

Forging Alternative Resistance Through Empathy in Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns*

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Abstract—Until recently, Palestinian nonviolent resistance has historically been overshadowed by the narrative of armed and violent resistance. This article contends that the reality of Palestinian resistance is relatively nonviolent and explores alternative nonviolent approaches drawing on Sahar Khalifeh's novel *Wild Thorns*. Originally published in 1976 and translated into English in 1985, Khalifeh's novel serves as a blueprint for nonviolent resistance, emphasizing empathy. This research demonstrates how interethnic connections between antagonistic groups, particularly in workplace settings, can mitigate violence by humanizing the face of the perceived enemy. Through documenting the violence of imperial imposition and scrutinizing the means by which a nation can resist its occupier nonviolently, Khalifeh creates a readership that is ready to empathize by acknowledging the trauma experienced by the Other.

Index Terms—alternative resistance, antagonistic groups, empathy, humanizing the enemy, interethnic connection

I. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of resistance realities within Palestinian literature finds its foundation in the historical context of 1948 Arab-Israeli war which is considered by researchers and historians the baseline of contemporary Palestinian history. The war, which is referred to as Nakba (catastrophe) by Palestinians and is otherwise marked as independence war by Israelis, terminated in the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel and drastic changes in the geography and demography of the historical land of Palestine (Sanbar, 2001).

In addition to the documented massacres and the organized ethnic cleansing of the original inhabitants of historical Palestine chronicled by historians like Ilan Pappé in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006), the war also redefined the region's geographical landscape. The historical land of Palestine was de facto divided, with Israel claiming 77 percent of Palestinian territory (Sa'di & Abu Lughod, 2007), the West Bank coming under the administration of the Jordanian Kingdom and Gaza annexed to Egypt. Subsequently in 1967, both territories fell under military occupation (Hadawi, 1967). The residents of historical Palestine had a different fate as more than 80 percent were expelled and uprooted from their land gaining the status of refugees settling in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza while others were now living in refugee camps in neighboring lands where they experienced excruciating circumstances in countries that relegated them to second-class citizens and restricted their access to basic human rights (Sa'di & Abu Lughod, 2007).

Although historical Palestine was depopulated of the majority of its Arab inhabitants, around 170 thousand Palestinian Arabs, now totalling 1.3 million (Daoud, 2012), resisted denationalized and remained in their homeland, thus becoming 'internal refugees' (Daoud, 2012, p. 82) and constituting a minority within their own country. This led to rapid demographic shift, witnessed in regions like the Galilee district, where Jewish forces transformed a predominantly Palestinian area into an almost exclusively Jewish territory within a remarkably short span (Pappé, 2006).

Despite the inimical relations between the two nations, there has always been a common space of interaction resulting from historic collision over the past decades which has led to unavoidable interaction and to the creation of a new space that transcends national identity, thus rendering a simplistic binary approach to Palestinian-Israeli space reductive. Drawing on concepts and debates in the field of postcolonial literature and in light of the view that "fiction reveals truths that reality obscures" (West, 1957, p. 77), this paper aims to show how through her novel *Wild Thorns*, Sahar Khalifah reveals the truths about the reality of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and addresses the gaps concerning a third space of interconnection between the two nations. Originally published in Arabic in 1976 and translated into

English in 1985 (Mahmoud, 2019), *Wild Thorns* stands as Khalifeh's most renowned and critically acclaimed work. It portrays a realistic praxis of the Palestinian trajectory navigating between revolutionary aspiration, the necessity to defend one's home and the humane empathetic approach that is the product of collective human interactions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wild Thorns debuted in Arabic in 1967 and was then translated into various languages including French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Greek and English in 1985. The novel is Khalifeh's registration of the events of occupation and Palestinian resistance as well as the dialectic relationship between resistance and nationalism that unfolds through the events of the novel.

Most analyses of the novel have centered on Khalifeh's personal and intellectual affinities as well as on the complexities of resistance and steadfastness that are represented in the novel. For example, Cotter (2011) complicates the reality of life under occupation all the while providing a "space for reflection on varying methods of resistance to military occupation, namely a contrast between nonviolent steadfast resistance versus armed violent resistance" (p. 24). Moreover, Cotter (2011) makes it clear that much of Khalifeh's work underscores the important role of acts of *Sumud* (steadfastness) as a part of the greater notion of resistance. By the same token, Metres (2010) examines Khalifeh's work in the context of alternative resistance options advocating less violent responses to occupation.

