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## The Question of Resistance Literature Theory with Reference to the Palestinian Example

الملخص:

يدعو البحث إلى تطوير نظرية نقدية أدبية تُعنى بأدب المقاومة. ويمكن اعتبار كتاب الكاتبة الأمريكية باربارا هارلو الموسوم "أدب المقاومة"، ١٩٨٧، حجر أساس لنظرية نقدية منصفة لأدب المقاومة في معاركه الأيدولوجية، والثقافية، والحقوقية الموازية للمعارك المسلحة على الأرض. يوضح البحث أنه ما زال من الصعب تطوير واعتماد النظرية، وذلك لسيطرة القوى الاستعمارية على المؤسسات الأكاديمية، ودور النشر، واعتماد نظام رقابة غير منصف، واضطهاد أو اغتيال الكُتّاب. وي طرح البحث أمثلة توضيحية مستوحاة من قضية فلسطين.

كلمات مفتاحية: (أدب المقاومة، لنظرية نقدية، الاستعمار، فلسطين)

Title in English (The Question of Resistance Literature Theory with Reference to the Palestinian Example)

**Abstract:**

(The article argues that Resistance Literature as a genre of written texts should be studied within a critical theory that reserves the ultimate message beyond such texts, which is supporting colonized people like the Palestinians. Barbara Harlow's book Resistance Literature (1987) introduces such a theory, but it has not progressed in the literary theory canon; thus, the article aims to be part of the development of this theory in terms of exhibiting the interplay between theory and literature within the controversial discourse of Resistance Literature.)

**Keywords:** (Resistance Literature, theory, Palestine.)

## The Question of Resistance Literature Theory with Reference to the Palestinian Example

Resistance Literature as an umbrella term can be used to describe genres of arts that are created with the intention of resisting an oppressor or a hegemonic power; however, this article is concerned with Barbara Harlow's perception of resistance literature regarding literary texts. Barbara Harlow is a pioneer researcher in resistance literature as she wrote a book that can be considered a milestone in establishing a critical theory to study resistance literature. Harlow's Book *Resistance Literature* was first published in 1987, just about the time as Postcolonial theory gained popularity in the areas of history, culture, literature, and the discourse of imperial powers. Ten years prior to the publication of Harlow's *Resistance Literature*, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, 1978, had become a big hit generating disciplines of postcolonial studies that were more focused on literary theory and cultural criticism associated with the Middle East. Even though Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "have read and discussed" (Harlow, 1987, p. xx) the content of *Resistance Literature* with Harlow, the impact of *Resistance Literature* on literary critical theory is not as widely recognized as the impacts of Said's *Orientalism*, or Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). The nature of it being Resistance Literature theory concerned with people who are still colonized inevitably implies an obstacle to its development. Since resistance literature is concerned with literature that is hard to get access to for reasons like censorship or fear of endangering the writers' lives, this theory is less given attention to. Harlow quotes the famous Palestinian poet Samih al-Qassim's lines that best embody the description of resistance literature:

I would have liked to tell you  
the story of a nightingale who died  
I would have liked to tell you  
the story . . .

Had they not slit my lips. (pp.1-2)

Harlow attributes the definition of Resistance Literature to Ghassan Kanafani, a Palestinian author who was assassinated by the Israeli Intelligence the Mossad in 1972 because of his literary writings and journalistic activities that promote the Palestinian cause. She states that, "[t]he term "resistance" (*muqawamah*) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*. In his definition, as Harlow translates, Kanafani states that, "[t]he attempts at a history of the resistance literature of a given people are usually, for reasons that are self-evident, accomplished after liberation" (qtd. in Harlow, 1987, p. 3). Thus, trying to analyze literary works of resistance while the resisted colonization is ongoing is risky and tricky. Consequently, no literary theory has yet thoroughly matured to incorporate all aspects of resistance literary works while the colonization is still effectively in power. Explaining the reason behind material limitation in her book and

the difficulty to provide exhaustive study of resistance literature Harlow states that it is,

a consequence of the institutions of publication and distribution in both the “first” and “third” worlds where various forms of censorship or neglect have imposed real restrictions on the availability of this literary production... Given too that a publisher in New York may decide that translations of Palestinian literature are not “marketable,” or that a government censor in Argentina or Lebanon may confiscate the entire printing of a collection of short stories because one of the stories is considered “objectionable,” resistance literature continues to wage a struggle for liberation on many levels and in many arenas... In the meantime, whatever the framework, a certain flexibility and tentativeness is desirable since the struggle is not yet over and new material continues to be made available. This condition, apparently circumstantial, is itself part of the challenge posed by resistance literature and its theoretical implications. (1987, pp. xvi-xix)

