

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Factors that motivate women to speak out for themselves, whether in writing or verbally, include support from women that strengthens solidarity. Time after time, women try to voice themselves so that perceptions of women may change. Throughout history, women have had to understand many things happening around them, including their own role as women, household matters, and even romantic relationships. They were coerced into submission merely because they are women. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (2012), states that the world seems to be made only for men and will remain their domain. However, women have also fought against these practices to show the world that women can hold the same status as men and also desire freedom and independence. The view that men are superior and that women are merely weak beings has spurred women's emancipation, driving them to demand justice and stand up for themselves. Women's ability to speak out through the feminist movement has become a source of fear for men, as it represents competition from the opposite gender (De Beauvoir, 2012). It shows that women can also do more than men expect.

Although times have become more modern, there are still many who look down on women and do not necessarily understand what it means to be a woman in the context of womanhood. This is consistent with female writers who interpret womanhood by presenting female characters who face their lives as women. Mary Eagleton, as cited in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism* (2007), stated that the

feminist movement invited feminist literary criticism, noting that a work written by a woman and dedicated to women provides space for women to present their views on themselves and on social and political issues. Therefore, literary works are meant to convey the messages authors intend to deliver. Many female authors also weave their own experiences and perspectives into their work to help readers understand the situations depicted in their novels. Most of them also experienced circumstances similar to those their characters face, which have shaped and inspired them to convey those experiences. Female writers express their views on the world's unequal treatment of women as a form of solidarity. They reinterpret the history written by their male counterparts, who have confined women to domestic duties and denied them freedom, from the women's own perspective.

Besides, many female writers have written about the experiences of their fellow women, including literary works that represent the voices of women from various countries, such as Palestine. This country is constantly the subject of online discussion due to its ongoing political instability and the attempt to erase it from history. No matter the gender, class, or even age in Palestine, women are writing news articles, essays, and even fiction related to them, solely to underline the genocide the country is enduring until now. They spread awareness of what is still happening in Palestine; it is related to women trying to voice their concerns about Palestine.

Moreover, many women writers, especially those who are direct descendants of their forebears, the Palestinians, have written about the nation itself, Palestinian women, and the political situation in their writing. Susan Abulhawa with *Against the Loveless World*, Sahar Khalifeh with *Wild Thorns*, Adania Shibli with *Minor Detail*, and many other women writers speak about Palestine and women. Despite their

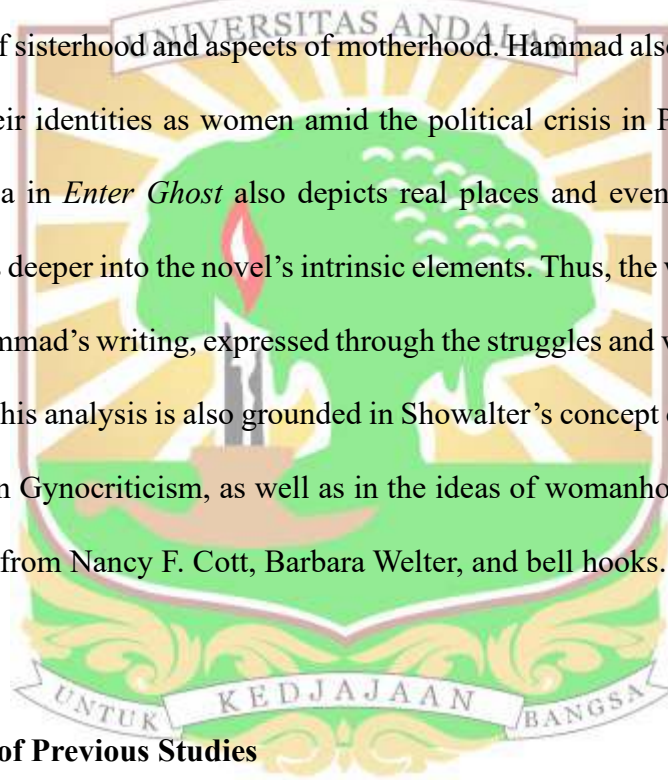
different settings and plots, these three authors represent only a small sample of female writers from Palestine. These are writers who write about women and for women; their work is shaped by political pressures, history and their roots.

