

## **Double Colonisation of Palestine in Sahar Khalifeh's Wild Thorns**

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**Abstract:** "Wild thorns" is a novel written by the Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifeh; it focuses on the colonisation of Palestine from a feminist point of view. She considers the Israeli colonisation as a patriarchy. This paper aims at investigating two types of colonization that have been represented in the form of patriarchy in the novel. The investigation of the issue of Palestine from a feminist point of view and the relation between the tribal traditions and colonisation is among the notable aspects of the novel. The present paper has been conducted based on Jungian criticism, which views literature as a repository of "archetypes". For this reason, the paper aims at decoding the archetype of patriarchy and patricide suggested by Freud in his book Totem and Taboo. According to this theory, the early humans lived in hordes in which the father spread his dominance over the children and women. In order to exercise his dominance, he castrated or exiled the children. Finally, the children united and killed their father. It was the beginning of changes in early human's life. Patricide is represented in two layers of Wild Thorns. The first is seen at the level of Palestine-Israel relations in which Israel is like the father who tries to prevent Palestinians from farming on their soils (mother), and also castrates their children and banishes them to dominate over the land (mother). The second layer is seen in the patriarchy of the father in a Palestinian family and reunion of the children against him that leads to his death in a hospital.

**Keywords:** double colonisation, archetype, Totem and Taboo, Sahar Khalifeh, Wild Thorns.

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## Introduction

The fictional literature of Palestine in the beginning of its appearance involves two main periods: one between 1948 and 1967, and the other after 1967 (Zalman, 2003, p.1). One of the differences between the novels of the second period (after 1967) in comparison to the previous period (1967-1968) is the emergence of female writers in the field of novel writing. In general, literature was male-dominant before 1967. But after the Arab's defeat in the war against Israel in 1967, "most men were crippled by a sense of defeat, so women were the first to carry the burden" (Sabbagh, 1989, p.62). One of the prominent writers who became known after 1967 is Sahar Khalifeh. Khalifeh is "one of the prominent novelists born in Nablus and has become well known for her feminist stances. As a very young woman, she entered into a traditionally arranged marriage; then, after thirteen years of frustration and disappointment, she found her freedom and decided to dedicate herself to writing. She resumed her studies and obtained a PhD from the University of Iowa in 1988 in Women's Affairs Center in Nablus and Gaza. Sahar Khalifeh has written five novels so far and her early novel, *We Are No More Your Slave Girls*, made quite an impact because of its advocacy of feminist freedom. However, it was with the appearance of her third novel, *Wild Thorns* in 1979 that she received literary recognition and acclaim" (Jayyusi, 1992, p.589).

In this paper, *Wild Thorns* is investigated according to a psychological-critical approach. Generally, in psychological approaches to literature, the literary works are viewed as "an expression of the state of the mind" (Abrams, 1999, p.247). According to Freud's psychology, a literary work arises from the desires which "are repressed by the censor into the unconscious realm of the artist mind but are permitted by the censor to achieve a fantasied satisfaction in distorted forms" (Ibid).

Therefore, every literary work can be investigated from a psychological point of view. In fact, the main reason for choosing this novel for review and analysis was that the writer considered *Wild Thorns* as a novel arising from a pure experience and the unconscious of the novelist. Due to this, it has a multi-layered text, all of which are reasonable.

Regarding the theme of *Wild Thorns*, it narrates the story of a Palestinian youth called Usama al-Karami who returns home after five years and observes

that the people have changed a lot and the youth no longer farm or work in their own home country; rather, they have sought occupation in Israel. Deeply affected and seeing that Palestine is falling into oblivion, he becomes very sad. Usama tries to make those around him aware of the issue of Palestine, only to realize that a lot of people have changed and just a minority of the new generation follow him and share his views. In a suicide operation, he decides to blow the bus that transports Palestinian workers in Israel. The story also revolves around the family of Karamis, Usama's uncle. His uncle is self-opinionated and ill. Adil, the eldest son of this family, has to work from morning to night in order to earn the money for the treatment and dialysis of his ill father. Nuwar, the daughter of the family, has feelings for Saleh the Palestinian fighter but does not dare voice it for she fears her father. Basil, another son of the Karamis joins his cousin Usama and helps him in carrying out his plan. Basil, like the other brother, is not on good terms with his father. He quarrels with his father about Nuwar and protests to his father's insistence on her marriage with Doctor Ezzat Abdol Rabah, and announces that Nuwar is in love with Salih al-Safadi and visits him in prison and apprises the authorities that Salih is her husband. Once his father hears about this truth, his health gets worse and is hospitalized. Adil, Basil, and Nuwar are unhappy with their father and his tyranny. At the end of the story, the Israeli forces discover Basil and his friends' explosives in the basement and decide to demolish their house. On this event, the father is again hospitalized. The last chapter of the story describes the Karamis evacuation where the Israeli soldiers allow them ten minutes to get their things. In this scene, Adil is unsure whether to take the dialysis machine or not and finally decides not to.