Dissimilarly, Tahboub (2009) believes that Khalifeh's literary productions focus on "the internal battle with men and institutions of patriarchy more than the battle of the Palestinians against the occupation, and [are] a call for the freedom of women prior to the freedom of Palestine" (p. 188). Correspondingly, Abdulqader (1998) argues that all women in Khalifeh's works are under the subjugation of men citing examples from *Bab Alsaha* (1990) to illustrate the troubled reality they face as a result of male dominance. Likewise, Mohamadi and Sadeghi (2014) examine the novel through the lens of double colonization by both patriarchy and Israeli occupation.

While the majority of studies on *Wild Thorns* primarily focus on themes of resistance, particularly in terms of steadfastness amidst political turmoil, as well as women's liberation, my analysis offers a departure from this focus. Rather than focusing on these themes, the researchers seek to fill a gap in the existing analyses by examining the role of empathy as a tool for nonviolent resistance as highlighted within the narrative.

A. Navigating Nonviolent Resistance: Exploring Palestinian Literary Terrain

The occupation of Palestine spurred a resistance movement that was "not a choice but a necessity" (Abu-Remaileh, 2014, p. 192). Anti-imperial resistance infuses many elements and is by no means monochromatic; it takes many forms ranging from armed resistance to intellectual resistance. The reality of resistance to occupation in Palestine, however, is relatively non-violent. In fact, Awad (1984) is of the opinion that nonviolent resistance is not a novelty in the Palestinian struggle. In the same sentiment, Mason and Falk (2016) assert that Palestinians have a long history of non-violence that dates back to the Ottoman and British Mandate periods and persists through modern history, nonetheless the story of unarmed resistance has been relatively invisible by the international community and mainstream media as "violence has far greater media appeal than nonviolence" (p. 167).

In addition to strikes and protests, nonviolent resistance took the form of written word that sought through the creative expression of its producers to restore the voices that have been lost due to oppression of Israeli forces. Through their writing, Palestinian creative practitioners have been "bearing witness" (Hamdi, 2011, p. 23). In other words, Palestinian artists in various realms have been archiving chronicles that are essential for the survival of the collective memory of the Palestinian narrative against the premeditated "assassination of liberation" (Hamdi, 2011, p. 24). Hence, poetry, fiction and novels became sites of resistance against occupation and the imposed cultural isolation and intellectual restraints.

Though Palestinian writing has often been situated in the realm of "resistance literature", a term first introduced by Ghassan Kanafani in his book, *Palestinian Resistance Literature Under Occupation* (1966), it "has questioned, complicated, and sometimes rejected romanticized representation of the resistance fighter... [in fact] Palestinian writing often demonstrates the struggle within Palestinians between an abhorrence of violence and war and the necessity to defend one's rights and homeland" (Metres, 2010, p. 86). Hence, despite the prolific production of literature among Palestinians confirming to themes of belonging and resistance and despite the propagated social antagonism between the Palestinians and the Israelis, there is always a common space of interaction between the two nations leading to the creation of a hybrid space.

This hybridity was elucidated by Mahmoud Darwish in a Landmark 1996 Interview with Helit Yeshurun in which he contends that it is impossible to evade the place that the Israeli has occupied in my identity. He exists, whatever I may think of him. He is a physical and psychological fact. The Israelis changed the Palestinians and vice versa. The Israelis are not the same as they were when they came, and the Palestinians are not the same people that once were ("Exile" 63).

In this excerpt, Darwish asserts the interdependence between the Israeli and Palestinian identities; the two have become interconnected as a result of historical processes of "national intertextuality" (Ebileeni, 2016, p. 225) in addition to increased contact between the two nations.

In this sense, the "personal strikes back at the political" (Cohen, 2016, p. 1) making it impossible but to recognize the humanity among antagonistic social groups resulting in an 'inbetween' space that Bhabha (2012, p. 37) calls "third space

of enunciation" which is "a transcultural space, a contact zone" (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 108). In this new space both the colonized and the colonizer renegotiate their fixed sense of identity as both inform each other's identities making communication possible. Henceforth, themes of mutual humanity began to infiltrate into Palestinian literature reflecting the realities of the third space and its consequences as with regards to alternative resistance patterns.