A newcomer to the literary scene, Isabella Hammad was inspired by the many Palestinian writers who came before her. She had already written an essay on the genocide in Palestine and reviewed Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* before publishing her own novel. Isabella Hammad published her first novel, *The Parisian*, in 2019. Although this novel follows a male protagonist, it explores the patriarchy and colonialism that women experience. Subsequently, her second novel, *Enter Ghost*, published in 2023, has won several awards. The most recent prize Hammad received in 2025 for *Enter Ghost* was the Clark Fiction Prize (Blaschke, 2025). Since this novel is told from a woman's point of view, the writer chose to discuss it.

Furthermore, Isabella Hammad is also of Palestinian lineage. She introduces Sonia, who has Palestinian roots, and explores her search for independence through her career, romantic relationships, family life, and diaspora. Additionally, other female characters, such as Mariam and Haneen, are introduced; they have received little attention in other studies, which focus on their efforts to demonstrate that women can stand on their own feet for themselves and their families. In this analysis, the writer assumes that the female characters in the novel help one another and demonstrate their independence, thereby showing womanhood through sisterhood and motherhood among Palestinian women. Thus, this analysis draws on Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost*, which also explores the connections between her Palestinian roots and her writing on women's independence. Therefore, this research will discuss the voices of Palestinian womanhood in Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost*.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost* focuses on Sonia's life as the protagonist. From the narrative, it is evident that Hammad portrays the problems faced by female characters. She creates female characters as independent Palestinian women who remain true to their identities and build solidarity as a form of political resistance. Indirectly, Hammad gives voice to women's issues through her female characters. The term used to describe their struggle is "womanhood", rooted in the novel's emergence of sisterhood and aspects of motherhood. Hammad also has her characters articulate their identities as women amid the political crisis in Palestine. The story told by Sonia in *Enter Ghost* also depicts real places and events in Palestine; the writer delves deeper into the novel's intrinsic elements. Thus, the writer's chosen title explores Hammad's writing, expressed through the struggles and voices of the female characters. This analysis is also grounded in Showalter's concept of women's writing as outlined in Gynocriticism, as well as in the ideas of womanhood, sisterhood, and motherhood from Nancy F. Cott, Barbara Welter, and bell hooks.



1.3 The Review of Previous Studies

The first article examining the novel *Enter Ghost* through Frantz Fanon's decolonisation is by Ayyed and Abdullah, titled "Voices of Palestinian Resistance: A Postcolonial Reading of Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* and Isabella Hammad's *Enter Ghost*" (2025). Drawing on Fanon's notion of decolonisation, this article also intertwines the histories of Palestine and Israel in *Enter Ghost* (2023), using *Hamlet*'s reinterpretation and theatre as a weapon of resistance from European literature. In

this article, the researchers' findings also present a view that aligns with the portrayal of the Palestinian symbol as a spectre that cannot be defeated by the coloniser seeking to eradicate them, in line with Fanon's narrative of decolonisation, in which "the coloniser kills to maintain power" (Ayyed & Abdullah, 2025, p. 459). Based on the researchers' analysis, they concluded that *Enter Ghost* reflects resilience in the narrative and the use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a weapon of resistance through the concept of decolonisation put forward by Fanon.

The second article by Amrieh and Shalabi, entitled "A Tale of Two Houses: Returning Ghosts and Hammad's Appropriation of Shakespeare's Hamlet" (2025), explores the theme of return in this novel and the symbol of the ghost. From the findings, the researchers discovered the issue of Sonia's house being sold to a Jewish person, which symbolises "the displacement and loss of home" (Amrieh & Shalabi, 2025, p. 7) for her as a Palestinian. This article highlights Youngwhoe Koo's argumentation regarding the symbolism of the ghost of King Hamlet through "Sonia as a descendant of Palestinian" (Amrieh & Shalabi, 2025, p.9), who returns to Haifa as a form of haunt while "Israel attempts to bury the past" (Amrieh & Shalabi, 2025, p. 10), the existence of Palestinians. In this study, the researchers concluded that the connections between the narratives in *Enter Ghost* depict a form of resistance through the portrayal of ghosts against Israel, which silences them. The researchers also emphasise that political, social, and spatial segregation persists within the novel's timeline.

