



## Beyond Armed Struggle: Settler Colonial Structures in Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns*

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the novel *Wild Thorns* by Sahar Khalifeh through the theoretical lens of settler colonialism, examining how it embodies the idea of political domination as a long-standing institution internalized in the daily life of Palestinians. Instead of depicting struggle as a sequence of military confrontations, the novel reveals the workings of settler colonial power through labour regimes, spatial disciplines, surveillance, and internal social fragmentation. Based on a close textual analysis, the study shows that domination is normalized in *Wild Thorns* through everyday practices such as checkpoints, work relations, and administrative control, and that ordinary spaces are turned into spaces of coercion and control. The analysis also shows how these processes redefine social relations and collective consciousness, creating psychological tension, class division, and ironic forms of resistance in Palestinian society. The study claims that the structural logic of settler colonialism is anticipated, and that the novel's resistance is rebranded beyond armed struggle, extending to endurance, speech, irony, and the assertion of ongoing presence. In the end, *Wild Thorns* demonstrates that it offers a rigorous literary statement of settler colonialism as an irreversible order that restructures life, space, and meaning, rather than a momentary state of occupation.

**Keywords:** Sahar Khalifeh; *Wild Thorns*; settler colonialism; resistance; labor; space.

Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh's novel *Wild Thorns* is one of the most prominent literary texts to address the Palestinian national struggle from within Palestinian society inside

the occupied land, or what so-called today as Israel (often referred to as the Palestinian interior or Palestinians of the interior), not only as a direct military confrontation, but also as a

long-term structural struggle that affects the fabric of society, the economy, relationships, language, and even individual conscience (Khoury 56-58). Set in the occupied city of Nablus in the 1970s, the novel reveals, through its multi-voiced narrative, the complexities of Palestinian reality under the Israeli occupation, specifically under a settler-colonial regime that seeks not only political control but also to reshape the Palestinian present and future at every level.

The conflict in *Wild Thorns* is not a traditional conflict between an occupier and a freedom fighter. Instead, it is a multifaceted struggle: between the interior and exile, between labour under occupation and armed resistance, between belief in the revolution and disillusionment with reality, and between collective memory and individual interest (Ayyash and Puttaiah 2456-58). In this context, the novel offers a rich field for understanding the nature of political conflict, not only from the perspective of the victim but also from that of a structural critic, who rethinks how the settler occupation produces its tools within the Palestinian social fabric itself.

Reading *Wild Thorns* through settler colonial theory contributes to redefining the nature of the Palestinian struggle, not simply as a military confrontation or protest, but as a struggle to reclaim life, to reshape oneself, and to survive without falling into the trap of submission or annihilation. The novel does not present mythical heroes but rather highlights the fragility of humanity in the face of colonialism, which not only seizes land but also sows doubt among people, undermining their loyalty, dreams, and livelihoods (Priyanka 1435-37).

It is not merely a novel about resistance or betrayal, but rather a text that deconstructs the system of spatial and class discipline imposed by colonialism and shows how the Palestinian is transformed into an "object of surveillance" and a "target of control," not only through direct

repression, but also through the engineering of space, work, and identity. In doing so, it emulates Foucault's description:

In the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space. To achieve this end, it employs several techniques. Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony. (Foucault 141).

This insight is an essential entry point for understanding the spatial dimension in Sahar Khalifeh's novel *Wild Thorns*, which not only narrates the tragedy of Palestinians under occupation but also reveals how Palestinian space, from camps to checkpoints, factories, and homes, has become a disciplinary tool that reshapes the Palestinian body according to the terms of the occupation. The occupied Palestinian city appears as a restricted space, where Palestinian workers are forced to cross checkpoints daily and are subjected to inspection and humiliation, making their daily lives governed by the disciplinary logic of occupation that transforms geography into an open-air prison.

By situating *Wild Thorns* within settler colonial theory, the novel can be interpreted as more than just a story of occupation, but as a literary attempt to intervene in the structural processes that perpetuate the order of domination. According to the theorisations of Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, settler colonialism focuses on permanence, replacement, and the normalisation of control rather than temporarily ruling over and governing people. The framework is especially applicable to the Palestinian context, where occupation is implemented in the form of labour dependence, spatial control, and administrative punishment, which pervades everyday life.

