Between the Self and the Collective: An Examination of Palestinian Resistance in Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns*

Shaden Khoury

"سلام لأرض، خلقت للسلام وما رأت يوماً سلاماً" – محمود درويش[1]

Introduction

> "The occupation! The word had so many meanings. Exile: a reality we experience in the heart of the motherland itself. Torture: a topic defined to perfection by the pimps of politics at the United Nations. Sink in the mud, Palestine, kiss the world goodbye!" (Khalifeh 2011, 56).

When discussing the Israeli occupation of Palestine, it is imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding not only of the diverse manifestations of subjugation but also of the manifold expressions of resistance to said op-

pression—it is crucial to understand that the Palestinian resistance is not monolithic and can take various forms. Sahar Khalifeh, an author renowned for her exploration of the multi-faceted struggles of the Palestinian people, masterfully portrays this struggle through the characters of her novel, *Wild Thorns* (1976) where she underscores the interplay between an internal conflict, centered on individual choices for survival, and an external and existential struggle against the Israeli occupation. Khalifeh's narrative serves as an integral component in fostering a profound understanding of the Palestinian experience in the West Bank[2] , elucidating the intricacies of their resistance, both against the Israeli occupation and within their own society.

As such, this paper examines Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns*, discussing its portrayal of Palestinian resistance and identity within the Palestinian liberation struggle through the stories of four characters: Adil, Usama, Zuhdi, and Basil. While there is much scholarship on the content of *Wild Thorns*, there is very little written about how the novel itself is an act of resistance. In a study which examines the way literature represents reality, it is important to also discuss the material reality of the censorship of Palestinian literature and how the act of writing and publishing a novel depicting the Israeli occupation, and its effects on Palestinians, is an act which refuses to allow for the erasure of the Palestinian narrative. Within the novel, the treatment of resistance is

multifaceted, consisting of three key elements. The first section of the paper, then, underscores the notion that resistance takes many forms, one of which is literature, focusing on how it expresses people's oppression and their resistance to it, as well as how literature itself can exist as an act of resistance.

The role of education as a form of both oppression and resistance is not lacking within the scholarship regarding the Israeli occupation of Palestine; however, when discussed within the context of *Wild Thorns*, few (Mahmoud 2019; Priyanka 2016) discuss this issue at length vis-à-vis its representation and manifestation in the novel. Additionally, within the literary scholarship on this novel, there is surprisingly very little written on the role of everyday language as not only a tool of oppression but also a form of resistance. As such, the second section of this paper emphasises the pivotal roles of language and education in the context of both Israeli occupation and Palestinian resistance, as it is used not solely as a tool and form of resistance, but also as a tool of oppression imposed by occupying forces.

While each of the characters in the novel approach their oppression differently, each of them is eventually driven to violence. While it is important to note that violence does not always result in counter-violence, it is also imperative to understand exactly how people who face violent oppression and occupation may eventually resort

to armed resistance. As such, the third section of this paper examines how *Wild Thorns* dramatises the concept of armed resistance as manufactured by the Israeli occupation's violent nature, underscoring the cyclicality of violence within the context of oppression.

The Literature of Resistance

In *Wild Thorns*, Sahar Khalifeh elucidates the intricate struggles experienced by Palestinians in their resistance against the Israeli occupation, capturing the collective challenge of Palestinians to stay in their land. In accordance with Girma Negash, in "Art Invoked- A Mode of Understanding and Shaping the Political" (2014), art is the best mode of understanding the political, as it "takes account of the intentions, motivations, and reasons for human actions" (Negash 2014, 188). Negash reaches three main conclusions regarding the usefulness of the arts in the construction of political ideas and notions, as well as where the arts are located within the academic perception of politics: (1) Art "shape[s] political ideas or help[s] constitute politic;" (2) art "provides the fabric and setting from which political meaning is derived;" and (3) art provides us with the tools for "restoring and intensifying experience," thus amplifying our understanding of the political (Negash 2014, 196). Literature constitutes a platform for political discourse, as it is affected by historical conditions, both in the temporal and spatial sense.

Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, in "Speaking Truth to Power – Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance" (2013), further explain that the notion of indigenous storytelling, a narrative form which "must also be a remapping project, one that challenges the sacrosanct claims of colonial borders and the hierarchies imposed on either side of the dividing line" (Sium and Ritskes 2013, VI). Sium and Ritskes quote Haunani-Kay Trask, saying that "our [indigenous] story remains unwritten. It rests within the culture, which is inseparable from the land. To know this is to know our history. To write this is to write of the land and the people who are born from her" (Sium and Ritskes 2013, VII). Sium and Ritskes further discuss the importance of indigenous storytelling in the preservation of memory and land, as "in the colonial order of things, indigenous stories are always threatening. They're threatening because they position the teller outside the realm of 'objective' commentary, and inside one of subjective action" (Sium and Ritskes 2013, IV). Historically, many Palestinian writers and poets were imprisoned by Israel for their work, while others were told that if they confessed to espionage, they would be pardoned and allowed to leave the country (Kanafani 1968, 23). As such, while *Wild Thorns* does capture the manifold forms of resistance, it is important to note that its narrative is not only a representation of resistance: the novel itself exists as an act of resistance.

In the discussion of Palestinians remaining in their land, the concept of *Sumud*— "steadfastness"—is significant.

It serves as a framework for understanding a multitude of everyday acts of resistance and offers a perspective that seeks to uncover gaps within resistance narratives. "The essence of sumud," Jedya Hammad and Rachel Tribe explain, "is endurance and perseverance in an anti-colonial struggle, opposing and resisting the occupation and the pervasive impact it has on everyday life" (Hammad and Rachel 2021, 138). In other words, *Sumud* is the maintenance of normalcy in an abnormal context; small, everyday acts such as eating, smiling, and having family and friends, are acts of resistance for Palestinians. Palestinian resistance is not only a response to Israel's territorial occupation, then, but also a reaction to Israel's persistent efforts to erase Palestinian culture and identity. The Israeli government's refusal to permit Palestinians to commemorate their own history is a testament to the exercise of power not only over the land and its inhabitants, but also over the narratives, perspectives, and overarching truths of memory and history, as explained by Helga Tawil-Souri in "Where is the political in cultural studies? In Palestine" (2011). Tawil-Souri goes further to define culture as a product of everyday lived experiences, illustrating that the cultural production of Palestinians is a form of resistance against attempts to silence and erase the Palestinian narrative (Tawil-Souri 2011, 470). This form of resistance through memory occurs in various moments in the novel, as characters reflect upon the past and the present, highlighting the importance of memory in the steadfastness of Palestinians. The first instance of this in *Wild Thorns* occurs as Usama

makes his way to Nablus, when another passenger tells him how the occupation burned the trees, but that they need to "leave some tracks" (Khalifeh 2011, 24) wherever they go to not forget the past and keep fighting for their liberation. Khalifeh's mission in the novel, then, is to leave her track by telling the story of Palestinian life under occupation through the characters in her novel.

Khalifeh, however, is not the first to undertake the mission of documenting and capturing the oppression of Palestinians. Following the *Nakba* in 1948, Palestinians faced the arduous task of maintaining their presence in their homeland. This struggle to remain rooted in their land imbued Palestinian literature with its distinctive character in expressing Palestinian identity (Zayyad 1970, 81). Poets and writers played a pivotal role in this mission, actively engaging in the ongoing struggle for Palestinian identity and survival. Their close connection to the people and the overarching struggle was instrumental in preserving the Palestinian cultural heritage, as they deliberately and consistently portrayed the Palestinian struggle and identity in their literary works (Zayyad 1970, 82). The poets and writers were entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing the national spirit among the Palestinian youth, many of whom had limited exposure to these poets and writers and only had access to them through prominent newspapers such as "Al-Ittihad" and "Al-Jadeed" (Zayyad 1970, 87). These writers succeeded in this mission, providing the younger generation with

poetry and literature that addressed national issues and heritage. Their connection to the working class, which represented the lived reality of the Palestinian people, contributed to the resonance and success of their works (Zayyad 1970, 92). This connection between the literature and the people can be seen in various points in the novel, most notably during Basil's time in prison, as his hesitation to become more actively resistant is alleviated through the prisoners singing folk songs and reciting poetry, specifically that of Kamal Nasser, a Palestinian poet and political activist:

> "Strike executioner, we're not afraid.
> These dark brows
> Beaded with sweat
> And burdened with chains
> So the nation will live.
> Strike then, and have no fear" (Khalifeh 2011, 119).

