



## Palestinian Women as Silenced Subaltern in Elizabeth Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Cathryn Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand*

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### Abstract

*In colonized societies, women are viewed as the lowest object in the hierarchical system; therefore, they are constantly excluded and have no voice or representation. Women are frequently considered as the other, particularly in Third World societies. Palestinian women – whether mothers, wives, or girls – suffer from subjugation by the Israeli occupation, which imposes its hegemony over them by disempowering them, in contrast to women in other eastern cultures who experience patriarchy. They continue to encounter the severe misdeeds of the occupation that disempowers them by subjecting them to humiliation, economic exploitation, and instilling in them the fear of losing everything. This paper aims to investigate how Palestinian Women are subject to disempowerment because of Israeli occupation in Elizabeth Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Cathryn Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand*. The paper demonstrates how Palestinian women are fundamentally oppressed in both novels by fear, humiliation, and financial hardships. The paper also argues that women receive little attention in the two works and they avoid any conflicts with the Israeli soldiers because they feel completely powerless under the occupation. Therefore, due to the ongoing breaches of the occupation that violate their integrity and security as human beings with established rights, Palestinian women in both novels are traumatised by the thought of losing a loved one. Finally, the paper demonstrates how Palestinian women are marginalised by the economic circumstances that make it impossible for them to live a decent life and reduce them to voiceless subalterns.*

**Keywords:** Palestinian Women, Elizabeth Laird’s, and Cathryn Clinton’s, *A Little Piece of Ground*.

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## Introduction

Women are susceptible to the disempowerment of societies that downplay their significant contribution to the growth of communities. Because society views them as inferior groups, they are treated as lost objects. The situation of Palestinian women, however, goes beyond societal disempowerment; the atrocities of the occupation are perpetrated against them. Since they constitute the core of Palestinian society, women are integral to both the Palestinian cause and resistance movements. Palestinian women who have confronted the violations of the occupation for decades, still experience various forms of disempowerment.

Elizabeth Laird, author of *A Little Piece of Ground*, was born in New Zealand and grew up in South London. She first worked as a teacher in Malaysia; however, after she finished university in Bristol, she worked as an English teacher in Addis Ababa. She has lived an adventurous life and she has many experiences to tell. She visited far places in Ethiopia and she even travelled to Kenya to write about the wild. Further, she went also to Palestine, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Russia. Laird has written more than 150 books and many of them are dedicated to children.

Similarly, Cathryn Clinton, author of *A Stone in My Hand*, has been awarded a BA in English from Iowa University and an MFA from Vermont College. After she completed her studies in Vermont College MFA program for writing for children, Amy Ehrlich, Candlewick Press editor, granted Cathryn Clinton a contract for two novels. Moreover, *The Calling*, her first novel has appointed Clinton as the most popular writer as it was published in Publishers Weekly's "Flying Starts". Further, her second novel, *A Stone in My Hand*, also has a religious touch, but it varies in the background. It tells the story of a Palestinian girl in Gaza in 1988 who lost her father in a bus bombing operation and her brother's decision to violence.

Written by Elizabeth Liard, *A Little Piece of Ground* recounts the occupation of the Palestinian lands from her protagonist's viewpoint. Karim Aboudi is a twelve-year-old boy who lives in Ramallah City with his family. Karim only wants to play soccer with his friends, but he can no longer enjoy his game due to endless curfews. His passion for playing soccer leads him to be imprisoned in an abandoned car and get shot in the leg at the end. On the other hand, Cathryn Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand* presents Malaak Abed Atieh, an eleven-year-old girl living in Gaza City. After her father's disappearance, Malaak stops talking for weeks, she takes a refugee of her own and speaks only to her pet bird, Abdo. She is traumatized by the loss of her father and remains worried all the time after knowing that her brother insists on joining Islamic Jihad. However, when her elder brother is shot, Malaak breaks her silence.