Settler colonialism seeks to restructure the life of Indigenous people internally, unlike

classical models of colonialism, which aim to place people in opposition and to diminish any collective resistance. In this aspect, the concentration of Khalifeh on workers, checkpoints, prisons, and social tension is correlated to the structural interpretation of colonial power that is beyond military confrontation. The novel reveals the reproduction of political domination through regular encounters, so the struggle is irrevocably connected to lived experience.

Drawing on settler colonial theory, the study analyses *Wild Thorns* as a text that narrates the incomplete and volatile character of the settler project. The novel shows how subjugation endures through staleness and habit, but can be broken by words, recollection, and persistence. This theoretical placement allows taking resistance as a practice in daily life rather than an abstract nationalist ideal.

Despite extensive analysis of *Wild Thorns*, which has been based on the frameworks of resistance, identity, and occupation, a significant portion of the current scholarly literature views Israeli domination as primarily a military or event-related phenomenon. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how *Wild Thorns* exposes settler colonialism as a structural system that reorganises Palestinian life through labour regimes, spatial discipline, psychological fragmentation, and internal social divisions, rather than through overt military confrontation alone. These readings tend to favour explicit opposition at the expense of the under-theorising of how domination is being normalised in the daily life of Palestinians. What has not been well addressed is how the novel internalises settler colonialism as a system that is here to stay, restructuring labour, space, social relations, and consciousness. Stabilising settler colonial theory as theorised by Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, the proposed study redirects attention to structural domination rather than episodic violence, thereby reformulating resistance in a new form: beyond armed struggle.

## Review of Literature

The body of scholarship on *Wild Thorns* is enormous. However, it is concentrated around postcolonial resistance, identity fracture, and boundaries, occupation discourse, as well as, more recently, nonviolent resistance and decolonial temporality. Such clustering is essential, since it makes clear what the field tends to foreground and what it tends to background.

One of the first broad clusters encompasses *Wild Thorns* within a generalist postcolonial tradition of resistance literature. The study by Said Ahmed Aboudaif Mahmoud clearly constructs a theoretical and practical framework of resistance as a postcolonial concept and subsequently interprets *Wild Thorns* as a place where various forms of resistance are expressed and debated (74). Priyanka, Shashikantha Koudur also frames the novel as an expression of experienced realities under Israeli occupation and as a literary description of Palestinian struggles within the social and economic life (1435). Moreover, these works help establish that *Wild Thorns* is part of a broader global discourse on colonial authority and cultural resistance. Still, they generally treat colonialism/occupation as a broad term rather than settler colonialism as a particular structural organisation.

The second group is centred on identity construction and internal conflict in occupation and frequently incorporates feminist and postcolonial theories. The *Fractured Selves* by Qutaiba Mohanad Mhaidi Alhatemi situates the novel within a broader identity crisis influenced by colonial circumstances and gender pressures, foregrounding the instability of belonging and the provisional quality of selfhood under domination (885). This scholarship comes in particularly handy when the political conditions are attributed to any kind of psychological or social fragmentation, but which conceptual language is explicitly postcolonial/feminist rather than overtly settler-colonial: identity

crisis and gender oppression are the analytic focal points, as are structures of replacement (895).

Recent literature has widened the resistance literature beyond the armed struggle, concentrating on other modalities. According to Samah Jarrad, Raihanah M. M., and Ravichandran Vengadasamy, one can interpret the novel as an enlightening method of nonviolent resistance, considering the morality of compassion as integral to the workplace experiences that individuals undergo in relationship areas (2142-43). It is a valuable corrective to scholarship that values violence as the default mode of Palestinian resistance; concurrently, empathy models can risk disconnecting resistance from the material infrastructures that constitute social relations unless they are incorporated into the structural explanation of colonial rule.

Lastly, the article by Salami develops a slightly different theme by examining narrative temporality and temporal ruptures as a decolonial opposition through border thinking, colonial/modern gender, and chrononormativity, and proposes that form per se can challenge colonial time management (215-16). Theoretically ambitious and methodologically formalist, this branch of criticism demonstrates the fact that the scholarship of *Wild Thorns* is not a victim of sociopolitical interpretation. However, it is mainly transmitted through decolonial theory rather than the settler-colonial structure per se.

