Israeli Occupation and Palestinian Resistance in the Novel Wild Thorns by Sahar Khalifeh

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Abstract

This paper focuses on literary representation of Israeli Occupation in Palestine which started after Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948. The impact of the occupation on socio-political and economic life of Palestinians has been such that it has become difficult for them to survive in their own homeland. The majority of Palestinians who live inside and outside the Palestinian territories face major challenges and hardships in day-to-day life. In particular, this paper deals with the Israeli Occupation as represented in the novel Wild Thorns by a prominent Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh. The different shades of Palestinian resistance to Israeli Occupation are specifically looked into.

Keywords: Occupation, Exile, Resistance, Violence.
“Our life under Occupation cannot be described in one word. But if I were to do so, I think that no word would serve so well as “tension.” Tension inside, tension outside” (Khalifeh 1984: 26).

The well-known Palestinian critic Edward Said, the author of Orientalism, talks about colonial domination, effects of imperialism on colonized countries, and also representation of the ‘Other’ as a strategy of colonization through literary texts. His theories have been formidably shaping the understanding of colonial discourses, representations as well as contemporary politics and histories. Edward Said has been a central figure in contemporary understandings not only about Palestine, but also of the Middle Eastern countries in general. Israel and many other Western countries depict Palestine as the ‘Other’ with inflated clichés associated with religion and nationalism. The tenor of these clichés challenges the legitimacy of the Palestinian institutions many a time in such attempts as branding political parties as terrorist outfits. Stereotypes on these lines are produced, circulated and reproduced in the Western world through literature, official discourses and mainstream media. This is also expressed through visual media such as photos, films, and web pages. Said in his work Covering Islam says that it is a common tendency to reduce Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalizations about the faith, its founder, and its entire people. Islam is projected as violent, primitive, and fundamentalist (Said 1981: xvi).The former Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon says “[w]e are confronting Terror for 120 years, we once called it Arab Terror and it is now Palestinian Terror” (Sharon 2003).Joan Peters argues in From Time Immemorial that “[t]errorism is the core of the new Palestinian identity that West Bank Arabs created in 1967”. Forecasting the plight of Palestine, Peters claims that a Palestinian state would be regarded as a terror state. Perhaps it gains victory through the act of terrorism all over the globe. It also implies the defeat of America in the terror war(Bernard 2010: 350).These arguments show that Palestinians do not have positive identity and they are often generalized as terrorists, hijackers, oil suppliers, and suicide bombers. Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh, in her lecture “Caught Between Western Prejudices and Islamic Fundamentalists” says, “[a] Palestinian is a synonym to a terrorist; an Arab is a synonym to a filthy, greasy sheik with a beard and beads, a camel in the background and a dagger behind his back. We are reduced to a picture that does not change in time or seen under a different light. A Moslem Ben Laden, a Moslem fundamentalist, a Moslem terrorist, a Moslem wrapped up woman, a Moslem filthy oil-sheikh. We are fixed in one reality, one image, one picture which is considered real and true” (Khalifeh 2010).

Debunking the above mentioned notions, the representation of ‘Self’ plays a critical role in Palestinian narratives. This can be achieved by justifying and legitimising their standpoint through writings, art, literature, and visual media. These factors act in themselves as resistance to a prolonged Israeli Occupation (IO). Palestinian writers and artists are challenging the preconceived and prejudiced perceptions about their socio-political being. “The desire to create an alternative world, to modify or augment the real world through the act of writing (which is one motive underlying the novelistic tradition in the West) is inimical to the Islamic world view” (Said 1975: 81).Indeed, Palestinian self-narratives are playing the role of self-assertion in order to
resist the hegemonic Israeli and Western narratives. “Palestinian creative practitioners have sought to counter this narrative suppression by formulating their own multi-layered accounts of Palestinian experience and identity through the mediums of film, literature, art, and criticism” (Gertz and Khleifi 2008: 1). They endeavour to portray the real (as opposed to the imagined) in their works of art. Palestinian women too, have been increasingly part of such an exercise. Sahar Khalifeh claims “[n]o one has dissected this society as I did... I don’t think any writer has written about the Palestinian society in an accurate way and in such frankness as I did” (Nazareth 1980: 69-70).