## The Concept of Subalternity

According to Spivak, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of woman disappears" (102). Spivak handles the term subaltern from a feminist postcolonial perspective, and she used the Indian woman as an example of a subaltern female who is oppressed by both imperialism and patriarchal society, which maintains her dependence on men. Consequently, Spivak acknowledges, "the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever" (90). She affirms that

the figure of the female subaltern is still hidden behind her disempowerment since she is unable to act.

Moreover, Spivak highlights the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and “Can the Subaltern Woman Speak?” She indicates that the subaltern woman’s voice is muted and goes unnoticed when she attempts to speak. Spivak gives an example of the Sati (widow) woman who, “ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice” (93). The British colonizer, however, banned this practice on the grounds that “White men saving brown women from brown men”. In this portrayal, the British emphasize their supremacy and accentuate the inferiority of the colonized. Likewise, Ghan Pal and Dharmendra Yadav also indicate that the female subaltern's dilemma is the worst throughout repressive regimes. To be a subaltern woman is a fatal matter since oppression results in giving up her life, vision, ambition, and every guaranteed right of existence. Racism, classism, and patriarchy lead to the victimization of the female subaltern (103). Additionally, in an interview with Spivak, she talks about how society oppresses women and she gives the example of her aunt who hanged herself because she was unable to carry out an assassination. Therefore, she killed herself instead of being voiced; however, she was accused of illicit pregnancy. By killing herself, she wanted to say that women are invisible and muted; even when they try to speak, they become unheard. Spivak concludes, “she had spoken with her body, but could not be heard. To say the subaltern cannot speak is like saying there’s no justice” (91). This example highlights the harmful situation of women in colonized societies. This woman sacrificed her life to be voiced, but her attempt became nothing. Moreover, her society contributed to her oppression when it kept the details of her death a secret. Thus, colonization and society oppress women.

Likewise, the position of Palestinian women is not different from their Indian counterparts. They also fall victim to the oppression of the occupation. However, Palestinian women may not have the freedom to talk about the oppression of their society since they are busy struggling against the Israelis who subjugate them and take away their right to lead a regular life.

Elizabeth Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Cathryn Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand* show how Palestinian women are subjected to the hegemony of the occupation which in turn results in their disempowerment. Disempowerment is a daily occurrence in the lives of Palestinian women in both novels. They are torn between resisting the harsh living conditions and protecting their children from the brutality of the soldiers. In Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand*, disempowering Palestinian women is obvious since they are subjected to the soldiers’ humiliation. Additionally, they felt the loss of their roles as wives and mothers. Furthermore, the role of women has changed due to the economic hardships caused by the occupation, which forces Palestinian women to work even in low-paying jobs to support their families.

### **The Hegemony of the Israelis over Women**

In Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground*, Lamia, a mother of four children: Jamal, a seventeen-year-old boy; Karim, a twelve-year-old boy; Farah, an eight-year-old girl, and Sireen, a four-year-old girl, is subjected to the hegemony of the Israelis who

restrict their movement through imposing curfews. The Israelis imposed a curfew that lasted for two weeks with only occasional breaks of two hours once or twice a week. Lamia was upset since her four-year-old daughter, Sireen, suffered from a severe earache and she could not cure her because of the curfew. When the curfew was lifted and the two-hour break began, Lamia heaved a sigh of relief, “If they’d kept us penned in here one or more day...this child’s ear infection would have gone into her brain. Her temperature’s been way up for three days now” (Laird 16). The curfew situation is an illustration of how Palestinian women suffer as a result of Israeli atrocities. They control their lives to the extent that Lamia is unable to break the curfew and save her child. Many Palestinians, like Lamia, lack the freedom to live their lives as they like as though they were not their own. They are unable to take charge of their circumstances. In *A Little Piece of Ground*, the Israelis assert their power through frequently extended curfews that prevent people like Lamia from leaving their homes to save her suffering daughter.