Thus, resistance literature forms a parallel battle front to the armed battles on the ground which is a symbolic battlefield over legitimacy and cultural and historical rights to the colonized land. However, the “flexibility” Harlow proposes as a way around colonization, censorship, and other challenges to resistance writings is also limiting, especially that in recent decades, academic departments in the Humanities have been showing an increased interest in *post* and *meta* narratives while resistance literature texts are about real current wars and thus do not fit into the concepts of post and meta, instead they are painfully realistic.

Resistance Literature theory also argues for the crucial political significance of literary texts and, by extension, for the necessity of an informed political commentary on those texts. Harlow introduces a new critical perspective arguing that works written in the context of resistance require an abandoning of the western model of criticism that renders art as apolitical (1987, p.16); as she emphasizes that “the theory of resistance literature is in its politics” (p.30). Hence, resistance literature theory focuses on texts that chronicle an unsettled past or present, in order to achieve an envisioned future of freedom for the people it represents. It is current, self-referential, and bears responsibility because “[t]he absence of representation is the starting point of every resistant movement seeking the opening of political space” (Grinberg, 2013, p. 208). Such an opening is very difficult to forge when the nation resisting is colonized while the free world is not providing a space nor a stage for them. In the Palestinian context, many resistance narratives are about people caught up in the land of the battle, their fight becomes the art and the creativity, and their death for the land is the only meta-philosophy.

The relationship between literature and political struggles has been discussed extensively within postcolonial theories. Books such as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by Franz Fanon, *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said, *In Other Worlds* (1987) by Gayatri Spivak, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in*

*Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft et al, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi K. Bhabha, and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said are concerned with indigenous people from previously colonized and marginalized countries and how have they increasingly found their voices, attempting to assert their own visions, tell their own stories and reclaim their experiences and histories. Through these major theoretical works of postcolonial theory, literary texts have been proven to play a significant role in preserving identities throughout the struggles, besides keeping a watch over the transformation of the identities and cultural outcomes of both the colonized and the colonizer. Similar objectives can be recognized within Resistance Literature narratives, except that the texts take part in liberating and decolonizing the colonized and function as part of the battle rather than post reflection on it.

Harlow explains that “[t]he very conditions of research into the literature of occupied Palestine...like the conditions of production of that literature, provide the basis for a re-examination of literary critical methodologies and the definitions whereby a literary corpus is established” (1987, p. 3). However, Palestinian literature that can be studied under such aspirations is complex in terms of language and location. Present-day Palestinians reside either in occupied Palestine or are scattered around the world, which means they experience colonization differently and they use different languages to write about the colonization of their homeland. As Harlow quotes and translates from Kanafani’s *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*, [there is] an important distinction between literature which has been written ‘under occupation’ (*taht al-ihtilal*) and “exile” (*manfa*) literature. Such a distinction presupposes a people’s collective relationship to a common land, a common identity, or a common cause on the basis of which it becomes possible to articulate the difference between the two modes of historical and political existence, between, that is, “occupation” and “exile”. The distinction presupposes furthermore an “occupying power” which has either exiled or subjugated, in this case both exiled and subjugated, a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it has dispossessed and whose land it has occupied. Literature, in other words, is presented by the critic as an arena of struggle. (Harlow, 1987, p. 2)

Harlow further gives an example of the writings of Ghassan Kanafani as being “concerned with documenting the existence and material conditions of production of Palestinian literature under Israeli occupation, in the face of what he designates as a ‘cultural siege’” (1987, pp. 2-3) Similarly, many Palestinian and pro-Palestinian authors write with the intention of documenting and providing semi-historical accords of the colonization of their homeland. Elizabeth Laird, Ahmad Masoud, Susan Abulhawa, and Adania Shibli, are examples of authors who write their literary texts with the intention of documenting and commemorating the Palestinian culture and supporting the Palestinian struggle. As Harlow explains, “resistance literature calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity. The literature of resistance sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in

a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production” (pp. 28-29). Considering that, in resistance literature narratives about Palestine, categories of plot, character, and setting are designed to expose the political and social conditions of colonized Palestine, and the psychology of the characters is usually given social and political dimensions, where a developed resistance literature theory can best provide a convenient critical theory for the analysis of such narratives.