Sahar Khalifeh is the most outspoken writer from the West Bank. Her works deal with the denial of women’s rights under IO, in a traditional culture. In her writings, Khalifeh portrays the interrelatedness between the two forms of oppression a woman faced in Palestine: the oppression as a colonised and as a woman. Women's writings have been marginalised even in Arab countries just as in many other places. Palestinian women authors are engaged in writing about their varied experiences in their own language and in English. But the unfortunate part is that the majority of Arab literary critics have ignored, misinterpreted, and marginalised women authors. There are many misconceptions about women writers which are furthered by Arab male critics. Male authors consider that women's writings fail to explore the ‘major’ socio-political issues of the country and that they do not go beyond the ‘confined boundaries’ of the issues such as home, children, marriage, love etc. Male critics tend to assume that women are intellectually and creatively less capable. Precisely because of this, Latifa al-Zayyat, an Egyptian writer, rejects the term ‘women’s literature’, because “in both Arab and Western literary criticism the term suggests a lack of creativity and a depreciation of women’s perceived narrow concerns” (Quoted in Shaaban 2009: 1-2). She says, with the term 'Women's literature', there is “a prejudgement made on the basis of the gender of the author and not of the written text” (ibid: 3). Challenging these popular notions, Arab women writers, nevertheless, are engaged in the field of writing, publishing and translating.

Even though Khalifeh is a contemporary of Mahmoud Darwish, and Ghassan Kanafani, the two Palestinian writers of fame, she has not been much recognised. She has portrayed the harsh realities of Palestinian life under the IO. She has dealt with major political issues like exile, resistance, harassment and violence that form the core of the contemporary Palestinian predicament. She says, “I began writing after the 1967 (the beginning of Occupation) invasion of the West Bank... The year 1967 became a watershed year for me in a political and a personal sense. I felt that I could no longer remain an alienated housewife. I had to participate in the predicament of my people and contribute through my writings” (Sabbag 1998: 137). Therefore, writing came to Khalifeh as a political commitment, a commitment so compelling because of the extreme political condition. Her contribution to literature has been immense. Khalifeh has written essays and novels in Arabic language; six of her novels have been translated into nine different languages. Yet, she is not considered a part of mainstream Palestinian Literature. This paper analyses her political novel Al-Subar (1976), originally written in Arabic and translated into English as Wild Thorns (1985) by Trevor Le Gassick and Elizabeth Fernea. The novel received wide publicity in Israel and has been translated into Hebrew as well.
Since 1923, Palestine was under the control of the British mandate and it ended in 1948. In the same year Israel waged a war against Palestinians – Nakba, which resulted in great catastrophe in the history of collective tragedy. This war was a seminal event in the modern history of Palestinians which completely destroyed the socio-economic and political life of Palestinians. After this war Israel took its birth as a nation-state and occupied the Palestinian territories. Again in 1967, “The Six Day War” was fought between Israelis and Palestinians. Israel won the war and started occupying the territories like Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria. Currently, these places are under Israeli military occupation. The term ‘occupation’ is a political rhetoric which involves the conquest of territories. Indeed, the term can be employed politically without reference to its general or legal meaning. Eyal Benvenist defines occupation as “[t]he effective control of a power (be it one or more states or an international organization, such as the United Nations) over a territory to which that power has no sovereign title, without the violation of the sovereign of that territory” (Benvenisti 1993: 5). Through the enforcement of power, occupation takes the responsibility for managing the occupied territory and it also controls the people who live in those territories. “In former times, enemy territory occupied by a belligerent was in every point considered his State Property, so that he could do what he liked with it and its inhabitants” (Oppenheim1952: 432). But the concept of occupation underwent fundamental change in the nineteenth century. Apart from the political, the impact of occupation is massive on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of life.