### **Theatrical Framework**

In order to study the novel of *Wild Thorns*, a critical approach known as Jungian approach has been used, which is based on the theory of collective unconscious by Carl Gustav Jung. Jung believes that in addition to the personal unconscious, the human psyche is also composed of the collective unconscious which "retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind" (Jung, 1988, p.107). He views this collective unconscious as "the repository of racial memories and of primordial images and patterns

of experience forms that he calls archetype" (Abrams, 1999, p.251). He argues that the transmitted experiences and archetypes are not passive in the collective unconscious; rather "they function, when the occasion arises, in more or less the same way in all of us" (Jung, 1988, p.75). Therefore, in his opinion, man has always dealt with archetypes throughout history, which manifested themselves in media such as literature and arts. In this light, it is important to examine literature from this point of view where every work of art could comprehend archetypes that man transmits along generations and his descendants. Based on this theory, *Wild Thorns* as a work of art could be studied from the perspective of archetypal criticism, as well.

The archetype which has been studied in this novel and its function has been elaborated on, is the archetype of patricide. As Sigmund Freud argues, the archetype of patricide dates back to the pre-historic era. He offers a theory for the life of the early humans on the basis of Darwin's data. Freud "outlined a scenario where, long ago, people lived in primal hordes governed by an autocratic father. The patriarch kept the women for his sons, from sharing in his delights" (Heller, 2005, p.205).

In this primal horde situation "there was domination by the old male over females, and over his expelled sons. This was the first patriarchal society" (Bocock, 2002, p.66). The father did not suffice to exile in order to suppress the children, and in some cases the children "were killed or castrated" (Freud, 1939, p.131). This made the children dissatisfied so that "one day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and made an end to the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeed in doing what would have been impossible for them individually" (Freud, 2001, p.141). This event caused a change in the lifestyle of humans and triggered the "beginning of so many things- of social organization, of moral restrictions, and of religion" (Freud, 2001, p.142).

According to Freud, this primal patricide left its effects on human's mind and "the murder was so traumatic that permanent memory trace was laid down in the human race a phylogenetic inheritance" (Lear, 2005, p. 213).

Due to this, it is seen that the issue of patricide "was a real event which had left ineradicable traces in the history of humanity (Storr, 1989, p.107). The examples of this old pattern can be seen in the histories of Oedipus Rex,

one of the Greek legends, and Iranian stories such as the story of Zahhāk in *Shahnameh* and his father's murder by him.

### **Patricide Archetype in Wild Thorns**

Patricide archetype in the *Wild Thorns* is represented in two different levels. First, it is shown in Israel-Palestine relationship. In this level, Israel, in a metaphorical expression, is like a father who has castrated and expelled the sons of Palestine from their land, which is an image and metaphor for Motherhood and femininity. Then, Usama, the Palestinian youth who has immigrated to oil-producing Arab countries is shown like an expelled son who returns to unify Palestinian sons to overthrow Israel and regain their land (Mother). In this metaphorical reading, Palestine as a colonized land, is a symbol of feminity that is common in Palestinian literature in which the "women are associated with an enduring and feminine land and are fused in expressions of yearning for a feminine beloved" (Zalman, 2003, p.1-2). This expression is very common in Palestinian national literature because "the Palestinian national narrative is undeniably erotic and male. In it, as in the case of other nationalist narratives, Palestine is metaphorized as a woman" (Amireh, 2003, p.750).

However, this kind of metaphor is not unilateral because in national Palestinian speech, women are considered as the land and soil. Joseph Massad (1995) studied documents of the nationalist movement: the Declaration of Independence, the Palestinian National Charter and Communiques of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). He found that these documents portray women as "the soil producing manhood, respect, and dignity" (Massad, 1995, p.472).