In the literature on *Wild Thorns*, the themes of resistance, identity fragmentation, and politics of boundary, the ethics of nonviolence, and the form of the narrative have been ample subjects of investigation, typically through a postcolonial, feminist, or occupation-related lens. Although these works provide helpful information, they are inclined to formulate Israeli domination in the generic form of occupation or colonial domination. What is still not well theorised, however, is the repetitive

nature of the attention to labour discipline, the control of spaces, the practice of surveillance, and the fragmentation of the self and inner being that constitute the systemic logic of a settler-colonial structure in the novel. Through the mobilisation of settler colonial theory, the analysis shifts to a structural explanation rather than thematic representation, and this study situates the everyday life of Palestinians as organised by a long-term project of permanence, replacement, and control rather than temporary military governance.

### The Concept of Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism has taken root as a structural formation rather than a historical phase. Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism is an ongoing process grounded in the elimination, replacement, or destruction of the indigenous communities, instead of exploitation itself (Wolfe 388-89). This reconceptualisation has transformed the study of colonialism by redirecting analysis towards non-eventualized models of colonialism, while overlooking durable processes such as spatial discipline, labour discipline, and social fragmentation.

This framework is also extended by Lorenzo Veracini, who underscores the logic of settlers' self-reproduction. According to Veracini, settler regimes tame domination through bureaucratic practices, economic reliance, and institutional stability, which allow a state of colonialism to exist in situations in which formal occupation seems to have been normalised (Veracini Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview 9-12). Importantly, this normalisation hides violence and nests it within the daily administration rather than in the extraordinary military operations.

In addition to the outside control, settler colonialism turns the Indigenous social relations inside out. Veracini shows that the settler project is effective in both controlling mobility and territory, and in restoring order in relationships between the colonised, thereby creating internal

fissures that undermine the strength of collective action and turn the conflict inward. In this regard, fragmentation, competition, and mistrust are not the unintended side effects of occupation but the realities of a colonial system constructed to destroy solidarity.

Settler colonialism is thus played out at material, spatial, and psychological scales simultaneously. It restructures labour as a dependency mechanism, turns space into a controlled, monitored territory, and reinvents social consciousness to make domination a normal state. Viewing settler colonialism as a form rather than a transitory state enables a more in-depth examination of how colonial power is reproduced through the most mundane aspects of daily life, rendering it self-sufficient, seemingly unavoidable, and administratively neutral.

#### Method

The research design applied in this study is a qualitative approach based on two complementary methods: textual analysis and theoretical analysis. These methods, combined, allow us to take a close look at the literary representation and place the text in the broader context of the critical approach.

To begin with, the research employs textual analysis, one of the most common techniques in literary studies. Textual analysis considers the literary work as a thick location of meaning production, involving the use of language, imagery, plot, symbolism, and space, to discover the processes of meaning production in the work (Barry 72-74; Hawkins 1754-55). This approach enables the researcher to track how political and social reality is enshrined in mundane settings, conversations, and storytelling. According to Krippendorff, textual meaning cannot be determined by the author's intention but arises from the interaction between the text and the reader's interpretive activities (Krippendorff 24-29). By using this method, it is possible to read the mirroring of lived experiences of domination, surveillance,

and displacement in the articulation of these phenomena, not through any political narration, but through ordinary moments.

Second, the study's analysis is based on a theoretical framework of settler colonialism. This structure is applied to understand the patterns identified in the structural analysis of the texts. The conceptual framework of settler colonialism, formulated by Patrick Wolfe as "not an event, but a structure", offers a conceptual basis for explaining colonial domination as an unending system of elimination and replacement of Indigenous presence (Wolfe 388). Instead of emphasizing military occupation alone, this viewpoint points out mechanisms of dispossession, spatial reconfiguration, and labour control as long-term domination strategies.

Lorenzo Veracini further develops this model by distinguishing settler colonialism from other colonial formations, underlining that it aimed to establish a permanent settler society by reorganizing space, memory, and social relations (Veracini *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* 3-5). Veracini claims that settler colonialism reconfigures the space of the Indigenous peoples that should become a controlled, foreign land to its indigenous inhabitants and tends to create internal displacement and fragmentation (Veracini *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* 36-70). The application of this theoretical perspective enables the research to frame the novel's depiction of labour, movement, and social division within the logic of a permanent settler structure, rather than as isolated narrative moments.

Through textual analysis and the application of settler colonial theory, the present study connects close literary reading to structural criticism, enabling the interpretation of the novel that prefigures how everyday experiences express a stable colonialism.