IO can be termed as colonial in nature, which created the relationship between occupiers and occupied which is similar to the binary opposites of colonizer/colonized and oppressor/oppressed. Indeed, IO has lots of similarity with European colonialism which occurred in South Asia, Africa and Latin American countries. Zionism, the Jewish political movement is inspired by the models of European colonialism that fortified the foundation of the State of Israel. Zionist establishment of a Jewish Homeland on the land that belongs to indigenous Palestinians have resemblance to the ‘settler colonies’. IO has granted Israeli Jews the power to rule over the Palestinians in the occupied territories who have become powerless. It has rigorous administrative control over the population. Further, the Israeli military regime has been in control of currency, import-export trade, labour mobility and control of all productive resources including land and water. Israel confiscated native identity cards and issued colour coded identity cards in the occupied territories. At the time of occupation, many educational institutions were closed in West Bank. The curriculum has been modified and has introduced new syllabi in its place, which has facilitated the naturalisation of the Jewish state. History books have been modified and published entirely in contradiction with the historical facts of natives and have argued that Palestinians did not exist. Apart from this, Arab historical texts have been replaced by Jewish historical texts in schools and universities. The motive is to support Zionist colonialism. “. . . [s]chools and universities have been closed for years at a time, and one University, Birzeit has been kept closed for four consecutive years; thousands of acres have been expropriated, whole village rendered destitute, over 150 settlements established, and about 80,000 Jewish settlers introduced into the heart of Arab population centres . . .” (Said 2000:434).
Since 1948, confiscation of land has been the prime target of the IO, which is claimed as “state land”. The occupied land has been used for Jewish cultivation and settlements. The creation of new Jewish settlements is portrayed by such rosy slogans as ‘making the desert bloom’ – 25 Jewish settlements were established on the Golan Heights, 22 in Gaza and Sinai, 36 on the West Bank. On the other hand, native land is used for the construction of the wall, to build checkpoints as well as highways. This process of colonization of land has been termed by Fanon as “the geography of hunger” (Fanon 1967a: 76). The land belonging to the Palestinians in the occupied territories has been either confiscated or made inaccessible to them. Fanon, generalizing from the Algerian revolution, argues that “[f]or a colonised person the most essential value . . . is first and foremost the land; the land which will bring them bread and dignity” (ibid: 48). On the other hand, Palestinians resist the IO through a set of strategies: not only by boycott of Israeli goods, peaceful demonstrations, strikes, walkouts, sit-ins, but also by producing literature in their languages, translating literature into many languages, promotion of arts, conducting Palestinian literary festivals, publication of newspapers, magazines, and journals, etc. If Intifada is uprising, Palestinians have now restored to electronic Intifada as well. This was started by Ali Alumina, by making available online the most current information about Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Palestinian literature is an integral part of modern Arabic literature. The prominent Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani applied the term “resistance” (muqawamah) in the description of Palestinian literature in 1966. Kanafani’s term “Occupied Palestine” indicates the establishment of Israeli state on the Palestinian land in 1948. His work acknowledges the conditions of Palestinian literature under Israeli rule. This, he termed as Resistance Literature. Kanafani described the Palestinian literature “as an arena of struggle” (Harlow 1987: 2). Resistance is one of the most important themes in Palestinian literature both in poetry and prose. Palestinian writers are continuously engaged with the pervasive political issues. One can say that the prime concern of current Palestinian literature is to present the Palestinian realities to the rest of the world and thereby, legitimise their strife. These writers tend to articulate the personal and political experiences of their life. After 1948, Palestinian writing has frequently appeared as the precursor of resistance literature. In spite of censorship, banning of books, jailing, torture, and assassinations, the Palestinian resistance succeeded in continuing the literary production. The writers in exile however, continued to produce enormous literature. Salma Khadra Jayyusi in her Anthology of Modern Palestinian literature says “[i]f Palestinians do not announce their experience to the world, surely the world is ready to forget them” (Jayyusi 1992: 69).

The term ‘resistance’ is the movement of the mass in relation to power, which may not have any limitation or boundary. In the Palestinian context, much literature arises from conditions of military occupation and ongoing struggle for liberation. Said says, “[t]he realities of Israeli brutality, seen most vividly as early as the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, simply receded while the narrative of Palestinian struggles and resistance was denied ‘permission’ to be spoken” (Said 1991: 11). The idea of resistance is intimately engaged with different forms of hegemonic power structures and strategies. Michel Foucault observes the relationship between the presence of power and resistance. He says, “[w]herever there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather by the same token, the latter is never external to power . . . [T]he strictly relational character of power’s connections . . . can only exist as a result of a multiplicity of points of resistance. . . These
points of resistance are present everywhere in the network of power” (Foucault 1981:125-126). Different modes of resistance to power therefore, are natural.