According to this approach, we can consider the Israeli plan of preventing Palestinians from farming on their lands and giving them better wages in exchange of working on the Israeli factories as a conspiracy for separating the son from the mother. This is one of the concerns Khalifeh deals with in *Wild Thorns*, because in the story "Palestinians began to abandon their land for work in Israeli factories, for seeking better wages" (Abu-Shamsieh, 1987, p. 344). This is more or less like what the patriarch father used to do in primitive hordes to "expel his younger male rivals, for preventing incest" (Storr, 2001, p.106).

In addition, to impose its dominance on the mother (Palestine) and colonize it, Israel tries to castrate and expel the Palestinian youth, which is a theme repeated in many chapters of *Wild Thorns*. In the beginning of the story when Usama is in a taxi on his way to reach his mother's house, he talks with a man named Abu-Muhamad. This man tells him that all of his sons have immigrated to Arab countries except for the last one named Khalid who was about to be castrated under the Israeli soldiers' tortures:

Khalid is the last of the line and of the six, he is the only one who's been a problem. He got out of prison on bail. They had tortured him in every part of his body, even down there. They loused a dog on him that went for his genitals. He may be infertile. You mean impotent (Khalifeh, 1985, p. 7).

The theme of castration of the Palestinian youth by Israeli forces is repeated in another chapter of the novel, when the character of UmmeSaber sees an Israeli officer in the street and stares angrily at the stars on the officer's epaulettes while remarking in a monologue "How many men you have killed, you bastard? How many prisoners have you castrated?" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.157).

Another level of patricide is represented in Palestinian society and its family system. As mentioned in the introduction, the main theme in the novel is Palestine. In this story, Khalifeh sees the dominant patriarchal system in Palestine as the main reason for its failure. She insists on this idea in one of her interviews and asserts that "In *Wild Thorns*, most of the main characters are male - at the time reality seemed male" (Johnson, 1990, p. 24).

She blames this male-centred society for the Arab's defeat in the war of 1967 and believes that the new generation needs to overcome this system in order to allow a transition to another stage i.e. freedom. In the same vein, the character of Adil mentions that Palestinians' family structure is not built to yield freedom for them. He states that "the decrepit house of ours produces nothing but illness and cowardice" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.193). This idea is repeated in the novel by the other character Basil, who expresses his wrath upon the Palestinian family system and states that "I am a stranger in this house, damn this house" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.199).

On the other hand, a part of the story describes Karamis, the character

of the family's father who has damaged kidneys and is on dialysis. However, despite his sickness and dependence on the eldest son of the family named Adil, and the other members of the family, he is aggressive and domineering. The first sign of his dominance on the family is his name. All of the characters in the novel have a name or nickname like, Adil, Basil, Nuwar, Umme Adel, UmmeSaber, Abu Saber, etc., but the father's name in Arabic text is "Al-Waled" which means "the father". It is obvious that this kind of naming makes him different from the other characters and gives him a superior position compared to the others.

The father always wants to impose his sovereignty on the other members of the Karamis family and constantly exerts his dominance on his children, as the character of Nuwar expresses in a part of the novel "father was bellowing for Basil who reluctantly went into his bedroom. Another shout, this time for his wife. She left what she was doing in the kitchen and went into him" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.191). Also, she says "father was now calling for his glasses and demanding to see Nuwar: she hurried into his room. A few minutes later she emerged while her father was still ranting and cursing volubly" (Ibid).

This has made the two sons of the family unhappy with their father. Adil is the eldest son who bears the responsibility of his family. He spends the better part of his income on his father's dialysis. He mentions his situation in a part of the novel:

And that damned kidney machine's never satisfied. A mouth as big as the gates of hell sucks up money to keep my father's bones alive. While my revered father continues to sit on his throne in the reception room surrounded by the notables (Khalifeh, 1985, p.55).

Besides, Adil clearly portrays his father's pre-emptory behaviour when Dr.EzzatAbd Al-Rabbah comes to propose to Nuwar for marriage. His father asks him if he knows the suitor or not:

He turned to Adil. You know him, of course? Adil shook his head and went on eating. Whether I know him or not, why bring me into it? You're the absolute master here, I'm just the family milk cow (Khalifeh, 1985, p.193).

