells and gifts,
Of a warm hearth,
Scorched by the whip of cold in the desert.
(*Mawāqif*, 1994, p. 34)

This stark imagery underlines the moral failures of modern society, where countless children are left without basic necessities. By invoking the Biblical narrative, Qaraman launches hard attacks against the dissonance between the ideals of compassion and the realities of human suffering, urging readers to confront their complicity in perpetuating these injustices.

The child's suffering, however, is not portrayed as inevitable. Instead, Qaraman uses the child as a symbol of potential renewal, emphasizing the possibility of transformation through collective action and resilience. The act of singing to the "dove of peace" becomes an act of resistance, a refusal to succumb to despair:

For you, O dove of peace,
I sing—
And yet you, forever, move away,
Farther away from me."
(*Mawāqif*, 1994, 35)

The tension between aspiration and reality in these lines reflects the broader Palestinian experience, where hope persists despite systemic oppression and displacement. The act of singing itself becomes a form of defiance, reaffirming the power of art and creativity to inspire change. This dynamic situates Qaraman's poetry within a wider global framework, bridging local struggles with universal themes of resilience and transformation.

Qaraman's exploration of childhood, motherhood, and national hope resonates deeply with global literary traditions while preserving its distinct cultural identity. Her portrayal of the child as a symbol of societal failure and vulnerability finds a parallel in William Blake's critique of industrial exploitation in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, particularly in *The Chimney Sweeper*, where innocence is overshadowed by systemic injustice (1991). Similarly, Qaraman's poignant depiction of maternal grief reflects Adrienne Rich's feminist analysis of motherhood, seen as both an institution and a lived experience, highlighting the dual burden of nurturing and enduring societal oppression. By drawing on these global resonances, Qaraman amplifies the universal relevance of her poetry while remaining firmly rooted in the Palestinian context.

Within the Palestinian literary context, Qaraman's focus on mystical and maternal imagery complements the works of Nidaa Khoury and Mona Daher. While Khoury deplores societal rituals and Daher explores relational dynamics, Qaraman emphasizes the spiritual and emotional dimensions of resistance, offering a holistic vision of feminist and national renewal.

Conclusion

The poetry of Nidaa Khoury, Suad Qaraman, and Mona Daher exemplifies the dynamic interplay of rebellion and renewal within Palestinian feminist literature. Each poet contributes a unique voice to the collective exploration of identity, resistance, and

transformation, while their shared themes reveal a profound interconnectedness. Together, their works enrich the Palestinian literary tradition, offering new perspectives on the intersections of gender, culture, and political struggle.

Suad Qaraman's poetry exemplifies the feminist rhythm of rebellion and renewal, blending mysticism, maternal imagery, and national aspirations to create a deeply resonant disparagement of societal inequities. Through vivid symbolism and evocative language, her works challenge patriarchal norms while celebrating the resilience and agency of Palestinian women and children. By setting her voice within both Palestinian and global literary traditions, Qaraman affirms the transformative power of poetry as a medium for resistance and hope, offering a vision of a world where the "dove of peace" no longer remains distant.

At the heart of their poetry lies a commitment to critiquing communal constructs that confine women while celebrating feminine efforts and agency. Nidaa Khoury's works deconstruct the rituals and traditions that perpetuate patriarchal oppression, transforming them into sites of resistance. Her layered symbolism and rhythmic complexity highlight the tension between cultural preservation and personal autonomy, emphasizing the transformative potential of self-awareness and defiance. Khoury's use of natural imagery, such as water and waves, underscores her broader vision of renewal and continuity.

In contrast, Mona Daher's poetry oscillates between romantic vulnerability and fierce defiance, capturing the complexities of interpersonal relationships and the emotional toll of betrayal. Her exploration of dualities—the fragility of the rose and the raw power of the she-wolf—reflects a nuanced understanding of feminine strength. Daher's work celebrates the resilience of women while critiquing the societal structures that confine them. Her intimate tone and focus on relational dynamics differentiate her from Khoury's broader societal critiques, yet both poets share a commitment to challenging male dominance and redefining feminine identity.

Suad Qaraman's poetry, with its mystical undertones and focus on motherhood, bridges the personal and the collective. Her use of the child as a symbol of vulnerability and hope, coupled with maternal imagery, reflects both the immediate suffering of the Palestinian people and the enduring possibility of renewal. Qaraman's invocation of spiritual and national themes positions her within a Sufi-inspired tradition while maintaining a sharp critique of societal inequities. Her works expand the feminist rhythm to include the spiritual and the communal, offering a holistic vision of resilience.

While these poets differ in tone and focus, they converge in their ability to transform personal experiences into powerful critiques of societal structures. Khoury's structural deconstructions, Daher's relational explorations, and Qaraman's mystical visions collectively articulate a feminist rhythm that is both deeply rooted in Palestinian culture and universally resonant. Their works draw upon shared cultural motifs—such as motherhood, land, and renewal—while engaging with global feminist traditions, from Adrienne Rich's critique of motherhood to Sylvia Plath's introspective poetics.

In their differences, these poets highlight the multifaceted nature of Palestinian feminist literature. Khoury's intellectual rigor contrasts with Daher's emotional immediacy, while Qaraman's spiritual depth offers a counterpoint to their respective focuses on societal critique and relational dynamics. Together, they provide a comprehensive exploration of the Palestinian feminine experience, capturing the intersections of personal, cultural, and political struggles.

The contributions of Khoury, Qaraman, and Daher to Palestinian and global literature are profound. Their poetry challenges entrenched norms, reimagines gender

dynamics, and celebrates resilience in the face of adversity. By intertwining the personal with the political, they create a body of work that not only reflects the complexities of Palestinian life but also resonates with broader human experiences. Their voices assert the enduring power of poetry as a tool for resistance and renewal, enriching the literary landscape with their unique perspectives and collective feminist rhythm. In doing so, they reaffirm the transformative potential of literature to inspire change and articulate visions of a more equitable future.

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