Moreover, the third article on the same novel, written by Fuchs and titled "The Future of the Ghost: Absence, Haunting, and Returning in Contemporary Palestinian Cultural Production" (2025), also discusses the ghost as a symbol in the novel. This

article discusses how ghost symbols have appeared in modern Palestinian art, literature, and films “for almost a century” (Fuchs, 2025, p. 2). Ghosts here illustrate the issue of settler-colonialism discussed by Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini: what Israel did to “replace the Indigenous population” (Fuchs, 2025, p. 7), as perceived by the Palestinians. The findings of this article show the relatedness between Isabella Hammad’s *Enter Ghost* and other artworks: “the haunting return indicates a method of resistance” (Fuchs, 2025, p. 15), just as Sonia did when she returned to Haifa and also took part in a production of *Hamlet* in the West Bank. This article also highlights Palestinian resistance when Hammad writes that someone can be a ghost in the novel, describing it as “a ghostlike ... tension between preserving the past while looking towards the future” (Fuchs, 2025, p. 16). In this study, it can be concluded that the presence of ghostly symbols depicted by contemporary Palestinian artists or writers constitutes a “process of rendering presence into absence” (Fuchs, 2025, p. 17), serving as a form of resistance.

In this research on womanhood, the fourth article by Neimneh is titled “Women in the Works of Ghassan Kanafani: A Comparative Reading of Two Novels” (2022). Neimneh found that both works by Kanafani, *All That’s Left You* (1966) and *Umm Saad* (1969), symbolise the role of the woman or mother as the Palestinian homeland, drawing on a comparative and archetypal reading of the Earth Mother by Carl Jung. From Jung’s archetype reading, in *All That’s Left You*, character Maryam mostly depict the negative symbol because she “becomes a source of infamy” (Neimneh, 2022, p. 502) and source of loss, while Umm Saad in *Umm Saad* depict the positive symbol because as a mother she showing “resistance and return to the land” (Neimneh, 2022, p. 504). This article discusses motherhood and womanhood in both

works as the “relation of the Palestinian homeland” (Neimneh, 2022, p. 505) and the female characters connected to the “Palestinian crisis after 1948” (Neimneh, 2022, p. 506). This study highlights how the authors of both works portray female characters as defiant and inseparable from politics, and the presence of female archetypes associated with the homeland, which are intertwined with Palestinian history.

The fifth article, titled “Palestinian Women Writers in English: Compromising National and Feminist Agendas” (2024), by Jarrad et al., discusses how Palestinians contribute to the national movement by advancing gender awareness and defying societal and cultural norms through literature within a postcolonial feminist framework. The researchers uncover the representation of Palestinians through feminism and nationalism, “as women’s rights cannot be isolated from the political context” (Jarrad et al., 2024, p. 173). Palestinian literature can be described as a “bildungsroman” (Jarrad et al., 2024, p. 175), in which the story traces the growth and development of the representation and symbol of women in Palestine. This article highlights Tahboub’s ideas about motherhood in literature, “representing the nation, the motherland, and martyrs’ mother” (Jarrad et al., 2024, p. 176). The researchers discuss Mahmoud Darwish’s poem that addresses the traditional opposition voiced by women, associated with “land and womanhood” (Jarrad et al., 2024, p. 176). This study also underscores womanhood and motherhood, revealing that they are not separate from Palestinian history or nationhood.

The sixth study, written by Rehman et al. under the title “From Being to Becoming a Woman: A Feminist Study of Rum’s *A Woman Is No Man*” (2025), examines the complexities of identity, societal expectations, and oppression,

particularly regarding womanhood, especially for Palestinian Arab roots in the novel. This article uses a mixed-methods framework from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Other*, Judith Butler's *Theory of Performativity* and Chandra Mohanty's *Third-World Woman*. The female characters must follow "patriarchal norms and expectations" (Rehman et al., 2025, p. 463), experiencing an identity confusion between "modernity and conservatism, male and female, also American nationality and Palestinian Arabic roots" (Rehman et al., 2025, p. 463). This article concludes by showing how women are subordinate to men, how their lives are controlled by societal expectations, cultural norms, and patriarchal values, and how it portrays tension around cultural identity through the female characters.

The seventh article, entitled "Arab Women and War in the Short Story *Falnaltagi* by Radwa Ahmed Eid" (2022), by Handayani et al., uses Showalter's gynocriticism to examine the intrinsic elements of the data selected by the researchers. This article also reveals that, in literary works, women are still considered weak and passive, marginalising them from public roles, especially in stories related to war (Handayani et al., 2022). This article itself emphasises that female authors such as Eid still face challenges in writing about women but are still shackled by gender stereotypes, especially patriarchal culture (Handayani et al., 2022). Furthermore, nowadays men and women, even though they can work together in war "by carrying out activities according to their expertise" (Handayani et al., 2022, para. 6). This article underlines the struggles faced by female writers in

confronting the ideology of *jihad*, which encourages women to take part in war; moreover, many female writers remain trapped in androcentrism.