### **The Palestinian and Cultural Resistance**

Aldous Huxley writes that “nations are to a very large extent invented by their poets and novelists” (1959, p. 50). The development of a Palestinian national movement started in the early twentieth century chiefly as a reaction to the Zionist movement and the Jews’ aspirations to establish a Jewish state in Palestine; “The theory of a British-Zionist plot aimed at dispossessing the Arabs was widespread and accepted as self-evident” (Peled, 2016, p.169). Thus, the journalistic and literary writings started to become politically involved in attempts to find a Palestinian national voice that counters the division of the people and lands imposed by different parties at the time. Therefore, “[p]atriotic writing flourished during the mandate (1922-48) ... expressing Palestinian discontent with the Mandate authority, Jewish migration and labor and land sales” (Mir, 2013, p. 111). The literature that started emerging under these circumstances has been later described as “resistance literature”, and this literature has to a great extent been echoing a series of different war narrations and peoples’ journeys overcoming war traumas while simultaneously struggling to end the colonization. Thus, Palestinians have exhibited how well-aware they are of the importance of registering their experience as a form of unarmed resistance which is reflected in the writings of Kanafani who emphasized that the cultural form of resistance is extremely important and “no less valuable than armed resistance itself” (qtd. in Harlow, 1987, p. 11). However, Kanafani and others like him were assassinated by the Zionists which, as Harlow clarifies, “signal the importance attached even by the enemy to the efficacy of cultural resistance” (1987, p. 11).

According to Stephen Slemon, literary resistance “can be seen as a form of contractual understanding between the text and the reader, one that is embedded in an experiential dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in culture” (1995, p.7). Therefore, preserving the culture of the indigenous brings a great significance to the resistance and confirmation of the identity and history of the colonized. As Amilcar Cabral explains in “National Liberation and Culture”, “[t]he value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated” (2013, p. 54). That is particularly evident in the Palestinian case, especially with the systematic process of changing the names of the occupied cities, and claiming the Palestinian cuisine, folkloric dance, and clothing styles to be Israeli Jewish cultural heritages. As Roger Sheety states in his article “Stealing Palestine: A study of historical and cultural theft”,



The continuing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their historic homeland goes hand in hand with the theft of Palestinian land, homes, history, and culture. It is an essential part of the larger, long-term Zionist project of eradicating the Palestinian nation altogether, literally writing it out of history while simultaneously assuming its place. (2015)

Sheety also questions Israeli claims of Palestinian cuisines as theirs by sarcastically throwing questions at Israeli prime ministers as he refers to their countries of origins, Did the Russian-born Golda Meir (originally, Golda Mabovich) invent hummus? Did the Polish native David Ben-Gurion (originally, David Green) create the recipe for tabouleh? Perhaps it was the family of current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu (originally, Ben Mileikowsky), who created falafel? As ridiculous as these questions are, this is essentially what Zionists are asking us to believe whenever they refer to Arabic food as “Israeli.”

Hence, there is a fierce cultural battle going on between the colonized and the colonizer and literary narratives take part in this battle. Nur Masalha highlights the term “cultural memocide” coined by Ilan Pappé in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006), as Pappé defines it as the “systematic scholarly, political and military attempt in post-1948 Israel to de-Arabise the Palestinian terrain; its names, ecology and religious sites; its village, town and cityscapes; and its cemeteries, fields, and olive and orange groves” (qtd. in Masalha, 2012, p. 89). Masalha elaborates further,

Zionist methods have not only dispossessed the Palestinians of their own land; they have also attempted to deprive Palestinians of their voice and their knowledge of their own history...The founding myths of Israel have dictated the conceptual removal of Palestinians before, during and after their physical removal in 1948... The de-Arabisation of Palestine, the erasure of Palestinian history and the elimination of the Palestinian’s collective memory by the Israeli state are no less violent than the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in 1948 and the destruction of historic Palestine: this elimination is central to the construction of a hegemonic collective Israeli-Zionist-Jewish identity in the State of Israel. (2012, p. 89)