Power, on the other hand, invents new strategies to curb resistance. Palestinian resistance has mostly been depicted in western hegemonic powers as violence and terrorism. “Conditions for the Palestinians had deteriorated considerably with the campaign by Menachem Begin’s Likud party to treat all resistance as terrorism, and hence to justify their incursion into Palestinian areas and refugee camps as exercises to combat the ‘disease’ of terrorism” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 1999:132). Said and Hitchens, write that the Arab is represented as “[t]he mad Islamic zealot, the gratuitously violent killer of innocents, and the desperately irrational and savage primitive” (Said and Hitchens 1988:3). Resistance however, allows for intellectual debates and discussions which try to put an end to violence. Resistance can work at many levels and in different modes, which are not available if one resorts to terrorism. “Muqawama Sha’biya a term commonly used in Palestine is roughly translated as Popular Resistance. The word Sha’biya has its roots in Sha’b (people) and is understood by Palestinians to refer to all kinds of resistance practiced by large numbers of the population, as opposed to more narrow armed resistance” (Qumsiyeh2011:11).

The Intifada– the uprising which literally means shaking off or awakening – began in December 1987, a movement that Said has called “[o]ne of the great anti-colonial insurrections of the modern period” (Said 1994: xvii). It is a mass movement which allows everyone to take part actively.

For Sahar Khalifeh, the act of writing itself is a resistance. In the process of writing, she faces many constraints. She earned her doctorate in Women’s Studies and American Literature from the University of Iowa in America. She was inspired by Intifada and decided to return to the city of Nablus in West Bank. This was a rare decision as Palestinian intellectuals and authors, who left the country for different reasons in the wake of 1948 and 1967 wars, hardly came back. After returning, she actively participated in the Palestinian freedom movement apart from writing. In 1989, she founded the Women’s Affairs Center at Nablus in West Bank. Unfortunately, her writings were not supported by her own people – neither men nor women. In 1991, she was attacked in the streets and was also threatened with assassination by the Islamists. The main reason for attack on her was that she questioned the superiority of men and challenged the notions of patriarchy. On the other hand, women embedded in the same patriarchy also refused to acknowledge her writings. They expressed the view that her writings are wrong and incorrect. Apart from this, she faced issues with publication such as lack of availability of her novels. The only manuscript of her first novel, After the Defeat, was confiscated by the Israeli authorities. Her second novel, We are no Longer your Slaves, about the IO was out of print for several years. Later the novel was reprinted in Beirut in 1974. Despite all these hurdles, she never stopped writing and continued to live in Nablus (Sabbag 1998: 141).

Khalifeh, the eyewitness of IO, decided to write about working class people who endured difficulties due to the IO. She took eight months’ break from her studies at the university in order to do research before writing the novel Wild Thorns. She read extensively about the workers and also collected the statistical information about the workers who were working for Israeli factories. She put immense efforts to understand the ideology of the proletariat along with their background and beliefs. She observed the living condition of workers. She says, “I went to see
them in their houses and in their refugee camps. Most of them are from refugee camps or from the older parts of the city in which we have the slums. There is no running water. There are shared toilets, there are very, very, bad conditions” (Nazareth 1980: 76). By doing an empirical research before writing her novel, Khalifeh attempts to legitimise her work as ‘real’ and that it is not an ‘alternative world’ of ‘fiction’. Moreover, on several occasions she also speaks about the contexts in which she wrote the novel, further augmenting the sense of reality and the immediacy with which it needs to be addressed. The writings of Khalifeh have been always the mouthpiece of the oppressed and marginalized sections of Palestinian society.

The novel Wild Thorns depicts the harsh realities of Palestinian life in the West Bank city of Nablus under occupation. The whole story revolves around the life of a common man who struggles hard to satisfy the basic needs of the family. The novel deals with the problems of discrimination, exploitation, unemployment, poverty, interrogation in check points, life in prison, and the experience of exile. Different forms of resistance and protest against Israelis are highlighted in the novel.