Moreover, Basil the other son of Karamis is also upset by his father's

overbearing behaviour. He expresses his hatred in a monologue as "I hate my father because he personifies sickness" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.199). The daughter of the family Nuwar also believes that her father is useless and does nothing but make the others' life a hell, "What does he do, may I ask, she said bitterly, 'except make our lives hell" (Ibid).

This kind of behaviour of the father makes the children upset with him and prepares the situation for them to gather against him. Chapter 33 of the novel portrays some kind of alliance between the three children against their father, which happens when the father presents the proposal of Dr.Abd-Al-Rabbah to Nuwar. At first, Basil quarrels openly with his father about Nuwar and Dr.EzzatAbd Al-Rabbah and straightforwardly says that Nuwar is in love with the Palestinian fighter Salih, and would marry no one else:

Then, without warning, he heard himself speaking solemnly and slowly as though reading a formal statement. He said "Nuwar al-karami loves Salih al-Sfadi, but won't admit it. She's promised to wait for him as long as he's in prison. That's assuming the occupation continues, of course. If the occupation ends, she plans to marry him no matter what all of you say. And most of all, no matter what her father says (Ibid).

And he continues and goes further and reveals some other truths between Salih and Nuwar and says "Nuwar al-Karami, Basil repeated in the tone of a radio announcer, loves Salih al-Safadi; she writes letters to him and receives letters back. She visits him in prison and pretends to the authorities that she's his fiancée" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.200).

Revealing the hidden relationship between Salih and Nuwar by Basil is a challenge posed by him to overthrow the dominance of the father by targeting his reputation. The second one is created by Nuwar herself who shows an act of defiance and notifies that she is in love with Salih and says: "Yes, yes! I will marry him! I won't marry anyone but Salih. No one else" (Ibid).

The alliance of Basil and Nuwar and the neutrality of Adil strike the dominance of the father, which makes him disturbed and puts him on the brink of death. Finally, because of this strike, the father is transferred to the hospital. Khalifeh describes the father's disturbance in this chapter as "beads of perspiration broke out on their father's forehead and he gasped for breath"

(Ibid). The father's hand clasped the table convulsively and says: "Call the doctor, he gasped or take me to hospital" (Khalifeh, 1985, p.201).

In the final chapter, it is Adil's turn to terminate his father's dominance. In this chapter, Israeli forces discover Basil's explosives in the basement and decide to demolish the house entirely. This chapter depicts the Karamis family moving out from their house, which is about to be destroyed in ten minutes. The father is in the hospital and Adil is to get the necessary things out of the house. UmmeAdil advises him not to forget his father's dialysis machine. When leaving the house, he hesitates whether to take the machine or not:

The kidney machine. He pushed the thought away, and began to walk up and down the stairs to keep his mind and body occupied. I won't take that damn machine. Yes, I will. No, I won't. Yes I will (Khalifeh, 1985, p.203).

Adil's hesitation persists and the following monologue shows his internal conflicts on whether he should take his father's dialysis machine or not. In this monologue, Adil tries to convince himself that he is doing the family a favour by killing his father:

Adil, for God's sake, be decisive. For once be decisive in your life! Emotions won't help you. Would you kill a man then? Kill your own father! But men are always killing. And if my father goes on living, we'll all die. Me, Nuwar, the children (Khalifeh, 1999, p.173).<sup>1</sup>

He finally decides not to take the machine and leaves it to be buried under piles of rubble:

Your father too, you've carried him for a long time. But when his existence becomes a threat to your own humanity... did you want something? The Israeli asked. Adil shook his head. When you are going to blow it up? He asked (Khalifeh, 1985, p.204).

The patriarchy of the Father in *Wild Thorns* and the alliance of the children against him is another pattern of patricide in the primitive horde, which is represented as an archetype in this novel.