In response to such systematic alterations of cultural and historical realities, the longing for a united national form of resistance against the Zionists, and the need to prove the existence of their nation, Palestinian writers have opted for literary writing to convey their voice; therefore, supported by pro-Palestinian writers, they keep advocating the Palestinian side of the story. In the words of Edward Said, “one has to keep telling the story in as many ways as possible, as insistently as possible, and in as compelling a way as possible, to keep attention to it, because there is always a fear it might just disappear” (Said & Barsamian, 2003, p. 187). Thus, the consistency in reclaiming one’s story and history is central to the relationship between nation and narration in the course of fighting to regain freedom.

Since a narrative normally details the suffering of one person, or a limited number of characters, war stories represent a relatively limited access to the world of

the victims; yet stories attain a feel of grandeur that expands their audience and consequently increases solidarity with the colonized. Furthermore, when the victims read about their own struggle in a story, it raises a reserved sense of connection and camaraderie among them and accentuates a sense of collective identity. As Miller and Tougaw explain, “in complex and often unexpected ways, the singular ‘me’ evolves into a plural ‘us’ and writing that bears witness to the extreme experiences of solitary individuals can sometimes begin to repair the tears in the collective social fabric” (2002, p. 3). However, focusing on the Palestinian victim is one of the challenges that pro-Palestinian writers face as they write the Palestinian side of the story. As Elias Khoury puts it, “we can also argue that the Israeli is not represented in the Palestinian story...[but] that literature is also an arena of misunderstanding. The absence of the Palestinian in modern Israeli literature and his presence as a ghost embodies all the problems of this long conflict” (2012, pp. 254-255). However, Khoury’s assumption implies that it is the norm to expect the Zionist colonizer to be represented in order for a literary text to be recognized and criticized objectively, which is the very reason the academic world needs to endorse Resistance Literature Theory as a critical theory where bias is understood within its true historical and political contexts.

Despite all the political complexities, literature that covers stories of Palestinian victims intends to maintain strong aspects of their ongoing battles to preserve identities, reclaim memories, and strive for altered realities. As Harlow demonstrates, “The narration, as exhibited in [resistance novels], is one which requires both historical referencing and a politicized interpretation and reading. It furthermore expands the formal criteria of closure and continuity which characterize the ideology of traditional plots and subjects the images and symbols of tradition to analytical inquiry.” (1987, p. 81) Therefore, writing a Palestinian side of the story “carries political weight well beyond the [Palestinian] own society. The humanization of the Palestinian and the deconstruction of the Palestinian stigma in other areas of the world, especially the West, on some level motivates practically every current Palestinian author” (Salaita, 2002, p. 442). At this stage, literary texts about Palestinians stand as testaments to individual and collective survival against overwhelming odds, transforming fatality to life, and preserving the memory into stories that equate political and armed resistance. As Cudjoe states, “[w]ith the crushing urgency of the revolution, literature becomes functional in that it has a very real task to perform” (1980, p. 64). Furthermore, such literature shall inevitably attend to the broader agenda of political resistance to accomplish a tangible improvement and impact people’s life veritably:

The muteness of literature is part of the muteness of history or, in other words, part of the inability of the victim to write the story. Anton Shammas, [a Palestinian writer], formulated the struggle as a struggle related to the storyteller. Whoever owns the story and the language will own the land because, in the words of the great Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, “land is inherited like language”. (Khoury, 2012, p. 254)

Thus, the storyteller is as powerful as the armed fighter in the equation of winning in a battle that is over history and culture as much as it is over land. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, Stuart Hall explains that:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (2013, p. 394)

However, for the colonized Palestinian, culture and identity are not forsaken in far past, but in a recent in current history of systemic obliterations. The constant process of demolishing, renaming and un-naming of Palestinian heritage creates a determined feeling among Palestinians that they always need to assert their existence and their Palestinian identity, and roots. Hence, it becomes important to raise awareness and linguistically keep the name of Palestine familiar to people. Such a notion has become more common in recent years especially after the hashtag #PalestineIsHere began trending in 2016 when supporters of the Palestinian cause condemned Google for not labelling Palestine on Google Maps. Elias Khoury explains that after 1948 *Nakba* the Palestinians did not only lose their land and cities, but they also lost their “Palestinian name” and their “story”. As he illustrates, “[s]uddenly a whole people became nameless and had no right to use their name and refer to their national identity”, and that is how “[t]his insistence upon the name has become a major element in Palestinian literature” (2012, pp. 259-260). Thus, a crucial element that preserves the culture of the oppressed is recognition of their case from other nations and cultures. And resistance literature provides a space for raising awareness and inspiring solidarity that can shield the oppressed from additional oppression.