Similarly, in Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand*, Malaak’s mother, Ibtisam, a mother of three children, Hend, a seventeen-year-old girl; Hamid, a twelve-year-old boy; and Malaak, an eleven-year-old girl, is also subjected to the hegemony of the Israelis several times. When her husband vanished and she became unable to contact him, she had no power to go to the authority to inquire about him. When she read in a newspaper about a terrible accident on the way to Jerusalem, she was certain that the Arabic mechanic in the bombed bus was her husband. Despite this, she remains silent as she tells Malaak, “Your father’s ID papers were in his clothes. Gone with the rest of him. I knew the name of the mechanic, but no one else did, and I could prove nothing” (Clinton 59). The loss of her husband traumatizes Malaak’s mother who decides to go through her pain by herself. She has consistently chosen silence over discussing her secrets with others. She tells Malaak, “They don’t know what I know in here” (Clinton 60). Although she informed her elder children, Hend and Hamid, about their father and the accident, she did not tell Malaak at first because Malaak had stopped speaking for two weeks when she first learned that her father was missing. Despite her enormous anguish and suffering, Malaak’s mother has to manage her family’s affairs without her husband and do her best to shield her children from the Israelis’ brutality.

Malaak’s mother experienced Israeli hegemony for the second time when the Israelis refused to heal Hamid at an advanced Israeli hospital. Hamid was shot in the head by the soldiers, and his injury was so severe that he needed major surgery. Malaak’s mother tried her best to get him moved to a better hospital, but none of Gaza’s hospitals had the same technology as Israel’s. However, the Israelis admitted him to Shifa Hospital where a graffiti reading “YES TO DEATH AND STARVATION” was painted on the wall. Malaak’s mother says, “They will not move him to a hospital in Israel. They are doing what they usually do; they are moving him right now to Shifa Hospital” (Clinton 179). Since the Israelis view Palestinians as their inferiors, they refuse to allow Hamid to receive appropriate medical attention in their hospitals. As she is subjected to their subjugation, Malaak’s mother has no power to send her son to Israel. The Israelis continue to rule over Palestine in this way. Thus, Malaak’s

mother serves as an example of a bereaved widow and a fearful mother. Israeli authority, therefore, has control over the lives of Palestinian women.

### **Israelis’ Humiliation of Palestinian Women**

Humiliation is a tactic the Israelis continually employ to disempower the Palestinians. Being humiliated or seeing someone dear to you be humiliated is extremely difficult as it harms one’s psychology. Rita Giacaman, Niveen M.E. Abu-Rmeileha, Abdullatif Husseinia, Hana Saabb, and William Boyce in their article “Humiliation: The Invisible Trauma of War for Palestinian Youth” argue that “humiliation in the Palestinian setting has been largely neglected as an important component of the ongoing chronic conflict, with possible ramifications on the well-being and mental health of the population” (564). Palestinians have been exposed to a wide chain of violations since the beginning of the occupation. Humiliation is a basic suffering that Palestinians endure daily.

As Phil Leask asserts the Israelis’ humiliation of Palestinians is a demonstration of their power. Leask points out that humiliation is an illustrative utilization of power against an individual or a group of people to reject, exclude, and deprive them of their dignity. Humiliation is a kind of arbitrariness toward a specific group as the personal feeling of injustice is triggered when there is no medication for such injustice (131). Similarly, Hartling and Luchetta also point out that humiliation takes place when one has power over another; in other words, when the perpetrator has power over the victim. Since the humiliator is supported by power, the victim has feelings of degradation, confusion, powerlessness, breach, and assault (261). Thus, humiliation is a kind of disempowerment of subaltern groups that always leads to their subjugation and marginalization.

Palestinian women suffer the same humiliation as men and children do at the hands of the soldiers. Palestinian women are particularly susceptible to the insults, bad treatment, and menace of the soldiers. In Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground*, when the soldiers stop Hassan’s car while they are on their way to the village, the soldier shouts at Lamia and orders her to close the car window, “Shut the window. Shut all the windows. Stay in the car” (Laird 43). Lamia experienced humiliation during this situation as a victim and as a witness. She witnessed the soldiers humiliating her husband and understood why he was unable to defend himself. She was also the direct victim of the soldier’s mistreatment. Karim could see anger on her face. Thus, in order to weaken and subjugate Palestinian women, the soldiers humiliate them.