### Analysis

. Major military events and historical explanations do not reveal political conflict; instead, it is revealed in everyday experiences that reveal the everyday dynamics of domination. Khalifeh finds strength in transitory sites, search zones, and disruption where the Palestinian body can be seen, studied, and interrogated. These scenes serve to help usher in a larger settler-colonial order that governs movement, space, and dignity not through extraordinary violence but through everyday routines. What follows is one of the very first and most telling moments in the novel, as a seemingly insignificant encounter condenses power dynamics within the asymmetrical relations in which Palestinian lives under occupation live and sets the structural conflict that will unfold through the novel into motion. The political events appear within the following passage, which was the starting point of the conflict:

The order came from a soldier sitting on the wooden walkway. Usama stopped, his heart pounding. 'Open your suitcase!' The Israeli stretched out his hand and rifled the contents. 'What's this?' 'Librium.' 'Yeah, you people are crazy about that stuff. (Khalifeh 10).

In a situation like this, we are not merely confronted with a security situation but rather a microcosm of the settler-political system that shapes its relationship with the Palestinians according to the logic of inspection, suspicion, and physical control of movement. The Israeli soldier, in this symbolic position, does not embody a transient individual within a political system but rather represents a structural actor in a project that seeks to transform the Palestinian from a citizen into a "security target," subject to being stripped of his dignity as soon as he crosses a border or checkpoint. Wolfe points out that settler colonialism does not aim to assimilate or integrate the indigenous population but rather to eliminate its existence

as an independent political body. The dehumanization of the Palestinian demonstrates this: his body, his possessions, and even his mind are searched, as in the sarcastic comment about the drug Librium, which reduces the Palestinian to the image of "crazy" or "unstable." From Veracini's perspective, this moment reveals how colonialism transforms public space into a daily structure of oppression: the checkpoint is not only a tool of control but also the continuous production of a state of coercive subjugation that reshapes the relationship between the Palestinian and the place, transforming every movement into a potential act of resistance, and every being into an accused.

This analysis parallels Edward Said's work in *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he argued that imperial domination operates not only through military force but also through cultural intolerance. The scene, then, is an act of representation, in which the image of the Palestinian—in the eyes of those included and of himself—is reconstituted as unbalanced, and his need for Librium is evidence of this "collective madness." Said argues that "colonialism weakens the colonised in view of this," and this is precisely what happens when the man acquires a simple symbol (a tranquilliser) through which he rewrites the story of the Palestinian, not as a fighter but as a necessary being (Said 16).

After the occupation has become a permanent fixture in Palestinian daily life, the novel begins to depict scenes that embody the external conflict at its political levels, not through wars and battles, but through the violent and recurring encounters between Palestinians and the colonial machine in the simplest details of their transit, work, and conversation. This conflict is manifested in scenes that represent the tension between the individual and the system, between the Palestinian entity and the occupying power, and it becomes clear how every Palestinian movement has become a space for questioning,

dispossession, and symbolic and material threat.

The bulldozer started up again. 'Speak up! Why were you fired?' Usama's head was throbbing; he could feel the blood pressure rising like a hammer beating on his brain. 'Why were you fired?' 'Because I'm Palestinian, Palestinian,' he shouted angrily. 'Give me another reason.' 'That was the only charge'. (Khalifeh 15).

In this passage, we find that the confrontation is no longer just at a checkpoint but rather a moment of forced interrogation within a colonial structure that strips the Palestinians of any legal or contractual context. The question "Why were you fired?" is not posed here with the intent of understanding but rather as part of a systematic production of humiliation that seeks to empty the Palestinian of his voice and the legitimacy of his protest. The answer "because I am Palestinian" is presented here not as a personal accusation but as a forced admission that national belonging is in itself sufficient grounds for exclusion. This aligns with Patrick Wolfe's assertion that settler colonialism operates according to a logic of elimination, not control, transforming Indigenous identity into a permanent political suspicion.

The scene accompanying the sound of a bulldozer is not a passing detail; rather, it expresses the material reproduction of colonialism: while the Palestinian is interrogated, a process of physical erasure takes place in the background – demolition, uprooting, and removal of structures. Thus, symbolic destruction (identity) intersects with geographical destruction (place) and the two theories.