B. The Contours of the Current Palestinian- Israeli Connections: Dynamics of Interaction in the Context of Separation

Since its inception, Israel has been trying to separate Palestinian and Israeli spaces. This separation aims to disconnect the two populations and restrict the movement of Palestinians under security pretences (Kotasińska, 2020). Alongside with blockage, checkpoints, flying checkpoints and closures, Israel has also enforced a "three-dimensional system of Israeli control over the Palestinian territories [which] includes roads and tunnels, hilltop settlements, control over underground aquifers and sewage systems, as well as dominance of the air" (Collins, 2011, p. 92).

The separation has culminated in the erection of the Israeli "security fence", or what has been defined by Palestinians as "Apartheid Wall" or "racist Wall of separation" (Kotasińska, 2020, p. 46). The establishment of the Wall which commenced in 2002 stretching over 700 kilometres (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006, p. 104) was a response to the second Intifada constituting not only a physical-material structure, but a "psychic one between a 'civilised us' and 'uncivilised them'" (Busbridge, 2013, p. 655).

Despite the seemingly impenetrable Israeli separation policies and its discriminatory practices against Palestinians alongside with the social distance the occupied keeps from the occupier and vice versa (Mi'Ari, 1999), there has been inter-ethnic contact between the two communities. The first instance of contact has been a result of chronic unemployment in the Palestinian territories which coincided with strong economic growth in Israel after 1967 war this led to an influx of Palestinian unskilled cheap manual laborers seeking employment opportunities in Israel, totalling approximately 150.000 workers (Sella, 2023). Some of these laborers entered Israel legally by obtaining work permits while others did so illegally through smuggling.

Furthermore, beyond inter-ethnic connections created as a result of employment in Israel and its settlements in the West Bank, there has also been direct contact between the two populations inside Israel. Approximately 170 thousand Palestinians, who have mounted today to 1.6 million (Molavi, 2013), remained inside what became Israel's internationally recognized borders post 1948 war. This minority Palestinian community living in Israel has been granted Israeli citizenship. Nonetheless, they face institutional discrimination where their integration into state institutions is conditional, leading to a complex situation of both inclusion and exclusion within the system (Daoud, 2012, p. 83).

Due to the increased contact between the Palestinians and the Israelis in these contexts, social distance, which refers to "the degree of closeness or acceptance that members of a group feel towards members of another group" (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986, p. 284) has decreased between the two nations. Nonetheless, research has proven that Palestinians have shown a more positive attitude towards Israelis than vice versa (Mi'Ari, 1999, p. 340). This asymmetry in social interaction can be interpreted by mutual dependency theory which maintains that the group with less control over resources tends to be more reliant on the other, thus seeking reciprocity and clarity in their interactions (Yuchtman-Yaar & Inbar, 1986). Applied to the Palestinian Israeli context, Israel exerts more dominance over resources making the Palestinians subordinate, thus creating an "asymmetrically contingent" (Hofman, 1985, p. 249) relationship between the two nations. In this sense, Palestinians are disproportionately dependent on the Israelis for resources and opportunities (Hofman, 1985).

Despite disparity in working conditions and privileges such as "cost-of-living increments...social security, pension and disability payments" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 110), increased contact between the Palestinians and Israelis fostered mutual empathy and sparked new political possibilities and discourses. This mutual contact at work encouraged the hostile groups to share their personal narratives, thus "humaniz[ing] the face of the enemy" (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013, p. 54). This process challenges the prevailing narratives which often depict the 'other' in a deeply polarized manner (Hammack, 2011). By demonstrating individuality, emotions and beliefs, individuals engage in a form of resistance against the dehumanizing function of the Israeli occupation (Hammack, 2011).

C. Theoretical Framework: Empathy as Non-Violent Resistance

Empathy is often recognized as a powerful tool in conflict resolution across various disciplines such as "political theory, neuroscience, applied linguistics, social psychology, and philosophy [as well as] conflict resolution" (Apter & Desselles, 2019; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Head, 2016). In the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, empathy has taken on a transformative role, being viewed as a form of non-violent resistance (Head, 2016). Here, empathy has transcended its traditional connections to emotional response to being a conducive environment for fostering understanding and positive societal transformation. This shift challenges conventional notions, unsettling the traditional categories of "'empathiser' (stronger) and 'sufferer' (weaker party)" (Head, 2016, p. 105). In this dynamic, marginalized groups like Palestinians demonstrate nonviolent resistance through the act of choosing to extend empathy despite their own trauma and disadvantaged political position (Pedwell, 2014).