Lamia was subjected to the humiliation of the settlers once more. When they arrived at the village and went to pick olives, the settlers attacked them and drove them out of the farm because it had become a part of their settlements. When they began shooting, Lamia warned them to cease firing as they were about to leave, “It’s OK! You don’t need to shoot anymore. We’re going” (Laird 55). Lamia was among the other family members who were humiliated at the settlers’ hands. Expulsion from their property is a form of humiliation for Lamia, who has to submit.

In Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground*, Lamia was not the only woman who experienced the soldiers’ humiliation. Hopper’s mother was another woman who was vulnerable to the soldiers’ humiliation. Hopper is a twelve-year-old boy who lives in the refugee camp with his family. Hopper is a wired child, and he has a tough character because

of the hard conditions he passed through under occupation. His mother used to pass through each checkpoint hoping to learn anything about her elder son, Salim, who was taken to prison without reason. While they were at a checkpoint, the soldiers stopped Hopper and his elder brother Salim and asked Salim about his ID. Although Salim gave it to the soldier, the latter took it and threw it in the mud. Salim got nervous and hit the soldier's arm strongly which is why he was imprisoned. When she finally knew where he was, she prepared herself at six o'clock to visit him. The soldiers made her wait for more than six hours before telling her she would not be able to see him. Hopper says, "they kept her waiting till two or six hours then said she couldn't see him, she had to go home. She's been crying and crying" (Laird 115). As a result, Hopper's mother is another woman who endures the humiliation of the occupation.

Likewise, in Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand*, Malaak's mother is a victim of the soldiers' humiliation. When Hamid and Tariq yelled at a soldier, the latter started shouting. Malaak's mother hurried running toward the soldier, but he shouted at her. When Hamid and Tariq stopped, the soldier told her something that caused her to cry loudly while getting down on her knees and staring at him. Malaak says, "My mother drops on her knees with a loud cry" (Clinton 82). Thus, the occupation humiliates Palestinian women in such a way to disempower them and subject them more and more to their hegemony.

#### **Fear and Sense of Insecurity**

The fact that Palestinian women are constantly subjected to the soldiers' humiliations makes them more fearful that their children would suffer at the hands of the soldiers. Due to the atmosphere of violations under occupation in both novels, Palestinian mothers show great fear and worry about their children while confronting the Israeli soldiers. In *A Little Piece of Ground*, Lamia felt afraid when the Israeli settlers attacked them on their farm while picking olives, "Karim's mother was shouting to him now. Karim! Do what they say! Don't move!" (Laird 54). Karim's fear of the guns forced him to run, but after the settlers fired their bullets, his mother shouted and ordered him to stop. Lamia knew well that those settlers would not hesitate to kill a child if he did not obey them. In this situation, Lamia is traumatized by the idea that she will lose her son in this military attack. Her motherly dignity is violated by the settlers' violence, and in doing so, they suppress her will to resist their subjugation for the sake of her family.

For Palestinian mothers and wives, fear is a regular companion. Each woman worries that she might lose a loved one since they are aware that the Israelis' brutality has no limits. Thus, Kevorkian in her article, "Liberating Voices: The Political Implications of Palestinian Mothers Narrating Their Loss", asserts that Palestinian mothers exert great efforts to protect their children from destruction. She states that some women hurry after their children and look for them in every place to stop them from engaging in conflicts. Mothers are not limited to preventing their children from encounters; however, they sometimes punish them to stop (402). Despite the suffering that colonialism has caused to women in general, Palestinian women are more oppressed because of their excessive concern for their children.