In Usama's search scene at the checkpoint, where a simple act like carrying a sedative becomes a symbolic point of humiliation, this new clip deepens the psychological structure produced by the settler-occupation in the Palestinian self. The novel delves into the deconstruction of political

conflict not only through policies of expulsion or checkpoints but also through everyday scenes that demonstrate how the settler-colonial system of oppression permeates the body, behavior, and emotions. In this scene, the narrative does not describe an exceptional event but rather an everyday experience that represents how normal reactions are reshaped under the sway of colonial logic:

The girl began to shout again, her screams mingling with the din of the bulldozer and the shouts of the Israeli woman soldier. Usama walked along quickly, as instructed, feeling as though someone were chasing him with a stick. Then he regained his self-control and slowed down. Afraid? No, I'm not afraid. Then why did I walk so quickly? A simple reflex, nothing more. (Khalifeh 16).

At the moment when the girl is forced to scream amidst the noise of the bulldozer and the screams of the Israeli soldier, Usama walks quickly in fear and then denies this fear by saying, "Afraid? No, I am not afraid. Vercini reinforces this idea when he says that settler colonialism succeeds when it "inserts itself into every day," making military orders and small details (walking, inspections, body language) tools for reshaping the relationship between self, land, and power. Thus, Usama's moment in this scene can be understood as a logical consequence of the previous scene at the checkpoint, but with a deeper degree of introspection: the first revealed external symbolic oppression, and the second showed how this oppression is reproduced within the Palestinian psyche itself.

The scene also demonstrates how public space has been transformed into a stage for symbolic violence: the sound of the bulldozer, the screaming soldier, and the screaming girl all point to spatial and temporal complicity in reinforcing the Palestinian's sense of being "under the whip" at every moment—even if they are not physically touched, the system

makes them hurried, tense, and fearful without them even acknowledging it. As Veracini points out, one of the goals of the settlement project is to impose on the Indigenous a new pattern of daily existence, reshaping their perception of space, time, and the body as tools of survival rather than tools of freedom.

Returning to the scene of Usama at the checkpoint and then to his reaction in front of the bulldozer, we see an escalating trajectory from external repression to psychological denial and finally to collective division. Initially, the Palestinian was met with suspicion and ridicule when he carried a tranquilizer; then, he confronted his inner fear without explicit acknowledgment; here, we see it met with an internal debate among Palestinians themselves, where bombing and explosion became an empty everyday language, evoking not excitement but mockery and frustration.

As the narrative escalates in *Wild Thorns*, the novel begins to displace nationalist slogans from their traditional positions, demonstrating how the slogan "Free Palestine" can become a subject of bitter mockery when it is detached from daily lived reality. In this scene, the narrative introduces a deadly paradox between political rhetoric and societal destruction, where liberation is reduced to mere explosions. "Our lives became one long round of explosions. 'Another man intoned, 'Yes, one long round of explosions! Yes, that's Free Palestine for you!'" (Khalifeh 45).

This narrative does not mock the idea of "freedom" itself. However, it reveals how the settler project transforms even slogans of resistance into a burden on people due to the constant context of violence, oppression, and collective despair it imposes. According to Wolfe, settler colonialism seeks not only to displace Indigenous people but also to reshape collective consciousness such that even talk of resistance becomes tinged with hesitation or even cynicism. In this context, "Free Palestine" transforms from a promise of liberation into a

tragic paradox: freedom equals explosion, not dignity.

This kind of internal irony, as the men repeat the phrase with sarcastic emphasis, represents a direct result of the ongoing friction between the structure of the occupation and society's response to it. This is not because they are against a free Palestine but because the occupation has made them see every attempt at liberation as a new bloody price paid with their bodies, their livelihoods, and their souls. Veracini adds that settlement succeeds when it not only occupies the land but also weakens the symbolism of resistance within the collective mind. The scene here embodies this: freedom is no longer an inspiring term; it provokes dark laughter because it is evoked by explosions, not by hope.