Roifah writes the eighth article titled “The Portrayal of Women Characters in the Novel *Well-Behaved Indian Women* by Saumya Dave: The Study of Gynocriticism” (2023). Roifah used Elaine Showalter’s Gynocriticism to examine the novel and determine how the author developed the four models of women’s writing in gynocriticism. The first model of women’s bodies is that women are expected to “limitations doing some things” (Roifah, 2023, p. 21) and to be cast in the role of a site of childbearing because “she has a womb” (Roifah, 2023, p. 21). In the model of language, women use repetition of their words to “be considered important repeatedly” (Roifah, 2023, pp. 21-22). The relatedness to women’s psyches as the third model with “reproductive processes” (Roifah, 2023, p. 22) increases the character's anxiety that may happen in the future. The last model depicts the relationship between the novel’s author and their culture by portraying the character as Indian and having her “prepare food for her husband first” (Roifah, 2023, p. 22), reflecting a particular culture. In this study, Saumya Dave portrays her female characters through the lens of gynocriticism as women who remain rooted in their culture. She does not focus solely on their culture but balances it with their ambitions and efforts to achieve equality with men in education, career development, and romantic relationships.

Similarly, the ninth article discusses women’s experiences, particularly as depicted by female characters, in Kuşcu and Başoğlu’s study titled “Representation of Women’s Experience in Füzûzan’s First and Last Short Stories: A Gynocritical Study” (2025). Through gynocritical readings of several of Füzûzan’s short stories,

the researcher found that female characters in these writings reflect the marginalisation of class and gender, dominated by a patriarchal system that limits women in various ways (2025, p. 67). Moreover, the researchers examine how Füzûzan depicts “personal and social conflict through the female body” (Kuşcu & Başoğul, 2025, p. 70). Some stories discuss motherhood as the “experience shaped by social, cultural, and ideological contexts” (Kuşcu & Başoğul, 2025, p. 71) and being a mother does not come only from biological factors. The last discussion describes how memories ingrained since childhood can influence a girl’s future in relation to her “social structures and family roles” (Kuşcu & Başoğul, 2025, p. 71). This study discusses how women face many other problems even from birth, as depicted in literature and fiction, and that what women experience in real life can be even more difficult

Hence, after two years, the novel was published, and more researchers began to study it. In Isabella Hammad’s *Enter Ghost*, the writer identifies additional themes beyond politics and the symbolism of ghosts. Thus, this inspired the writer to analyse other aspects and incorporate additional research from previous studies. However, this study will focus only on the female characters in *Enter Ghost*, using a gynocritical approach rather than discussing the novel’s Palestinian politics. To differentiate this study from other studies, the writer will examine *Enter Ghost*. As a new phase of this research, the writer focuses on a more recent topic related to women and Hammad’s writing, particularly their independence and womanhood.

1.4 Research Questions

Following the components to be discussed, this research focuses on Sonia's perspective as a woman in her surroundings and as a Palestinian. This research will be conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do the female characters in *Enter Ghost* define themselves as independent Palestinian women under political instability?
2. How does Isabella Hammad represent the voices of womanhood and show the female characters' connections to support each other as Palestinians in *Enter Ghost*?

1.5 The Scope of the Research

This research will focus solely on the interactions and relationships among female characters in novels depicting Palestinian women's independence and womanhood through sisterhood and motherhood. Thus, this analysis contributes to research on the novel *Enter Ghost* by focusing more closely on the female environment. Since other studies have already discussed the politics, narratives, and ghost symbols in novels, this analysis will focus on the issues women face in novels to show their independence and the experiences of female characters.

1.6 The Objective of the Research

After setting the scope of the research, the writer identifies the goal of the research on the voices of Palestinian womanhood through Sonia's perspective in *Enter Ghost*. This analysis will examine women's independence in the female characters Sonia, Mariam, and Haneen, who portray their Palestinian identities despite the political issues that arose. Moreover, this analysis will demonstrate how Hammad reveals that women's connections and support can foster womanhood through sisterhood and motherhood. In addition, this analysis will reveal the female characters' bond with one another as Palestinian women.