### **Censorship of Resistance Literature**

Judith Butler elaborates on censorship imposed on public spheres and how challenging the restraining policies can make it for intellectuals to speak up in support of certain victims:

Public policy, including foreign policy, often seeks to restrain the public sphere from being open to certain forms of debate and the circulation of media coverage... To produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content...but on what “can” be heard, read, seen, felt, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths. (2004, pp. xx-xxi)



Accordingly, emphasizing the Palestinian name and story is one way of enlisting Palestinian lives along with those “whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths”. Censorship on pro-Palestinian content has always been a problem for the Palestinians and is still a substantial obstacle on their path to freedom. However, sometimes adamant efforts of the activists supporting the victims pay off. For example, the Israeli escalations in 2021 that started in Jerusalem, specifically the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, have eventually spread to affect the whole historical Palestine and resulted in an unprecedented wave of Palestinian national unity fashioned by the social media platforms. The Palestinian resisting wave was named by some as the “Uprising of Unity” because it brought Palestinians all across colonized Palestine and diaspora together in armed and unarmed resistance. The most notable form of resistance from Palestinians in the diaspora and pro-Palestinian activists was the virtual resistance, taking the shape of mainly raising awareness about the Palestinian case and countering the Israeli propaganda. In response to that there was extensive censorship to the pro-Palestinian content especially on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. However, due to vigorous efforts to overpower the censorship and the insistence on educating people on the Palestinian cause, the ethnic cleansing was put on hold in Jerusalem and a ceasefire was implemented in Gaza. Even though putting violence on hold for a short time is not the ultimate solution, this example demonstrates the immense effect of raising awareness and telling one’s story.

In *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explain that a revolution requires empowerment of different versions of identity, which they call singularities, “the paths of rebellion and liberation, the metamorphoses of singularities in each domain can (and must, in our view) proceed in the same order and connection”. However, to form a strong parallelism heading towards liberation, this parallelism “is not given but must be achieved politically” (p. 341). The parallelism suggests that in order for the oppressed to acquire their freedom, they should resist not merely as an entity but as parallel singularities that share the common purpose of obliterating oppression:

One of the most significant challenges of revolution today, then, which this parallelism of singularities suggests, is that revolutionary action cannot be successfully conducted or even thought in one domain alone. Without its parallel developments, any revolutionary struggle will run aground or even fall back on itself... Multiplicity and parallelism set the standard for evaluating revolutionary politics today: the multiple parallel paths of liberation either proceed through correspondences or do not proceed at all. (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 343)

The exceptional incident of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood resonates in one dimension with Hardt and Negri’s proposed multiple parallelism of liberation. As mentioned earlier, rising tensions that started in Jerusalem were countered on multiple levels. Unrest started in cities across the occupied West Bank, Palestinian communities across Israel protested, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon fired rockets toward Israel, Jordanians marched toward Israel in protest, Lebanese protesters briefly crossed their

southern border with Israel, and the besieged Gaza fired locally made rockets toward Israel. Parallel to the violence on the ground another battle on social media platforms occurred and intensified when activists publicized the Israeli assaults on their Live streams that were watched by hundreds of thousands around the world. This resulted in censoring these activists' contents in desperation to cover up the Israeli forces' violations that were being streamed on-air. Social media was a central factor in moving the masses on the ground, attracting attention worldwide, and eventually amplifying the Palestinian voice. Thus, the parallels in this scenario took place on the ground as well as on the virtual world. The long-term impact of these events is yet to be anticipated, but meanwhile, noticeable changes in terms of awareness and solidarity with the Palestinian case have noticeably risen. In the same sense, literary narratives can form another layer of the parallelism supporting a revolution or a resistance especially on the long run.