Thus, in *A Little Piece of Ground*, Laird presents Lamia, and Hopper’s mother as vivid examples of precarious mothers. It was Lamia who showed feelings of worry and fear when Karim disappeared for some hours outside. Jamal tells Karim, “She thought you were a) dead, b) carted off to an Israeli prison, c) blowing yourself up in martyrdom, d) unconscious in the hospital with a broken skull, e) dead” (Laird 79). Although the multiplicity of these options will eventually lead to death, this repetition asserts that once again Lamia is traumatized by the idea of loss. Since the whole country was under occupation, nothing could guarantee for Lamia that any of her sons would return home without trouble with the soldiers. Karim was astonished while Jamal explained to him the extent to which their mother's thinking reached. When Karim got home late, his mother yelled at him as she thought he got in trouble with the soldiers even though she repeated the word dead twice, “More than twice. About 150 times, actually” (Laird 79). Karim is about to reach manhood, and Jamal says their mother will treat him as such because Jamal himself is caught up in their mother's excessive feelings of fear and worry. Jamal said that she was relieved he was not going with them to the village because he would be detained at the checkpoint. Lamia’s constant state of fear puts her in a panicked and traumatized state because loss is so close to her. Her negative ideas affect her psychological well-being and reveal how traumatized and scared she is.

In *A Little Piece of Ground*, women’s psychological issues like tension, anxiety, intense fear, etc. are caused by the economic and political oppression they are exposed to. Lamia’s fear and worry reached a peak when noticed Karim dressed in dirty clothes. When Lamia noticed Karim's filthy and ripped clothing, she assumed that he got into trouble with the Israelis. Lamia asks him, “You've been caught in an explosion! Your clothes! Everything's torn to shreds! Are you hurt? Where were you hit?” (Laird 107). Karim just made a soccer field and played with his friends, but his mother freaked out as she watched him because she could not believe he was merely playing. Such thinking explains that Palestinian mothers are different, they do not resemble other mothers worldwide. They live in constant fear as they are always about to lose a loved one. Their lives under occupation are intolerable since pain and suffering are inherent aspects of such life. Lamia’s state of astonishment makes her feel scared and worried about Karim. She has trouble imagining her son simply playing. Her negative thoughts are interpreted by her mind as reality.

Likewise, Hopper's mother worries about him in the same way, particularly after the capture of her elder son. Hopper says, “She's always scared I'll get arrested too” (Laird 116). Hopper's mother was a widow and she had to work after her husband's death to help her family. Her elder son, Salim, is arrested without a reason; therefore, she does her best to keep Hopper out of trouble because she understands how determined Hopper is to get revenge for the capture of his brother. Hopper’s mother says, “You boys keep out of trouble. One son in prison is enough” (Laird 119). Salim’s mother continued to wait for him after his arrest, but she was unable to find out where he was. She returned to her disappointment and sorrow and began to cry often. The Palestinian woman confronts the atrocities of the occupation because she is the mother, wife, and daughter of a martyr, detainee, dead, or injured.

Similarly, Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand* presents Malaak's mother who is also torn between her fear for her daughter who stops talking, and her son who wants to join Islamic Jihad. She was fully aware of her son's activities against the Israeli soldiers. He joined the stone-throwers who haunt more soldiers with stones; however, although she was constantly worried about throwing stones, her biggest fear was Hamid's desire to join Islamic Jihad. In Clinton's, *A Stone in My Hand*, Malaak's mother says, "but the soldiers could beat you or arrest you. I've lost my husband. I will not lose my only son" (Clinton 84). Thus, in her article, "Liberating Voices: The Political Implications of Palestinian Mothers Narrating their Loss", Nadera Kevorkian points out, "Mother's fear of future loss put them in a continuous state of worry and tension" (400). For this reason, Hamid's mother continually warns him against fighting the Israelis who only deal with weapons and will not hesitate to end his life if they feel threatened. Due to the extremist nature of those soldiers, fear and stress accompany those miserable mothers even in their dreams.