While this occurs within the text, it serves the metanarrative purpose of exemplifying how the poets and their work sustained the spirit of steadfastness in Palestinians; how their words eliminated fear and encouraged resistance, as well as created unity within the Palestinian community, which is crucial when fighting for the community. These lines from Nasser's poem highlight the role of the prisoners within the liberation movement: they are "Beaded with sweat/ And burdened with chains" as a sacrifice which will bring forth the liberation

of the Palestinian people. Speaking directly with the Israeli occupation saying, "strike executioner, we are not afraid," this poem emphasises the resilience and strength of Palestinians in the face of death.

Palestinian writers distinguished themselves by penning their works from within the heart of their homeland, describing the demolished villages and the stolen fields, thus embodying the essence of their lived experiences (Zayyad 1970, 84). Palestinian resistance literature effectively bridged the cultural and the political, with writers using their art to depict the lived struggles and resistance. During the period between 1952 and 1960, Palestinian literature elucidated the political, cultural, and societal challenges faced by Palestinians, characterized by optimism, and driven by widespread awareness of the struggle's objectives and a commitment to the Palestinian people (Kanafani 1968, 45). Through this understanding of storytelling, as well as the historical context of the literature, we can see how *Wild Thorns* emerges as a work of resistance, both through its existence and its narrative.

One prevailing belief in the Palestinian literary world is that "art for art's sake" is not enough; rather, writers need to communicate their identity to their audience (Kamel 2017, 6). This sentiment is evident in the works of many Palestinian poets and novelists, who often explore themes of sadness and conflict, as well as the effects

of displacement and exile (Kamel 2017, 7). Additionally, Palestinian literature offers a unique and important perspective on the cultural, political, and social issues facing the region. One question about the definition of Palestinian literature is whether it is resistant or oppositional and, in answering that question, Nabih Al-Qassem refers to Faisal Darraj's suggestion that it is "wishful literature": one which focuses on wishful thinking rather than material reality, allowing Palestinians to imagine a better future. Darraj assumes a moralist and humanist position on literature, saying first that humans should always be the focus of literature, and second that a work of literature must always point to what is right, but that the Palestinian writer often does not know what is right (Al-Qassem 2001, 173).

Highlighting this moral ambiguity, *Wild Thorns* does not take it upon itself to make judgements on either opinion or form of resistance. Rather, it creates a space for all opinions and approaches to be explored and critiqued. The novel does this through the inner conflict between Adil and Usama and the opposing perspectives and experiences they have. Adil lives in the West Bank and works in Israel as a means of providing financial support for his family, since his father's ailment prevents him from doing so, as "he's got nine people hanging around his neck, not to mention the kidney machine" (Khalifeh 2011, 31). He also believes, throughout most of the novel, that non-violent political action is the best way

in which he can resist the occupation. In contrast, his cousin, Usama, has now returned to his mother's house in Nablus, in the West Bank, after five years of working in the Gulf countries with the purpose of becoming a fighter with the Palestinian resistance (Khalifeh 2011, 38). Usama also opposes any sort of cooperation with Israel, irrespective of the circumstances. This opposition exemplifies the complexity of the Palestinian resistance and how, despite having a shared goal and mission, the resistance movement encompasses a variety of perspectives and approaches. The first time we see this is through an exchange between Usama and Adil at the beginning of the novel:

> "Usama insisted: 'What are young people like you doing to oppose what goes on inside?'
> 'The same as what you've done to oppose what's outside'" (Khalifeh 2011, 28).