Although this form of resistance can seem conceived in the same vein as the Palestinian idea of *şumūd* (steadfastness), the expression of resistance revealed in the novel is no longer rooted in the traditional moral and nationalist paradigm. Dignified endurance, ethical perseverance, and collective identity in the face of displacement are all traits commonly attributed to *şumūd*. In *Wild Thorns*, though, resistance has been deprived of the heroic certitude and articulated now through irony, fatigue, broken speech, and the rejection of the inability to give in to normalisation. Perseverance in this case is not romanticised as a moral virtue but revealed as a frail, in many ways ambivalent state of affairs, created by dependency on labour and humiliation, as well as internal conflicts. Defying *şumūd* as *quid pro quo*, rather than a figurative standoff, the novel reinscribes this resistance as a challenge to a fragile, destabilising act of engagement, thereby representing the structural forces of settler colonial domination.

It is evident how occupation produces not only an authoritarian political landscape but also a fractured psychological landscape, one that compels the individual to participate in the

destruction of their internal symbols, laughing at “freedom” as a psychological defense mechanism.

*Wild Thorns* reveals how settler colonialism transcends military control, reshaping social and psychological relations within Palestinian society itself, generating internal conflicts that tear apart the national fabric from within, and this is seen in the following passage:

Hajj Abdullah sighed deeply. ‘Look at him, sir, he’s still wet behind the ears, but he’s already got plenty of lip! Before the occupation, I had three workers, and they worked like clockwork. Now, since the occupation, they’ve been spoiled, and they haggle with us over every penny. May God never satisfy them! They’ve got uppity, too, and free with their opinions. (Khalifeh 71)

In Hajj Abdullah’s words, the political conflict is embodied as an internal colonial effect: Palestinians no longer view their Palestinian brothers as partners in the national concern but as “arrogant,” “daring,” and “demanding more than they deserve.” According to Wolfe, settler colonialism succeeds when it transforms the Palestinians into an obstacle to itself, shifting the discourse from resistance to the occupation to resistance to those who are supposed to be children of the land as well. In this context, the “other” becomes not just the Israeli soldier but the simple Palestinian worker.

This is what Veracini calls colonialism embedded in the social fabric, where horizontal relationships between people are distorted and reshaped according to a capitalist/settler logic that fragments unity and sows’ suspicion and contempt. Symbolically, this demonstrates how the occupation has produced a Palestinian “intermediate” class (such as Hajj Abdullah) that has begun to identify with the discourse of control partially: they complain about the “rebellion” of the workers as if the occupation

has not only changed their economic situation but also granted them “excessive freedom” that threatens the traditional class hierarchy.

Thus, under settler colonialism, the political conflict transforms into internal fragmentation, emptying the national struggle of its content and redirecting it toward secondary issues that disrupt the possibilities of solidarity.

This social fragmentation is reflected in the narrative form, as Khalifeh shifts his perspective. The novel fails to maintain a single, authoritative narrating voice and instead alternates among characters, including Usama, Adil, and Hajj Abdullah, who occupy different social, generational, and ideological positions in Palestinian society. Such structural motion violates narrative coherence in a manner that formally displays the ruptures created by settler colonialism, in which communal experience is disintegrated into uneven and often opposing perspectives. Meanwhile, this multi-voiced arrangement prevents colonial flattening by not placing these points of view in a hierarchical order or reducing them to a one-dimensional ideological decision. Sense comes out through opposition instead of synthesis, and this indicates that fragmentation is already a narrative technique that reveals colonial domination without eradicating the plurality of Palestinian social life.

Amid the psychological fracture and societal discord illustrated in the novel *Wild Thorns*, a voice arises that steadfastly resists capitulation, holding onto homeland as an indelible truth, and to liberation as a historical certainty, rather than mere aspiration, which appears in Adil saying: “You shouldn’t say that. This is our country. The occupation’s going to end soon, and we’ll be free” (Khalifeh 75). Despite the brevity of the sentence, it expresses a structural resistance to the logic of substitution that underpins settler colonialism. Wolfe argues that the settlement project works to erase the Indigenous, not annex them. Therefore, the

Palestinians' persistence on their land and adherence to the discourse of freedom is in itself a threat to this project. This simple statement: "This is our country," not only expresses an opinion but also embodies an act of resistance that confronts the logic of elimination with steadfastness and rejects the narrative that settlement seeks to establish that the Palestinian is an intruder, superfluous, or invisible.

According to Veracini, the settlement project targets not only land but also consciousness and language. Here, this statement represents a linguistic reclamation, recasting the homeland as "own," not as "neutral territory" or "subject to negotiation." In this context, cracks within the settlement structure become apparent: the persistence of the Palestinian voice, even under the direst circumstances, exposes the illusion of substitutionary success. The occupation has not succeeded in transforming the Palestinian into a stranger to his country or into someone who has lost faith in the possibility of liberation.