The cultivation of empathy is facilitated through mutual contact which according to Hammack (2011, pp. 259-60) can be "potentially transformative – even potentially subversive – activity" in contexts of conflict as it offers a platform for cultivating resistance and rejection of the perpetuation of antagonistic social order (Hammack, 2011). Notably, this mutual contact is primarily realized in the workplace as evidenced by a 2022 survey conducted by the Palestinian

Central Bureau of Statistics which revealed that 193 thousand Palestinians are employed in Israel or in Israeli settlements.

This empathetic engagement finds expression through language as highlighted by Head (2016) who explains that the recognition of empathy relies heavily on discourse analysis. In a similar vein, Cameron (2013) underscores the capacity of language to express connections between people, which she terms "gestures of empathy" (p. 53). This highlights the significance of linguistic expressions in communicating empathy and fostering understanding between individuals.

III. DISCUSSION

Palestinian and Israeli narratives diverge and that is quite predictable as narratives of conflicting nations tend to multiply (Scham & Poggrund, 2013). However, the Palestinian narrative is seldom recognized with the Palestinians frequently denied the power to communicate their history (Scham & Poggrund, 2013). Consequently, "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 & Khleifi, 2008, p. 1). In this sense, resistance is not restricted to armed guerilla, but rather extends to resistance writers who are "actively engaged in an urgent historical confrontation" (Harlow, 1987, p. 100) by reclaiming their lost narrative.

Among the pioneering Palestinian female writers and resistance practitioners is Sahar Khalifeh with her work *Wild Thorns* standing as a testament of this struggle. Albeit a dated corpus that goes back to its initial publication in 1976 and subsequent translation into English in 1985, the novel remains relevant today. It offers valuable insights inside Palestinian resistance viewed from both a confrontational and reconciliatory perspective. Despite its age, *Wild Thorns* is still extensively researched and recognized as Khalifeh's most prominent work both regionally and internationally (Cohen, 2014). The novel which is set in 1972 five years after 1967 War (also known as Six-Day War) seeks to dramatize life under occupation and to present different approaches to resistance through the depiction of the details of the lives of two cousins.

Sahar Khalifeh is a contemporary Palestinian author who is renowned for her prolific literary production. She has penned eleven novels which have garnered significant critical acclaim and have been translated into several languages including English, French, Hebrew, German, Spanish, and many other languages. One of her works, *The Image, the Icon and the Covenant* achieved notable success winning the Najīb Maḥfūz Medal in 2006 (Interlink, 2007). Later in 2013, Khalifeh was awarded the Mohamed Zafzaf Prize in recognition of her long-established career as a Palestinian writer authoring several novels that delve into the realities of the Palestinian society.

Central to Khalifeh's literary corpus are themes of women's liberation and resistance (Mahmoud, 2019). Her advocacy for women's liberation is deeply rooted in her own experience as a Palestinian woman living under dual oppression of both patriarchy and occupation. In fact, in an interview with Khalifeh, she asserts that the liberation of women is a fundamental prerequisite for the liberation of the nation (Nazareth & Khalifeh, 1980, p. 82). Khalifeh's encounter with occupation prompted her exploration of themes of resistance in her various novels including *Assubar* (The Cactus) which was translated as *Wild Thorns* in 1985. Throughout the novel, Khalifeh challenges the commonly held views of resistance and adds depth to our understanding of the struggle in face of colonialism, occupations and political corruption (Cotter, 2011).

The novel which is set in 1972 narrates the events of Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation in the West Bank city of Nablus. The novel which chronicles the lives of Usama, Adil, Nuwar, Zuhdi, Basil and Abu Sabri, opens with Usama's journey back to Palestine from the Gulf countries. Usama's return to Palestine is, as we learn later, a part of his mission to blow up Egged buses which carry workers from the West Bank to their jobs in Israel.

Upon his return, Usama is shocked with the changed reality of Palestinians who have to submit to searches, interrogations, and checkpoints and who have become economically dependent on Israel both for jobs and consumer products. Usama is further outraged once he learns that his own cousin, Adil, whose family is striving economically, has abandoned his family's farm and is working in an Israel factory.

The narrative also follows the lives of Nuwar and Basil Al-Karmi, Adil's siblings. Nuwar, a young college student, faces pressure from her father to marry a wealthy physician, but she defies her father's wishes by pursuing a relationship with Salih, an incarcerated resistance fighter. Basil, who is a high school student, is imprisoned as a result of his political activism. While in prison, he is indoctrinated with political ideals by his fellow inmates and resolves to join resistance movement following his release.