We can see through this exchange that while Usama and Adil are ostensibly oppositional, they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin—each mourning for Palestine, each wishing for the end of the occupation, and each thinking that their own way is the best for the collective. We also see this later in the novel when Usama confronts Adil, as the narrator tells us that "in spite of their wide differences, they'd always agreed on one point: the value of the individual existed only through the group. Today, the difference between them lay in the fact that each be-

lieved he was in accord with the group" (Khalifeh 2011, 87). Each of them blames the other for their way of dealing with the occupation and their oppression, as we see how, despite what each of them thinks of the other, neither has forgotten about the cause of Palestinian liberation. Furthermore, at various points in the novel, each of them reiterates the same sentence, we encounter it first through Adil: "Sink in the mud, Palestine!" (Khalifeh 2011, 56) following Abu Sabir, his co-worker, being injured at work and not being able to provide for his family anymore as he was working in Israel illegally, which deems him ineligible to receive workers' compensation. The second time we encounter a variation of this sentence is through Usama: "Sink, Palestine…" (Khalifeh 2011, 69), following his interaction with the bread-seller who was selling bread brought from Israel, as he laments on what has become of Palestine. Each laments the loss of the land, and each blames the other for their way of dealing with it, as in one of their confrontations, Usama exclaims, "I can't believe it. I'll never believe it. I just don't believe you've forgotten your own country and the occupation!" to which Adil replies, "the proof that I haven't forgotten about my country is that I haven't left it" (Khalifeh 2011, 98). While Usama thinks Adil is treacherous for working inside Israel and aiding the Israeli economy, Adil holds contempt for Usama for fleeing the land. Neither, however, is portrayed as better nor worse within the story: the novel simply lays out each perspective for the reader to understand the various

perspectives and make their own judgements.

Language, Education, and Resistance

As we delve deeper into the novel and its themes, the importance of language and education becomes evident, as they play a role in both the occupation and its resistance. Ghassan Kanafani, in *The Literature of Palestinian Resistance Under Occupation, 1948-1966* (1968), discusses how the State of Israel viewed language and education as an important aspect of Palestinian resistance, thus carrying out illiteracy policies towards Palestinians through inadequate curricula and lack of qualified teachers: not only were there not enough subjects taught at school, but the topics themselves—such as history and literature—did not represent Palestinian identity and history (Kanafani 1968, 23). In addition, Palestinian university students in Israel were subject to anonymous threats, with no protection from Israeli authorities, causing many Palestinian students to drop out of universities, lowering the education rates among Palestinians in Israel (Kanafani 1968, 30). In inspecting the relationship between knowledge and power, Michel Foucault claims that neither can exist without the other, saying "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, [and] it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power, [as] the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Foucault 1980, 52). The importance of literacy, education, and linguistic skills are crucial elements in *Wild Thorns,*

as can be seen through Basil's and Zuhdi's prison narratives, as well as other characters' everyday interactions.

In examining everyday forms of oppression and resistance, language is a main tool in the novel, functioning in two ways: (1) it is used by the characters as a tool of resistance, and (2) it is used by the novel to reflect the occupation's influence on Palestinians' everyday lives. The first instance in which we encounter language as a form of resistance is when Usama is at the checkpoint at the entrance of the West Bank, being questioned by an Israeli soldier:

> "'[…] We were living in Tulkarm; then my father died and my mother moved to Nablus.'
> 'Why did your mother move to Shekem?'
> 'She likes Nablus.'
> 'Why does she like Shekem?'
> 'She's got lots of relatives in Nablus.'
> 'And why have you left the oil countries to return to Shekem?'
> 'I'm returning to Nablus because my father died.'
> […]
> 'And what are you going to do in Shekem?' he asked.
> 'I'm going to look for a job in Nablus.'" (Khalifeh 2011, 13).

This exchange between Usama and the soldier, wherein the former refers to the town as "Nablus" and the latter refers to it as "Shekem"—which is the Hebrew name for Nablus—is one example of how Palestinians can resist

the occupation through language. By insisting on referring to it by its Arabic name, Usama insists on the town's Palestinian nature, symbolically refusing its occupation through language. Another layer to this exchange highlights Usama's fearlessness in using his own language as he finds himself in a situation where the power dynamics are imbalanced. By insisting on calling the town by its Arabic name, Usama—the occupied—resists the occupation of his language despite being faced with an agent of the occupying force who is, by nature of the occupation, in a position of power over Usama.