After a series of scenes documenting the political tension between the occupation and its members, *Wild Thorns* moves us to a moment of intense rhetorical explosion, summarising the conditions of Palestinian society under the yoke of settler colonialism. In this scene, Adil is asked to bear witness to reality, not only as an individual but also as a son of these people who struggle every day in the face of a colonial project intended to dehumanise them. This is seen in this quotation:

Tell him, Adil, by your father's life, tell him! Tell him how the people inside are suffering. Tell him how Israel's blown up twenty thousand homes and four whole villages. Tell him how the detention camps are as full of young men as a cheap public bath's full of cockroaches. Tell him what happened to al-Bahsh's son and to al-Shakhshir and al-Huwari's daughters. But the worst thing is that all of us, every

last one of us, are forced to work in their brothels just in order to live! (Khalifeh 84).

This passage is one of the most intense moments in *Wild Thorns* of the structural violence that characterises settler colonialism. According to Wolfe, this form of colonisation is not a passing event but an ongoing structure whose goal is the complete annihilation of the Indigenous, not necessarily through killing alone but also through the dismantling of the conditions for a dignified life, transforming survival itself into a form of humiliation.

The bombing of homes, the obliteration of villages, and the filling of prisons are not a "security response" but part of a substitution engineering aimed at destroying the infrastructure of Palestinian society and fragmenting the political community, rendering it incapable of self-reproduction.

The shocking description of Palestinian society as operating in "brothels" is purely symbolic: it is an image of daily material and moral enslavement, where Palestinians are forced to survive by means resembling shame, rendering survival itself condemned from within. This depiction aligns precisely with Lorenzo Veracini's analysis, which, based on Patrick Wolfe's thesis, argues that settler colonialism is a continuous, self-reproducing structure that cannot be reduced to a past "event." Veracini explains that settler colonialism "proclaims its passing, but it never goes away" – that is, it claims its passing while continuing its structural work in secret. This structure is not merely one of military or political control but rather one of "inevitable and infrastructural control," meaning that it reshapes material and economic reality so that resistance becomes impractical or even impossible (Veracini *The Settler Colonial Present* 9).

The novel reaches its peak in the friction between the colonizer's military reality and the symbolic realm of resistance. The lines between daily life and the manifestations of occupation

blur as simple celebrations and a repressive military scene intertwine. The scene is not merely a description of a military campaign but a dramatic reproduction of the political conflict imposed by the settlement project on the Palestinians as an entity that must always remain in a state of emergency. The following wording embodies one of the most prominent aspects of Usama's internal political struggle. He returns from exile, filled with revolutionary ideals, only to be surprised by a different reality dominated by complexities and contradictions:

Searchlights were switched on, and one of the houses was flooded with light. They could hear the sound of army vehicles moving towards the mountains, the tanks beginning their slow, grinding climb. The men stringing paper streamers climbed down the ladders and quickly disappeared into the neighbouring houses. Usama watched what was going on and said to himself, 'What am I doing? The resistance units are active and I stand here listening to the ramblings of a drunk! (Khalifeh 101).

This scene embodies how Palestinian life is transformed into a "permanent war front," where the concept of safety or private space ceases to exist. Homes, decorations, and civic celebrations become potential targets for incursions, reflecting Wolfe's argument that settler colonialism does not merely allow for survival but imposes a permanent state of threat. Settlement here is not only a seizure of land but of Palestinian time itself, where moments of joy are suppressed before they can be fully realized.

Usama's phrase, "What am I doing?" not only expresses self-blame but also embodies an internal rupture imposed by settler colonialism: the Palestinian observes himself from the outside at a moment when he is supposed to be an actor, not a spectator. This internal rift is part of a complex mechanism imposed by the settlement structure to abort the act of resistance

and transform it into a cognitive crisis before it becomes a political decision. Resistance here becomes an existential act rather than a tactical decision, and individual consciousness is reshaped to become an arena of conflict between a sense of duty and a sense of powerlessness.