The novel begins with the long interrogation of Usama al-Karmi, by Israeli soldiers in check point. Usama al-Karmi is a Palestinian expatriate who has returned from Kuwait. He is shocked to see the extreme changes in the life of people and its land because of IO. At check points, Israeli soldiers search the luggage by using electronic search equipment; later, in the pretext of frisking, they remove the clothes of their subjects in wooden cubicles. They have to pay the custom duty for newly bought commodities like cloth, watch, gold, and sewing machine. The business activities are curtailed and Israel takes control of the Palestinian market. After the IO, Israeli goods like rice, sugar, bread, cigarettes, tahina, etc. are sold inside the occupied territories. Israeli goods are prominently kept in front of the shops, in show room windows, and even on the pavements. These commodities are cheap when compared to Palestinian goods. Majority of the Palestinians invariably consume Israeli goods because of poverty and unemployment. By looking at these changes among his people, Usama is disappointed and dejected. He says to his mother, “I was crying for our people, Mother, for our Country” (Khalifeh 1985:30). Gita Hariharan quotes an activist from Stop The Wall group saying, “[i]t’s the old divide and rule colonial policy. The occupied are all hit, but in different ways so their day-to-day concerns are different. You want to hit commerce, you hit Hebron Market; you want to hit religion, hit Jerusalem; you want to hit agriculture, take away farmers’ land with roads, fences and walls” (Hariharan 2014: 24).

In the novel, Khalifeh portrays different forms of resistance which varies from person to person and generation to generation. The middle aged Usama and Adil are two different individuals who react in different ways to the IO. Usama is a revolutionary who uses violence to revolt against Israeli Occupiers. For Usama, resistance is born out of anger, frustration, and unhappiness caused by Israeli military domination and exploitation. According to him, the true form of resistance could be achieved through violence. He stabs an Israeli officer to death in the middle of a Nablus market. He carries out his mission and attacks the buses carrying Palestinian workers to Israel. He sacrifices his life in the midst of armed resistance.

Usama’s cousin Adil is another important character in the novel. He is more concerned with supporting his family, providing for its survival and livelihood than with military resistance.
For Adil, resistance would mean helping his own people who face many mundane challenges and difficulties in the wake of IO. Strategy of his resistance is different and he always tries to cope with the existing circumstances. Adil works day and night in an Israeli factory to provide basic facilities for his family. Usama’s mother says about Adil, that he is “[w]orking away day and night. He’s got nine people to support . . .” (Khalifeh 1985:31). He understands the present calamity in a different way from Usama. He was generally against an Arab working for an Israeli enterprise. He thought Adil worked for an Arab (Al-Karmi) family. But when he comes to know the reality, he furiously comments on that. Adil breaks into tears and shouts, “. . . [c]onvince me that what I’m doing isn’t part of the struggle, that the fight has fixed ground rules . . . You can have my life, Usama, if you can only convince me that freedom means that people who can’t defend themselves go hungry. And that there’s happiness in hunger. Come on, convince me!” (Khalifeh 1985:63). Khalifeh illustrates here that resistance, protest, or fighting for freedom are not easy tasks for the working class people.

The old generation responded to IO in own ways. Adil’s old father, who depends upon artificial kidney machine for his survival, also fights against occupation. He meets foreign journalists and talks to them regarding the Occupation. On the other hand, Usama’s mother is a staunch follower of Islam who strongly believes in God. She says “[t]he Country is fine, son. Things are all right. They’ll get better soon; God will settle everything” (Khalifeh 1985:30). In Palestine, men are the sole breadwinners in the family and their entire family depends on them. The working class has to balance both personal and political problems faced in their day-to-day life. They have been facing hardships under the IO: they are paid low wages, discriminated against in the working place, and physically exploited. About “120,000 labourers were bussed daily to work in Israel, 55% of whom work in construction, the rest in agriculture and industry. Unskilled day labour from the West Bank and Gaza represents 6.5% of the total Israeli work force” (Sabbag1998:71).