On the other hand, language is also used in the novel to reflect how the occupation asserts its power over Palestinians through every aspect of their life, even everyday language, with Hebrew—the language of the occupier—used to dictate a hierarchy. One moment in which this is evident is when one of the Palestinians who works with Adil, Abu Sabir, explains to Usama the words they use in Hebrew, saying, "You'll learn soon – words like Adon, and Giveret, and islakhli, and shalom . Those words, my friend, mean that the person's educated" (Khalifeh 2011, 79). Here we can see how Israel asserts its domination over Palestinians through what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "symbolic violence":

> Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the

> domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural (Bourdieu in von Holdt 2013, 115).

The prevalent notion in Abu Sabir's explanation is that anyone who does not use Hebrew is uneducated—those who do not know the language of the occupier are simply inferior to the occupier. Furthermore, symbolic violence requires the consent of the dominated, which Abu Sabir gives through the implication that the language of the occupier is superior to that of the occupied, thus strengthening Israeli dominance over Palestinians.

In addition to language, the theme of education plays a central role in the novel, with Basil and Zuhdi explaining how important education is for the growing Palestinian resistance. As previously mentioned, education is one way in which Israel has historically attempted to restrict Palestinian liberation and resistance. The first instance in which this occurs in the novel is not included in the English translation, appearing only in the original Arabic version of it wherein Usama thinks back to a poem he once wrote about his mother. In the English version of the novel, the poem reads:

> Mother doesn't read or write,

> Just her thumb print must suffice.
> Yes, he thought, my mother signs with her thumb (Khalifeh 2011, 38).

The Arabic version, however, reveals an important aspect of the role of education, as the poem continues:

> My mother signs with her thumb. Most mothers do. Fathers, too. And the responsibility of reading lies with this generation. And this generation is strong. Keen. Solid as granite, despite being slender as a bamboo stick (my translation, Khalifeh 1999, 45).

This passage, indicating that Usama's parents are illiterate, highlights the importance of literacy and education within his generation, the younger generation, who faces the "responsibility of reading" as a means to maintain and continue the steadfastness of the older generation. Usama here also ties the persistence and strength of Palestinians, especially his own generation, with education. While his parents are illiterate—a reference to the aforementioned illiteracy policies implemented by the Israeli government—he and his generation are resilient and will become literate and educated despite the occupation's attempts to prevent that.

The importance of education is further accentuated during Basil's and Zuhdi's time in prison. When Zuhdi is released, he tells Adil,

> "[the other prisoners] thought I was a spy when I

> went in, but by the time I left, I was a comrade. I got educated, not only school subjects but special evening sessions too. Proletariat, capitalism, bourgeoisie, compradorism, and all that, led by another Adil" (Khalifeh 2011, 176).

Historically, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons viewed education as a tool of resistance; as "the education system [in prison] combined independent reading of progressive literature with political discussions and critical debates" (Norman 2020, 53). Education, then, is an important tool by which resistance can be achieved, as knowledge of current politics and how systems of oppression operate is required for the dismantling of these systems. In the novel, understanding of the structures and infrastructures of these systems is viewed by the characters as the first step by which they can be resisted and dismantled.

Basil's time in prison highlights not only the importance of education, but also refers back to Usama's poem regarding his generation's responsibility towards the struggle. During Basil's imprisonment, the Palestinian prisoners create a "people's school" (Khalifeh 2011, 123), wherein the prisoners split into different groups based on their level of literacy and education, ranging from basic literacy to high school education. The educated prisoners are responsible for the uneducated ones, and at one of the evening assemblies, Salih, an-

other prisoner, highlights the importance of education in the resistance, saying: "it's not enough just to admit 'I'm responsible' to expiate your guilt and find peace. The problem goes deeper than that. We must read, plan, act. We must turn our backs to the past and look to the future!" (Khalifeh 2011, 125). Salih here highlights the importance of knowledge in the resistance movement, as resistance requires action, which must come from a place of knowledge: knowledge of the system of oppression and knowledge of how to fight it. Salih also mentions responsibility here, bringing us back to the poem Usama thinks of earlier on in the novel: resistance is not a choice, but rather a responsibility. It is one's responsibility to its land and people, the responsibility to ensure life and freedom to their people.