Flashlights and tanks represent a symbol of total domination, which not only monitors but also illuminates Palestinian life to expose it, strip it of its privacy, and then crush it. This interplay of visibility and power is a precise embodiment of Veracini's analysis, which argues that settler colonialism seeks to control not only through weapons but also through constant surveillance that reshapes behaviour before it produces action. The flashlight is not only a tool for illumination but also a symbol of a dispossessed narrative that seeks to label everything, including the Palestinians themselves.

In light of the political conflict and psychological alienation under occupation, the following scene can be considered an extension of the positions that reposition the Palestinians as a critical actor of the regime, even if they are isolated in prison, or their voice is suppressed in daily life. It is a form of symbolic resistance, often as powerful as direct political action, achieved through the use of irony:

They'd never do that. It'd be a disaster. If they wanted to give each inmate one courgette, the cooks would have to hollow out eight hundred courgettes – or more. And that's just if the operation's restricted to the Nablus prison. If they wanted to include all the prisoners on the West Bank, in Gaza, and inside Israel, they'd have to devote the entire machinery of the state to this vital task of stuffing courgettes. If the news is trustworthy, friends, we should rejoice and celebrate the collapse of the state budget. (Khalifeh 145).

According to Wolfe, settler colonialism aims not only to control the land but also to

produce a “natural” order based on the dehumanization of the Indigenous. In this passage, this structure is revealed when the fate of thousands of captives is reduced to a cynical debate over the possibility of providing them with stuffed zucchini. This kind of mockery does not weaken the occupation; it exposes it because it shows how even the simplest manifestations of dignity, such as eating a traditional meal, become imaginary under an oppressive regime that needs to “dedicate the entire apparatus of the state” to stuffing vegetables if it wants to be just!

Veracini indicates that “A settler society is by definition premised on the traumatic, that is, violent, replacement and/or displacement of Indigenous others.” (“Settler Collective, Founding Violence and Disavowal: The Settler Colonial Situation” 2). In Veracini’s view, the settler state is not built solely on control but on “violent institutional substitution,” where the Indigenous person is reduced to a mere number in prison or an administrative obstacle within an occupying structure. The irony here is that the mockery of “stuffing zucchini” reveals precisely this: when a simple act like providing a detainee with a meal becomes an enormous bureaucratic burden, the colonial system reveals its moral fragility and administrative weakness when it is asked to treat people as people, not as targets of oppression.

### Conclusion

*Wild Thorns* has finally placed settler colonialism not as an external power that is imposed on the Palestinian society, but as a structural form that invades daily life, labour, language, and personal interactions. The novel illustrates domination by routine rather than spectacle, economic dependency rather than open warfare, and psychological pressure rather than open violence. Resistance in this paradigm is not only developed through fighting but also through perseverance, noncompliance, and the continued presence in spaces created to obliterate its existence.

With forward-looking labour, surveillance, and internal fragmentation, Khalifeh situates the Palestinian struggle within a broader settler-colonialism that seeks to break down collective unity in its administratively natural way. However, the insecurity of this system is also revealed in the text. Instances of irony, rhetoric, and homeland obsession break the illusion of permanence in the colony and display the boundaries of the power to substitute. Even survival is a kind of political insistence.

This is seen through the settler colonial theory; *Wild Thorns* adds to a critical account of Palestinian literature as a place where structural violence is being put on the screen and addressed through resistance other than heroic mythologies. The novel confirms that, despite fragmentation and coercion, the colonial project has not yet been complete, confronted by voices that refuse to be erased and lives that still live within the land despite all the mechanisms that tend to make them disappear.

The revelation of the settler project's incompleteness in the novel is not an act of ambiguity but rather a political attack on occupation itself. *Wild Thorns* does not simply allow the settler regime the right to permanence or historical inevitability. The novel fails to provide a programmatic or utopian model of collective liberation, but it is extremely assertive about the colonial requirement that Palestinians live in silence, submissively, or obscurity. Resistance in the novel is not passive withering or even simple survival; instead, it is active denial of erasure through speech, irony, and memory, and through remaining on the land.

When Palestinians remain and resist institutions and formations that are supposed to wear them down, discipline and divide them, they are refuting the settler colonialism goal of destruction by occupation, elimination, and normalization. In this regard, the novel's political horizon is categorically hostile to occupation. It is collective not because of its

imminent emancipation and release, but because of its continued affirmation of the uninterrupted insistence on existence, dignity, and historical belonging, an insistence that makes the settler project permanently uneasy and incomplete.

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