Hamid's mother has already lived in the pain and sorrow that her husband's death left behind and she fears the notion that she might experience the same awful feelings because of her son. When her husband disappeared and she told her children that he was missing, her daughter Malaak stopped talking for two weeks. However, when she knew in her heart that he was dead, she preferred not to tell Malaak at that time. After that when she told Malaak the truth of her father's death, she declared that she was in mourning and wore black clothes to show that she knew that her husband died. Malaak's mother says, "Yes Malaak. I am in mourning now. I will show the world that what I know in here...is true" (Clinton 63). Her husband's death left a heavy burden upon her shoulders concerning keeping their children safe under the occupation. Malaak's mother becomes more afraid and scared and she is obsessed with the notion of any sudden loss.

Although there are no direct dialogues between Malaak's mother and her husband in Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand*, she regularly honours his memory. First, when he did not return, she told her children that he was missing, but then, when she read in a newspaper that there was a terrible accident, she knew that the Arabic mechanic mentioned in the newspaper was her husband, "Then I knew the meaning of the touch on my shoulder" (Clinton 59). Although she lost her family's provider and the source of financial income, Malaak's mother had to carry the whole responsibility of her family after her husband's death. Malaak says that her sister Hend used to share her one bedroom, but recently she used to sleep with her mother as the latter never stops crying, "But now my mother cries at night. Hend goes to her when she cries. A lot of time just sleeps with my mother" (Clinton 33-4). Malaak's mother became a widow and the burden on her shoulders grew heavier than before. She became the sole provider and the source of livelihood after her husband's death. In addition, she not only lost the source of financial supply, but she also lost a source of safety and security in their life under occupation

Hamid causes great fear and anxiety for his mother who becomes even more disturbed as a result of his desire to join Islamic Jihad and their tales of fighting the Israelis. She was fully aware that her son was vulnerable to the soldiers' brutality who won't think twice about beating him as they did to his friend Nasser before.

Therefore, when Hamid and Tariq were about to throw stones at the soldier who started shouting, Hamid's mother bent on her knees and cried heavily as the soldier told her something. Malaak says, “My mother raises her face to him. Then the soldier raises his rifle into the air and shoots it straight up” (Clinton 82). It sounds like the soldier is warning her that she might lose her son. Consequently, she can no longer stop crying due to excessive fear and worry, especially after the soldier's shouts. Malaak's mother is a traumatized woman who lives in an environment of abuse and the frequent violent crimes that occur nearby make her more afraid of losing one of her children after she lost her husband.

Thus, Kevorkian indicates that watching Israeli soldiers is a sorrowful and painful experience for many women. Many mothers express their emotions of fatigue, outrage, and distress; in addition to feeling humiliated, depressed, and helpless to defend and guard their closed ones, some others explain that they lost their ability to walk after watching those soldiers. Palestinian mothers allude to the inner conflict between their desire to keep and support their children, and their weakness and inability at the sight of the Israeli tanks and destructive weapons (401). Such a description of sorrowful feelings demonstrates the tension and depression that those helpless mothers experience. They live in a lawless zone where they are constantly in danger of losing a loved one for no apparent reason other than the fact that they are Palestinians.

Given the persistent emotional tension and suffering and the hard circumstances under occupation, Palestinian mothers suffer the chaos, insecurity, brutality, and violence of the Israelis. In Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand*, Hamid tells Malaak, “You only ripped the picture. Mother's life was already ripped” (Clinton 135). This is an indication of the oppression that women like Malaak's mother endure under occupation. She lost her husband on his way to Israel while seeking work. After his death, she had to hold the responsibility of three children. She spent all her time crying due to the negative feelings that surrounded her. She is constantly stressed out since she is aware that nothing is safe especially now that she is aware of her son's insistence on joining resistance: “But now my mother cries at night. Hend goes to her when she cries.” (Clinton 33-4). While Malaak's mother told her that her father was missing, she knew well that he was already dead. However, her fear of her daughter who stopped talking prevented her from telling the truth, and she chose to hide her pain inside. Malaak's mother is one among many Palestinian wives and mothers whose lives are a mixture of pain and loss, and they are left with no choice but to suffer.