Manufacturing Violence

In addition to the representation of the violence of the occupation, the novel also deals with the concept and practice of armed resistance, highlighting the inevitability of violent resistance. In discussing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, Karl von Holdt compares it with Frantz Fanon's discussion of violence, saying that it echoes symbolic power through the feeling of inferiority within the dominated, as "the violence of colonial domination can only be met with the counter-violence of the colonised" (von Holdt 2013, 116). He further quotes Fanon in saying that violence can be a way for

the colonised to rid themselves of feeling inferior to the coloniser; however, there is an additional political meaning to violent resistance, as it "imbues its participants with political enlightenment and egalitarianism derived from a sense of their own collective agency, strengthening them against false leaders, demagogues and opportunists" (von Holdt 2013, 116). We can see, then, how this inevitable violence as a reaction to colonisation and oppression emerges within the novel, as each of Usama, Adil, Basil, and Zuhdi have either participated, or thought of participating, in armed resistance as a result of their experience with the Israeli occupation.

Firstly, Usama is depicted in the novel as a romantic turned activist, as we are told at the very beginning of the novel that "he'd never been romantic himself. At least, he wasn't any longer, or so he believed. How had he come to that conclusion? Training. Bullets. Crawling on all fours. Pulling in your stomach. Such things make you unromantic in thought and deed" (Khalifeh 2011, 5). While Usama constantly rejects his previous romantic nature, he revisits it multiple times throughout the novel with a reminiscent tone, such as when he thinks of the poem he once wrote about his mother,

> ...when poetry had been his sole means of expression. That was before all passion, all poetry and all personal dreams had died for him. Yes, they'd died, and all the figures in the equation had been set, and

> he'd become a link in the chain of the cause" (Khalifeh 2011, 38).

Despite these hesitations, however, Usama is killed by Israeli gunshots following his participation with the Palestinian guerrilla fighters in the attack on an Israeli bus carrying Palestinian workers, one of them being Zuhdi. Prioritising the cause over his own life, he thinks with his dying breath: "I'm a real lion, mother; tell everyone I died a martyr, a martyr to the cause. A martyr to the land" (Khalifeh 2011, 185). We can see, then, that resistance and violence are not ingrained in Usama; rather, they are slowly inculcated in him the more he experiences the occupation's violence. His violence is a by-product of a system of oppression, as viewed by Fanon, and to him, he is left with no other choice but to act against his oppressors, even if that means hurting other Palestinians.

Within this attack by the Palestinian guerrillas, we also see Zuhdi's hesitation in his methods of resistance. While previously Zuhdi had, like Adil, believed in non-violent resistance, when finding himself in the crossfire between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian guerrilla fighters, he decides to act in the moment. He kills an Israeli soldier who was firing at Usama—the person who had just attempted to kill him—and thinks to himself, "you've killed a man, Zuhdi! So what? You'd let Usama and the guerrillas be attacked over your head and

you do nothing?" (Khalifeh 2011, 182). Here we see the aforementioned Palestinian solidarity and commitment to the cause of Palestinian liberation, as, despite Zuhdi having differing opinions to Usama, and despite Usama attempting to murder him, they have a shared enemy, and the lives of the collective here are prioritised over the life of the individual. At this moment, they are a single entity, acting against the reality of colonial violence and subjugation, wherein individuals morph into a collective as a means of survival—not the survival of a single individual, but rather the survival of a community.

Adil's version of resistance, on the other hand, is what saves him from being killed during the attack on the bus, as he had gone that day to Haifa to demand compensation for Abu Sabir's work injury. Throughout the novel, Adil slowly moves from resistance through survival and steadfastness, to political action. Adil's first act of resistance is done through bureaucracy by demanding monetary compensation for Abu Sabir's work injury in which he lost some of his fingers. While at the beginning of the novel he tells Usama, "Convince me that what I'm doing isn't part of the struggle, that the fight has fixed ground rules" (Khalifeh 2011, 63), as the novel progresses, he begins to move more toward action, telling Zuhdi, "Abu Sabir must receive due compensation. We must adopt a new approach. Step by step we must learn how to become masters and not victims" (Khalifeh 2011, 109). To Adil, then, the move from victimhood to

masterhood is not through armed resistance, but rather through legal action. Later on, Adil succeeds in convincing Abu Sabir to demand compensation for his injuries, telling him:

> Come on, Abu Sabir! Your rights won't be delivered to you while you sit comfortably at home. You have to keep at it, make a determined effort. It's not just a matter between Arabs and Israelis. It's a question of workers and employers. And if you can't find a way to fight for your rights on this issue, how will you learn to fight for them in other areas? (Khalifeh 2011, 152).