Due to the IO there are less job opportunities for Palestinians who live inside the occupation. There are no skilled labourers like peasants, merchants, and small artisans because of the Occupation. Majority of them have become common labourers. For them in order to feed their dependents they have to work in Israeli factories. Zudhi, Adil’s co-worker in the Israeli factory says, “[y]ou need so many things to live these days. The prices burn up like hellfire. And apart from meat, there’s bread, vegetables, fruit, water, electricity and everything else” to buy (Khalifeh 1985:77). Whatever they earn is barely sufficient for their subsistence. Their income does not bring changes in their living condition. Their life is filled with sadness, poverty, hunger, and even starvation. Majority of the Palestinian labour force works in Israeli factories without any choice. Khalifeh, in one of her interviews, says that,

At that time there was a scandal in the Arab world called the Palestinian Labor in Israel—Palestinian workers going to the Israeli factories and working there. Everybody in the Arab world was pointing at those workers, condemning them and accusing them of being traitors. I knew the situation, I knew what was the cause of the work in Israel. I was a person from inside, not from outside (Nazareth 1980: 75).

Through the character of Zudhi, Khalifeh portrays the challenges faced by Palestinian labour force that have to work both inside and outside the country. Wherever they go for work

http://www.ijhcs.com/index.php/ijhcs/index
they witness humiliation, exploitation, insult, discrimination, inequality, and job insecurity. In this way, IO creates a plethora of problems to Palestinians who struggle to get decent and respectful life for themselves. In the novel, characters compare their life before and after the occupation. Before of the occupation, life was easy. Cost of living was low. Zudhi recalls that before the occupation, they had a wage of 135 qurush a day; but after the war, it went down to 80 qurush a day. In other words, IO exploited Palestinians physically, economically, politically and psychologically. It broke the spirit of resistance. However, the character like Zudhi is optimistic in his attitude; he hopes the occupation is going to end and they would be free.

The novel portrays the working class people losing their ability to resist: poverty dries the people’s spirit to resist the IO. Yet, the novel indicates the two-pronged resistance that is entailed in the lives of many young Palestinians: fighting poverty and fighting occupiers simultaneously. Adil talks about Abu Sabir, one of his fellow factory workers, who met with an accident and says to Usama “[a]nd if we starve, how can we resist?” (Khalifeh 1985:98). Adil and his friends resist the occupation through individual and collective struggle supporting each other living in pathetic circumstances. Educated people leave Palestine in search of better living conditions. They are not bound by any regulation to stay. Therefore, even continuing to live in occupied territories is a form of resistance for working class people. Adil’s younger brother, Basil and his friends fall into the category of younger generation who have found different ways of resisting IO. These youngsters read revolutionary books and discuss political issues at home and in streets. They talk about the impact of IO on all walks of life including education. On completion of their education, Israel demanded that the Palestinians pay for their studies. This is one more reason for the educated Palestinians to migrate to other countries for jobs. However, educated youngsters are acutely aware of what might befall the Palestinian community in near future: Basil says, “[e]ducated people leave the country, and only workers and peasants remain. And that’s exactly what Israel wants to happen” (Khalifeh 1976: 59). The novel shows the youngsters are very much in the knowledge of the new Israeli policies on the construction of wall, illegal settlement, control over electricity and water supply, demolition of houses, and curfews. In their evening meetings, they talk endlessly about the political leaders like Dayan, Eshkol, Golda Meir, Sadat, and Arafat. Basil, the young idealist, is put in prison for demonstrating against Israel.

In the novel, Khalifeh depicts the life of prisoners who are arrested on different charges. A study shows that at least 30 percent of Palestinians who live in both Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza have experienced Israeli prison system (Harlow 1994: 110). The young revolutionaries do not sit with folded hands inside the jail but they are actively involved in subverting the Israeli power. The prisoners’ room fills with activities such as clapping, whistling, delivering revolutionary speeches and shouting slogans, as well as singing their anthem. The prisoners shout the slogan in loud voices, “Revolution! Revolution until victory!” (Khalifeh 1985:119). The revolutionaries recite the poems of Kamal Nasser, a Palestinian poet and political activist, who was assassinated in Beirut 1972 by an Israeli hit squad.

Strike, executioner, we’re not afraid.
These dark brows
Beaded with sweat
Are burdened with chains
So the nation will live.
Strike then, and have no fear! (ibid: 119).