The excessive fear of loss in the lives of Palestinian women under occupation leads to traumatized mothers and wives. The fear of loss plays a significant role in the lives of mothers like Lamia, Hopper's mother, and Malaak's mother; therefore, they become traumatized. Elder women are not the only female figures who are traumatized. The young girls also fall victim to trauma because of the Israeli atrocities. Farah, Malaak, and Hend serve as examples of girls who are mute and unable to speak for themselves due to trauma and oppression. In Laird's *A Little Piece of Ground*, Farah, Karim's sister, an eight-year-old girl, was a traumatized child who sometimes remained silent. She feared her elder brother, Karim who

considered her a source of annoyance. Karim could notice how Farah had changed lately, especially after the visit to the village: “she’d been different lately, more easily scared, less assertive, crying at the sound of loud voices, becoming frantic at the sound of explosions or distant gunfire” (Laird 140). Since their visit to the village, Farah began bedwetting. The other kids teased her when they noticed her wet spreadsheets. Farah was a miserable child who could not share her inner emotions with others. She preferred silence and sitting alone. She was so traumatized by the violence she saw during their visit to the village that she now reacts with increased terror to any sign of danger. She also changed from an innocent child to a stressed one as a result of other children making fun of her for using spreadsheets.

The occupation in Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand* not only traumatized mothers and wives, but it also traumatized young girls like Malaak and Hend. The story begins with the depiction of Malaak as a silent traumatized child who suffers from her father’s absence. Malaak stopped talking for two weeks since she could not talk about what she felt in her heart because of the occupation. One day, when Malaak was in the market with her sister, Hend, she noticed a soldier with the M-16 rifle. Malaak was terrified at the sight of the rifle and she remembered when she was with her father how the soldiers terrified the young men of the *Intifada*. This memory indicates her trauma since she felt safe and protected when her father carried her. But now her father is not here to protect her once again; therefore, she fears the soldiers, “I closed my eyes...The jeep started, and my father lifted me up. He carried me like a tiny baby. I was deep in his arms. Rocking in his steps. Safe” (Clinton 30). However, when she had a feeling that she had to express her fear, to be positive, to resist, and to gain some power, she could not because she was not only a female but also a young child who was not supposed to leave the house, “I want to run, jump, scream, throw stones, but I’m not supposed to leave our house” (Clinton 107). Thus, even when Malaak attempts to overcome her trauma and her fear, she fails, as she is aware of the oppression of her society, which limits these acts to men only.

Hend is another example of a young girl who experiences double oppression because of Israeli occupation and the patriarchal culture she lives in. She consistently complied with the social norms that restrict women’s roles in marriage and childbirth. Malaak says, “She’s waiting for the *intifada* to be over, she’s waiting for money, she’s waiting for marriage” (Clinton 153). Hend had postponed all of her dreams. She anticipated a large bridal procession and constantly fantasized about marriage and a knight to save her. However, the bitter reality made all of her dreams vanish. She could do nothing except wait. That is why her siblings call her ‘the wait-and-see girl’. On the other hand, because she was constantly working with her mother to maintain their poor living, the occupation increased her subalternity; Malaak says, “My sister lives in the smell of the stove with my mother, like the girls I know, but I do not” (Clinton 1). Hend is subjected to oppression since she is required to work while her brother is busily engaged in his work as one of the *Shabab*. Malaak says, “Hend has been working more than she has been in school anyway” (Clinton 27). Such a description of Hend asserts the fact that Hend is excluded; she never resembles the other girls of her age. She is too busy working. Female children like

Malaak and Hend remain silent and get traumatized as they lack the ability to stand up for themselves or make independent decisions.