Secondary characters like Zuhdi and Abu Sabir, Adil's coworkers, also play pivotal roles in shaping the events of the novel. Zuhdi, a young father, is imprisoned for assaulting an Israeli coworker while Abu Sabir is denied rightful compensation following a workplace injury.

The novel concludes with Basil helping Usama harbouring weapons in a secret vault in the family's estate. Usama meanwhile engages in a fire of arms with Israeli soldiers, resulting in his and other Palestinians death. The Israeli army later discovers the weapon vault underneath Abu Adil Al-Karmi's house, leading to the demolishing of Al- Karmis' ancestral home.

Significantly, through the portrayal of the two characters and the narration of the events that evolve in relation to them, Khalifeh complicates the notion of resistance which no longer solely aligns with Usama's concept of armed resistance. Nonetheless, although Usama is a fictional character, his beliefs resonate with those of many in the

colonized part of the world in general and in Palestine in specific. In fact, Fanon (1965) argues decolonization, regardless of its form or label is inherently violent, serving to purge the colonized from its "inferiority complex" (Fanon, 1965, p. 1). Fanon's sentiment finds support in the renowned words of the former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who governed over Egypt between 1956 and 1970, asserting "what was taken by force, can only be restored by force". This expression still reverberates among some Palestinians today who believe that armed resistance or '*muqawama*' is the only inalienable path to liberation (Public Opinion Poll No (84), PCPSR, 2022).

Although Usama proposes armed resistance as the only approach towards gaining freedom, the narrator highlights his detachment from the reality of life under occupation as he has lived abroad in the Gulf countries for the past five years departing only "three months after the occupation started" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 13). Usama places blame on everyone in the country, asserting "Arabs inside [referring to Arabs living inside Israel] are to blame...you're the ones to blame. You're the ones who hold the key to the situation" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 22). However, despite Usama's insistence that nothing has changed during his time abroad, as he states, "nothing had changed...hands of the clock still moved on slowly and silently, marking the passage of time. Only trees and plants had grown taller" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 26), the country has undergone significant transformation. Despite Usama's professes, life under occupation has become the new reality, marked by economic deterioration, and scarce employment opportunities. These circumstances compelled many Palestinians, like Zuhdi, to seek employment in Israel. Zuhdi recounts his experiences stating [w]hen I came back from Kuwait, I worked in an olive-oil factory. The owner exploited me because unemployment was so high. I was disgusted. I left there swearing I'd rather die of hunger than go back. Then I worked as a taxi driver on the Rafidiyya line. That was okay, but then the bastards [Israelis] took my license. For no reason... One day I was sitting brooding in the café and I had just seventy piastres in my pocket. Abu Nawaf told me about a job as a driver for some company [in Israel]. (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 77).

Although Usama moans the reality of Palestinians and struggles to comprehend the present circumstances as evident by his laments "Oh, what's happened to us? ...'what's happened? I don't understand. I don't understand anything." (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 43), other characters like Adil, Zuhdi, Abu Sabir and the rest of the unalienated Palestinians understand the situation completely.

Adil is burdened with a barren farm and must support "nine mouths and one machine [his father's kidney machine]" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 28). Zuhdi's employment history spans Kuwait, Dharan and Germany engaging in various types of professions. Upon returning to Palestine, he faces the harsh reality of the scarce job opportunities and is often exploited by employers who capitalize on the high unemployment rate and his need for a job. Meanwhile, Abu Sabir, an elderly man in his sixties, is tired of queuing in long lines of charity organizations and the ill treatment of Arab employers who either cut the wages of the workers, or refuse to raise them in line with the escalating cost of living.

Due to these circumstances Adil, Zuhdi, and Abu Sabir find themselves compelled to join the ranks of Palestinian working class in Israel subjecting them to both social stigmatization and workplace discrimination. The social ostracization faced by this class is exemplified in Adil's reluctance to disclose his workplace to Usama. Meanwhile, the disparity in treatment in the workplace between Arab and Israeli workers is highlighted in Zuhdi's observation: "there's a big difference between Muhammad and Cohen: Muhammad gets the heavy work, Cohen the light. The Jewish workers have cafeterias with tables and chairs, but we [Arab workers] sit on the ground to eat, in the sun or in the garage" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 76). Additionally, being a member of the working-class Arabs in Israel also entails the denial of essential services such as ambulances and fair compensation in the event of work accidents, as demonstrated in Abu Sabir's workplace accident.