In *Wild Thorns*, Khalifeh discusses the Palestine issue by contrasting two kinds of patriarchies. The first patriarchy is the Israel which has occupied the

1. Because of error in translation of this part, in English version, the author has used the Arabic one.

land (as an image of femininity and mother) and tries to castrate and expel the Palestinian youth to reinforce its dominance on the land and its sons. The second, according to Khalifeh's point of view, is another kind of patriarchy in the Palestinian family system, which unintentionally aids the colonizer to expand its dominance on Palestine. In her opinion, in order to defeat Israel, Palestinians should deconstruct the family system in their society and overthrow the father's dominance. This issue is realized in the story by the alliance between the Karamis children (Adil, Basil, and Nuwar). At first, Basil and Nuwar make the father hospitalized by opposing him and then, Adil lets his dialysis machine be buried under the piles of rubbles when the Israeli soldiers are demolishing Karamis' house. In other words, the foundation of the Palestinians' family system is a kind of Totemism which is "replaced by newer forms" (Freud, 2001, p. X). In this new form, the dialysis machine is a symbol of the Arab traditions that the sons do not accept and allow it to be buried under the rubbles.

In *Wild Thorns*, Khalifeh believes that the Palestinians cannot achieve victory in their struggle against Israelis without removing the father's tyranny from the Palestinian families. In addition to *Wild Thorns*, she expresses in one of her interviews that the reason for the Arab's defeat in 1967 arises from their social traditions and thus, they should start making modifications in their household and family rules:

I could see very clearly that the debacle of 1967 was the fruit of a rotten tree that needed a cure– the internally defeated do not triumph. The cure must start with our households and with those in power, with our social values and ties, with the fabric of the family, with the rules and basics of the upbringing of the individual at home, in school, and at university, and then progress to the street (Khalifeh, 2002).

In Khalifeh's opinion, the patriarchal system in Palestinian society is in the interest of Israel and this is a claim which is expressed by other feminist scholars who work on Palestinian society. For example, Samira Haj (1992) explains in an article entitled "Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations" how Israel takes advantage of this patriarchy and abuses it for continuing its domination on Palestinians. She states in one part of the article that Israeli

occupying forces also use sexuality as a weapon of political intimidation and domination. As stated earlier, sexuality in Arab cultures is ascribed to the woman by clan:

The violation of sexual mores is considered not only a personal disgrace but also a disgrace upon the clan's honour. Cognizant of the powerful cultural implications of female sexuality for Palestinians, the Israelis have not shied away from using it as a tool of intimidation. Since the Intifada, women's committees as well as human rights activists (both Israeli and Palestinian) have been recording cases of sexual harassments and attempted rapes by Israeli soldiers and interrogators intended to pressure and neutralize Palestinian activists (Haj, 1992, p.771).

Khalifeh believes that the patriarchal system has not only captured the females in the Palestinian society, but it also has put lots of restrictions on males' freedoms. In her opinion, the males are also victims of this system. Khalifeh, in an interview done by Peter Nazareth (1983), talks about females' liberation; she says that it can be realized only when males also obtain their freedom:

When you say 'the liberation of women' you cannot liberate the women before liberating the men. Therefore both of them should be liberated in order to have the liberated women (1983).

She believes that the Palestinians will not be able to take back their homeland unless they dispose of the patriarchal system and support women's rights.

### **Conclusion**

As a feminist writer, Sahar Khalifeh uses a deconstructive approach and offers a different view of Palestine and Israel. In the 1950s and 1960s, in the Palestinian literature, man was usually synonymous with nationalism. In *Wild Thorns*, she depicts a different image of the issue of Palestine. She portrays both sides, i.e. the oppressor/ occupier and the oppressed/ occupied in a patriarchal image and represents the involved Palestinians in a double colonisation. The first is the status of Palestine occupied by Israel, which is depicted in a metaphorical expression, in a structure like Oedipus complex theory. In fact, Israel is like a father who tries to separate the Palestinian people

from their country. On the other side, she also argues that the patriarchal and despotic system in the Palestinian community will end in nothing but failure. In her opinion, some sort of patricide should occur to the patriarchal system of the Palestinian community in order to remove the patriarchal or tribal dominion, and consequently, pave the way for the new generation to freely continue their resistance and be able to strike out the main patriarchal and despotic system, i.e. Israel. In the story, the sick father symbolizes the patriarchal and tribal society of Palestine. It is worth noting that the sick father is also inactive; in other words, the archaic tribal traditions have made the Palestinian society immobile and unable to make progress. Therefore, the confrontation between Basil and Nuwar and their father and his ensuing strike and hospitalization and also Adil's decision for not taking the dialysis machine and leaving it under the rubbles is a sort of patricide. This is an instance of patricide in its original form which has been developed in this story as an archetype with a distinct structure.

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