The women and girls in Laird's *A Little Piece of Ground* and Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand* consequently experience the feeling of humiliation or the fear of being humiliated, the real loss or the fear of loss as a result of the Israeli atrocity. Traumatized mothers, wives, and girls appear in both works due to either the actual loss of a loved one or the constant worry of losing them. The inability to speak freely and express their true feelings forces Palestinian women and girls into silence. Thus, when the Israelis arouse all these feelings in Palestinian women, they are successful in producing weak figures.

### **Economic Problems under Occupation**

In addition to the disempowerment strategy the Israelis use to subjugate Palestinian women, they also cause economic problems that alter the role of women in society. In these difficult economic times, some women split the household's responsibilities with their husbands, while others hold the entire load because their husbands are deceased or absent for any other reason. In Palestine, women not only turn to the labour market to establish an independent economic entity for themselves, but they also do so in order to manage their families under the difficult circumstances brought on by occupation. Kitty Warnock indicates that since the fifties when a great number of Palestinian men immigrated to seek work outside and used to visit their family once a year, some women found themselves adhering to the role of men since they became the only caregiver of the family (1990:51). Thus, the role of woman changes under occupation from being only a housewife to a caregiver who is thoroughly responsible for assuring the financial concerns of the family. Warnock also indicates that the Palestinian woman does not resemble her counterpart in the West who works in restaurants or public transportation. They never worked in shops until recently since they constantly tried to avoid the attention of foreigners; nevertheless, even if they are working more now, they still protect themselves by wearing their well-known attire. Some women work as domestic workers and cleaners, which are among the lowest-paying jobs (1990:121). Since men are still chosen over women in the job market, the lowest status of jobs and wages are considered as additional factors that define subaltern women.

Thus, Malaak's mother is the kind of woman whose economic conditions force her to work with the help of her elder daughter, Hend. After her husband's death, Malaak's mother had to take on all responsibilities for the family, which meant she had to find employment to support her family. Malaak says, "She and my mother clean houses for some wealthy people in Rimal" (Clinton 27). Thus, after her husband's death, Malaak's mother worked cleaning houses for wealthy families with the help of her elder daughter, Hend to keep her family. Hence, the poor economic atmosphere under occupation has changed the roles of many women including Malaak's mother. Moreover, because of the difficult conditions of the Palestinian society under occupation, the relationship between wives and their husbands tends to be different. In Laird's *A Little Piece of Ground*, the foundation of the relationship between men and women is based on sharing responsibilities concerning their family life. For example, besides taking care of her children, Lamia used to ease her

husband who was disappointed because of his unsellable goods, “Everyone’s in the same boat...All the other shopkeepers are having just as bad a time” (Laird 32). Lamia noticed that her husband was sad and depressed as he could not manage his business. She eased his suffering by saying, “It can’t go on forever, *habibi*. It can’t be as bad as this forever” (Laird 33). Lamia can feel the bad economic conditions; her role as a wife and a caregiver at the same time forces her to hide her suffering inside and support her husband in his ordeal. She managed to convince him of a better future; moreover, she also offered her salary to manage their family life although he refused her offer.

To summarize, Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand* present examples of Palestinian women who are subjected to several types of oppression. Lamia, Karim’s mother; Hopper’s mother; and Malaak’s mother are three women struggling under the occupation. They endure the overuse of power against them, such as the imposition of prolonged curfews that restrict their movements. The Israelis’ power aims to disempower Palestinian women in both novels. The policy of disempowerment in both novels manifests itself in various ways including humiliating women, frightening them, and threatening them with loss, all of which result in their trauma. Besides hegemony and disempowerment, the Israelis also create economic problems that badly affect the Palestinian society in general and Palestinian women in particular. The role of women has changed under occupation, especially in the absence of the husband like Hopper’s and Malaak’s mothers. Even Lamia, although her husband still lives with them, her burden increases after her husband’s financial crisis. Thus, Palestinian women in Laird’s *A Little Piece of Ground* and Clinton’s *A Stone in My Hand* are subalterns.

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