The jail is portrayed as a place filled with revolutionary spirit. The prisoners start beating an empty bucket for a drum, a few men dance in traditional folk dance form. All these invigorate Palestinian resistance and avoid it from becoming a passive and dull activity; they make resistance a part of their life. Many writers, who sacrificed their life for the sake of their country, rejuvenate and come back in the words of revolutionaries. There are other ways in which subversion of the jail space takes place. For example, two of the characters in the novel Salih and Elias engage themselves in teaching the prisoners. Education plays an important role in Palestinian struggle for independence and in bringing an end to the IO. Zudhi proudly tells Adil that he enters the jail as a common labourer but comes out as a comrade. The novel clearly manifests that Palestinian resistance is not a homogeneous struggle and it has different colours and contours: there are prisoners, educated students, old people, workers, outsiders, insiders, farmers, writers, and common folks. Fanon states, “[t]he masses resist and fight in a thousand ways, not only with arms in hand” (Fanon 1967b:3). The novel *Wild Thorns* juxtaposes power and rightfulness, violence and non-violence, the personal and the political. The resistance is a long and hard battle which needs to go on by putting in endless efforts. Harlow says, “[b]y locating prisons and factories as primary sites of confrontation, *Wild Thorns* challenges not only the Zionist program of Israel but the romantic idealism of Palestinian cultural symbolism and its focus on land and peasant” (Harlow 1994:114).

The Palestinians have been protesting against the violence of Israel by adopting numerous non-violent methods of resistance. In 2012, hunger strikes were started by Palestinians in order to gain International attention for the plight of Palestinian prisoners. For example, Islamic Jihad members, Tha’er Halahleh and Bilal Diab went without food for 77 days, while Khader Adnan, another Islamic Jihad member, starved for 66 days. Abdel-Razeq Farraj, the Director of Finance and Administration at the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, who is fighting for the rights of Palestinian farmers, went on a hunger strike for 24 days in prison (Prashad 2014: 63). This significant example shows that Palestinians are using Mahatma Gandhi’s way of resisting the colonial domination through non-violent modes. Yet, Palestinians who revolt or resist the Israeli exploitation are projected stereotypically as terrorists, suicide bombers and extremists. A contemporary Arab-American writer Susan Abulhawa in her recent article, “The Searing Hypocrisy of the West” states, “[w]hen we take up arms and fight back, kidnap a soldier, we are terrorists of the extreme kind who have no one to blame but ourselves as Israel subjects the entire Palestinian population to punitive collective punishment. When we engage in peaceful protests, we are rioters who deserve the live fire they send our way. When we debate, write and boycott, we are anti-Semites who should be silenced, deported, marginalised or prosecuted” (Abulhawa 2014: 10).

Sahar Khalifeh renders a complex criticism of the problems faced by the common people and how IO is affecting their day-to-day life. Those who are in exile are willing to return to their homeland; but the Occupiers obstruct the process by framing new policies which impose restrictions on their mobility. For Palestinians, the resistance has become a necessary indication to show Israel that Palestinian struggle is still alive. Legitimization and social transformation of
the Palestinians act as essential endeavours of Palestinian resistance literature. Consequently, it aims to bring changes in their lives and livelihood. In the novel *Wild Thorns*, Khalifeh extensively focuses on the political upheaval of 1967 and the suffering of the Palestinians. Issues related to the personal experiences of women such as marriage, love, motherhood, family, etc. are not the prime concerns here as women writers were constantly accused of. This however, would not amount to saying that Khalifeh too, belittled these issues as her male counterparts did. It was the political compulsion of the times that elicited such a response as *Wild Thorns*. As an insider, her treatment of the political situation of her country and its people is very tempered. Nowhere does one find any attempt at romanticization of the issue, but an ‘accurate’ portrayal of the issue. By writing *Wild Thorns* and by speaking about it several times, Khalifeh attempts a befitting reply not only to the West, but also to its novelistic tradition; to Israel, and to Islamists: both men and women. She says, “[t]he 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 good bye!” (Khalifeh 1985: 56).
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i Khalifeh’s effort to recover the manuscript of the novel from the Israelis failed.

ii A thicker paste made from ground sesame seeds in the Middle East.

iii One of the popular grassroots movements against the Israeli Apartheid wall and the settlements.

iv Sabbag makes this statement based on 1989 statistics.

v Saudi Arabian monetary unit. 20 qurushes equal a Riyal.