Adil highlights here the importance of an intersectional analysis of oppression, exemplifying how decolonial efforts must encompass multiple domains and how, in order to achieve full liberation, one must dismantle all oppressive systems. While throughout the novel, he chooses to approach resistance through class conflicts between workers and employers, by the end of the novel, Adil begins questioning his method of resistance. As Basil becomes a fugitive, Usama is killed in the attack on the bus, and the Israeli army demolishes Adil's house due to Basil's involvement with the guerrilla attack, Adil loses all faith in his non-violent approach, asking himself "what could be worse than admitting you're an impotent god, unable to assert your own rights or anyone else's?" (Khalifeh 2011, 206). Following this realisation, Adil is filled with feelings of rage at both himself and the Israeli

occupation and is suddenly overcome with the same violent urge his cousin Usama experienced when he first arrived in Nablus, as he thinks to himself:

> If only you were more cruel, or harder of heart, you'd blow up everything you could lay hands on, from the Atlantic to the Gulf and on to the world's furthest reaches. You'd leave no two stones standing. You'd uproot trees, exposing the infections beneath the earth's surface to the light of the sun, to the breezes of the spring. You'd turn everything upside down (Khalifeh 2011, 206).

In the end, it seems, all characters have been pushed to violence as a result of the occupation's oppression and violence, further highlighting Fanon's claim regarding symbolic power: the feeling of helplessness in the face of the violent occupation only results in an imbued sense of violence within Adil, despite his best efforts to adhere to non-violent resistance. While each of the characters begins the novel having different opinions and values in life, eventually they all share the same fate of being driven to violence.

This story, however, is merely one out of many and each character — Adil, Usama, Zuhdi, and Basil — represents the daily struggles of Palestinians in the West Bank as they are unfairly imprisoned, persecuted, killed, and their homes demolished (Ober 1990, 100). This ongoing reality of Palestinians is further reflected at the

end of the novel, as Adil walks into the town following the demolition of his house:

> He stood on the pavement watching the people on their way home, on their way to work. They lived their everyday lives stoically, silently. Nothing had changed. The square stood where it always had; the town clock ticked slowly as it always had. Only the flowers seemed to have grown larger, taller; otherwise nothing had changed (Khalifeh 2011, 207).

This moment of reflection folds the novel neatly unto itself, as it mirrors Usama's reflection at the beginning of the novel when he arrives in Nablus, lamenting how nothing has changed since the last time he was there five years prior (Khalifeh 2011, 26). This moment in Adil's reflection marks the beginning of his insurgence against the occupation, which complements his previous remarks on his desire to be more assertive and violent. Here we can see the cyclicality of violence, which is manufactured by the Israeli occupation: despite Adil's attempts to participate in non-violent resistance, he faces the harsh reality of living under occupation. The lack of closure or resolution at the end of the novel further highlights this cyclicality, indicating that Adil's story will be the same as Usama's. This is not unique to either of them, but rather is a by-product of the brutality of the Israeli occupation—this is the story of Palestine.

Conclusion

It is important to approach the discussion of resistance not only with nuance and historical knowledge, but also with an understanding of how systems of occupation and oppression work. Just as there is no single correct method of resistance, there is also not only one method of occupation; oftentimes, the violence is not physical, but rather permeates all aspects of life, such as employment, language, education, etc. While Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* has been criticised for its supposed critique of armed resistance, this type of narrative is extremely important, as it highlights Palestinians as individuals with differing perspectives and experiences, exemplifying how viewing Palestine through a monolithic lens creates a singular mould of the Palestinian reality and narrative and deprives Palestinians of their unique experiences and opinions. This paper's exploration of resistance within the novel allows for a deeper understanding of not only the daily struggles and challenges of Palestinians, but also forms a more critical and analytical approach to Palestinian resistance by which one may understand that the issue of Palestine is not one-dimensional and needs to be looked at from a variety of angles. While I explored the topic of literature, education, and armed resistance, this paper is merely a small part of what can be, and needs to be, explored, not only in *Wild Thorns*, but also in Palestinian cultural production as a whole.

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