Despite the challenges posed by these asymmetrical power dynamics, the workplace serves as a space for sharing thoughts and experiences through conversations and linguistic expressions which in turn creates a space for the development of empathetic relationships. In light of the above discussion, the term "resistance" needs to be re-evaluated "inviting a broader conception of resistance that may include armed struggle but also a host of other, less bloody and absolute responses to occupation" (Meters, 2010, p. 88). Khalifeh illustrates these alternative options through characters like Adil, Zuhdi and Abu Sabir along with the other working-class individuals who choose empathetic engagement over violence despite power imbalance and difficult working conditions.

Throughout the novel there are various instances where Palestinians express empathy towards Israelis and vice versa. For example, in a conversation about sugar prices in Amman and Syria in comparison to those of Israel, Zuhdi empathizes with them stating "[m]aybe they were oppressed after all, like everyone else" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 110). This interaction represents a departure from the struggles of hegemony, inequality, land annexation and illegal settlement. Instead, it portrays two conflicting nations engaging in discussions about mundane day to day concerns free from the influence of politics and geography.

However, as a result of the uneven nature of empathetic engagement (Pedwell, 2012, p. 175) we see Zuhdi losing his control and injuring his coworker Shlomo with a wrench. This incident occurs after Shlomo expresses his resentment with the violent actions of the Palestinians who attacked Bisan city burning a house and killing a civilian. Zuhdi responds by reminding him of massacres of Arab civilians in the villages of Bahr al-Barq, Deir Yassin and Qibya, thereby minimizing Shlomo's trauma. Instead of bonding over loss and using the traumatic memories as transformative power to a common space, this altercation between Shlomo and Zuhdi escalates eventually leading Zuhdi to violence.

Later while in prison, Zuhdi undergoes a transformation by reflecting on his reactive passion despite his own Palestinian background and his incarceration experience. He feels remorse and a profound sense of responsibility, stating: "Shlomo wasn't bad...But Shlomo wasn't bad at all. He was just a human being like you and me" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 128). At this point, Zuhdi recognizes Shlomo's humanity, transcending the conflict and opting to act empathetically by humanizing the other side and recognizing their trauma.

Like Zuhdi, Adil Alkarmi, who comes across as a cultured and composed character, demonstrates his ability to empathize with his adversaries. He offers solace to an Israeli woman whose soldier husband is killed before her eyes by muttering comforting words and leading her away from the body of her dead husband. Adil also takes the initiative to console the woman's child and carries her off on his shoulder.

Similarly, Um Sabir extends a hand to the widow, offering prayers and expressing sympathy: "[s]omething was shaking the locked doors of Um Sabir's heart. She softened and responded to the woman's unspoken plea. 'God have mercy on you!' she muttered" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 159). Um Sabir further expresses empathy by covering the daughter's exposed thighs "murmuring as she bent over the unconscious child, I'm so sorry for you my daughter" (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 159). This moment contrasts with Um Sabir's previous anger towards the Israelis who denied her husband medical care post an injury at an Israeli factory. Here, Um Sabir is able to transcend her anger and to demonstrate empathy towards the Israeli woman's grief representing an act of nonviolent resistance.

These feelings of shared empathy are occasionally reciprocated by Israelis although such instances are notably fewer given the political privilege they hold. An example of this is evident when Israeli prison guards struggle to conceal their tears upon witnessing the reunion of Abu Nidal, a Syrian prisoner in Israel, with his son after five years of being denied visitation.

In these episodes we see Khalifeh acknowledging the losses of the two opposing sides of the conflict by not diminishing the Israelis' sufferings while at the same time acknowledging the plights of the Palestinians. Proceeding in this fashion, the novel compiles evidence of compassion between the two nations all the while exploring the common humanity "without outright calling on readers to show empathy but by performing a narrative that acknowledges the cultural trauma of the other side" (Fischer, 2020, p. 3).

IV. CONCLUSION

The aim in this article has been to investigate Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* novel in the context of alternative nonviolent resistance which is often overlooked in existing research which predominantly focuses on violence and armed resistance. It has been demonstrated that Khalifeh's novel effectively portrays the Palestinian reality, particularly highlighting the interconnections Palestinians have developed with Israelis in workplace settings and how these shared environments foster empathetic relationships. Furthermore, Khalifeh's work demonstrates how these relationships contribute to humanizing the Other from both sides, thereby offering a critique that challenges the prevailing matrix of hatred. Finally, Khalifeh's narrative exposes the atrocities of occupation and demands equality and improved conditions for the Palestinians.

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