Literature is generally expected to be a safe space for writing about sensitive political or social matters that could be otherwise confined. In Derrida's words, "Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its right to say everything... with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or politics of responsibility" (Derrida, 1995, p. 28). However, in the case of resistance literary texts these privileges are taken away from the texts through acts of censorship. It can even get hideous when the authors get into risky situations such as losing their jobs and sometimes it gets as dangerous as losing their lives like the case of Ghassan Kanafani. For that reason, authors who take part in resistance literature risk a lot between their reputation and their lives. Elizabeth Laird, a British writer who has lived in the Arab world and visited many of its countries, including Palestine, wrote her novel *A Little Piece of Ground* (2003) after her visit to Ramallah city in the Westbank in Palestine. Laird believes that writers should be true to their stories, and she feels an obligation to reflect the realities of people because, according to her, "if we – writers – don't write about the great stories of our time, then we're not doing our job". In order to write *A Little Piece of Ground* Laird lived with a Palestinian family to gather material for the book. Telling how she got to write this novel Laird explains:

I was profoundly shocked by what I found. The real dreadfulness of people's everyday lives, the increase in poverty, the harassment, the curfews, and it occurred to me then that it would be a proper subject for a novel to see how children are managing under these circumstances ... The task of the novelist is to be true to the story, and what I've tried to do in my book is to be as true as possible to what it is like to be a Palestinian child today. (NPR, 2003, 1:05-1:46)

This statement establishes Laird's novel as an example of resistance literature in terms of the author's declaration of staying true to history besides her articulate advocacy for the colonized. Predictably, there have been serious calls to ban and censor this novel for representing the Palestinian viewpoint. The owner of Canada's largest children's

bookstore wrote a detailed letter to Macmillan expressing “a profound sense of shock and disgust”, calling the book a “piece of propaganda” and refusing to carry it in the store (*Guide for A Little Piece of Ground*, 2009). That was followed by a campaign to pressure Macmillan to suppress the publication of the book. Consequently, American publishers were reluctant to publish the book. In 2006 the book was finally published in the USA by Haymarket Books, a progressive, non-profit publisher in Chicago. Elizabeth Laird expressed her astonishment of the objections and criticism she received on the novel solely on the basis that the novel represents a Palestinian voice. In an interview with the National Public Radio (NPR), Laird responds to her critics:

I think this is an interesting criticism. I wrote a book called *Kiss the Dust*, and it is about a Kurdish family who escape from Iraqi Kurdistan and are interned in an Iranian refugee camp under very harsh conditions. Nobody has ever said to me that I should have shown the point of view of the Iranian guards in that camp. I would very much have liked to have put in that story a sympathetic Israeli character and, indeed, I tried to see how that could be done. But there is no point in making a sentimental attempt to show a half-truth when the whole truth is there in front of me. (2003, 5:40-6:20)

Therefore, Laird witnessed the occupation’s atrocities firsthand and wrote about them in the form of the novel; intentionally taking the side of the colonized and solely telling their side of the story. As much as the novel constructs Palestinian characters from a non-Palestinian perspective, it gives voice to the Palestinian in the discourse of western power. The novel offers the English-speaking world a viewpoint that would otherwise be restricted or inaccessible, as it counters the dominant western cultural narratives. Without official representation nor accommodating academic platforms, the Palestinian story is usually lost between censorship and the colonizer’s narrative; therefore, Laird’s novel is an example of few English books that try to break from the limitation of approaching the Palestinian case. In her review of the novel for the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, Sara Powell notes that, “first published in 2003 in the UK, the book has been both hailed as powerful and protested. Of course, were it not powerful, no one would have protested”. Thus, *A Little Piece of Ground* can be appreciated as an active contribution in the long journey of raising awareness for the Palestinian cause in the western public sphere which makes it a good example of resistance literature texts. Laird wrote the novel with emphasized declarations of the literary-historical context, besides the contemporary context in effect. In the Foreword to the 2018 e-edition of the novel Elizabeth Laird writes:

It’s fifteen years since *A Little Piece of Ground* was first published. I had hoped that by now, the occupation of Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank) would have ended, along with all the oppression and injustice it has brought in its tail. But nothing has been resolved, and the lives of ordinary people in Palestine are harder than they have ever been. At the same time, Israel, the occupying power, feels no more secure, and so tries to exert ever-greater control through its

powerful army... The boys in this book, Karim, Joni, and Hopper, stand for all the children caught up in the agony of war and occupation in the Middle East. This blunt declaration from Laird brings the book to the heart of resistance literature theory in the sense that it is an intentional portrayal and reflection of true political incidents. At the same time, it embodies Harlow's manifestation that, "the struggle over the historical record is...no less crucial than the armed" (Harlow, 1987, p. 7). The fact that Laird wished her book would instigate some good change further indicates her conscious decisions on what to represent in her fiction, yet, fifteen years on, the situation got even more dire for the victims.

Palestinian author Adania Shibli, whose acclaimed novel *Minor Detail* (2017) is also inspired by true stories from Palestine, explains the complexity involved in writing about Palestine,

The reference to the real should not be something much present within the novel, and actually there is a play with that and there is also... a rational behind that, because constantly as a Palestinian you are subjected to this exam of, "what you are saying: Did it really happen? Or not?" As if you are always exaggerating, you are always not precise, you always lack the means to present your story in the scientific sense, and I think turning to literature is exactly to say, "no, this is not about reality, this is about literature." And there is a game within that, saying "ok, let's relate to all these stories as fiction". (Shibli, 2020, 11:37-12:36)

Shibli highlights here one of the challenges that authors of resistance literature narratives face as they write in the margins of political taboos, so they have to mitigate their reference to the real and find ways to overcome censorship. The story of Palestine has for long "been told by Israelis, it's been told by other people in the West, and it's taken a generation of Palestinians who have grown up in the West to be able to narrate [their] own story in [their] own voice in Western languages and in the nuances of Western culture" (Mornings in Jenin, with reading, 2012, 04:27-04:54). For decades it has been hard for the Palestinians to strongly voice their case against their oppressor, as Edward Said in *Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims* elaborates:

Israel has some remarkable political and cultural achievements to its credit, quite apart from its spectacular military successes until recently. Most important, Israel is a subject about which, on the whole, one can feel positive with less reservations than the ones experienced in thinking about the Arabs, who are outlandish, strange, hostile Orientals after all; surely that is an obvious fact to anyone living in the West. Together these successes of Zionism have produced a prevailing view of the question of Palestine that almost totally favors the victor, and takes hardly any account of the victim. (1979, p. 25)

To contrast that, resistance narratives need to be recognized for what they are, and gain value as serious attempts to create a Palestinian voice where the colonized can speak for themselves. In such narratives, the Palestinians cease to be presented as minority Arabs who can disappear into another Arab land, or poor outcasts meekly begging for food and shelter on the ruins of their bombed houses as has been pictured and reflected



in the news for decades. In resistance narratives, besides the miserable Palestinian, the reader also meets the Palestinian the lover, the freedom fighter, the competent, the educated, the proud family-man or woman, and simply the human that the reader can relate to.

Another author who can be studied as an example of a resistance literature writer is Palestinian-American writer Susan Abulhawa. Abulhawa, started writing her first novel as a report on one of the massacres that she had the responsibility to cover as an international journalist; however, as she was writing and explaining the historical context that led up to the moment of the massacre, she ended up writing the historical novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010). (*Mornings in Jenin*, with reading, 2012, 0:24 - 01:30). Abulhawa states that she initially based her novel *Mornings in Jenin* on real life events, “it was really important to me that the backdrop of this book be historically accurate” (Part 2, 2010, 02:44-02:50). She explains the contradictory reception of the novel and expresses her disappointment in the fact that “there seems to always be a disclaimer”, and that people instead of researching the facts they choose to leave reviews with comments about not taking sides. One reviewer of the novel wrote that “she had to stop herself and think that she was being emotionally manipulated or politically manipulated” (Part 2, 2010: 01:45-01:50). Similar to Elizabeth Laird’s comments on such reviews, Abulhawa believes that, “that kind of comment would never ever be said about any other historic injustice” (01:58-02:00). Abulhawa clarifies her argument by mentioning Edward Said’s explanation that, “it’s hard for people to imagine that the world’s biggest victims have become victimizers, and it’s hard to hear the narrative of the ‘victims of the victims’” (5:00- 5:19). In another interview Abulhawa elaborates on the process of writing *Mornings in Jenin*, as she explains how she came to write it:

In 2002 there were reports of a massacre happening in the refugee camp of Jenin, I just decided to go and see for myself what was happening, and I ended up being one of the first international eyewitnesses to the immediate aftermath of that massacre and what happened there, I came back, and I started writing about what I had witnessed... and I just kept writing not realizing that I was writing a novel. (*Mornings in Jenin*, with reading, 2012, 00:24-01:30)

Thus, what Abulhawa started as a journalistic report on what she witnessed has eventually turned into a novel. However, publishing it as a novel has certainly expanded its readership and therefore raised more awareness than a journalistic or legal report would.

Likewise, Palestinian-British writer Ahmed Masoud presents a record of recent and current history of colonization in his detective and informative debut novel, *Vanished: The Mysterious Disappearance of Mustafa Ouda* (2015), which offers its readers a historical chronicle of a series of tumultuous events that occurred in the beleaguered Gaza Strip between 1981 and 2011. Preserving culture in order to preserve land and attain freedom has become a mantra that is embraced by many supporters of the Palestinian case. This is manifested in Masoud’s novel as he tries to register names of places as a means of fighting back during the military offensive that was launched



on Gaza at the time of writing in 2014. Masoud lived until his early twenties in Gaza but then he moved to the UK. When the offensive happened, he was in London, and he was following the news from there, so writing was his way to face the trauma the offensive inflicts on him through registering it via a literary text. As Masoud puts it in the interview I conducted with him, “I stayed sane because I wrote about it, I felt that I was doing something besides helplessly watching my town vanish, I was in a way documenting its existence while it is brutally disappearing”. As Masoud stresses over the destiny of his family, friends, and beloved city, he continues to write his novel and name the bombarded places in a desperate effort to save the memory of the places, their names and history. Masoud’s reflection on the time and process of writing also reveals that the act of writing a resistance narrative can as well help the authors cope and stay resilient. As Nguyen explains, the most studied narratives of trauma, and “the most compelling [ones] for advocacy, and for mainstream cultural consumption, are plotted on the trajectory from victim to survivor, from horrific wounding to heroic triumph, from devastation to restoration” (2011, p. 32). In the case of Palestine, novels that represent victims are also part of the resistance to the still continuing wiping out of the people and their history without witnessing the “triumph” or “restoration”. Like in the example of Ahmad Masoud it is a mix of a survivor and a witness testimony in the form of a literary text. Thus, these narratives can, on the most part, empower the victims by acknowledging their story. Therefore, resistance literature besides being political in its very nature, it helps the construct of resilience; and hence, in the realm of resistance literature, “resistance” could be thought of as anti-colonial, and “resilience” as pro-cultural and national.

On the relation between knowledge and power, and how power effects on the course of written history, Harlow takes Michel Foucault’s suggestion that, “we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended, and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interest” (qtd. in Harlow, 1987, p. 116). Harlow believes that Foucault is referring to the same tradition that resistant literature narratives seek to transform. As she explains,

The connection between knowledge and power, the awareness of the exploitation of knowledge by the interests of power to create a distorted historical record, is central to resistance narratives... Within the texts and their analytical representation of the social histories of their characters that tradition is critically examined. The texts themselves, however, are immediate interventions into the historical record, attempting to produce and impart new historical facts and analyses, what Edward Said has referred to as “new objects for a new kind of knowledge.” This requires that the historical record and the present agenda be rewritten”. (p. 116)

Under this perspective, the previously mentioned novels of Elizabeth Laird, Adania Shibli, Susan Abulhawa, and Ahmed Masoud can be considered as a rewriting of history from the oppressed viewpoint and as initiating a discourse on the

responsibilities that privileged people have, such as confronting the forged legacies of colonization, and insisting on the disclosure of the true histories of the victims.

According to Harlow, a researcher intending to adopt resistance literature theory should be located within the occupied land and the resistance movement itself. In particular, Harlow agrees with Kanafani's argument that a writer ought to display adequate knowledge of the historical context of the national struggle in order to convince his reader and to adopt resistance literature (1987, 10-16). This however problematizes the fact that the writers who manage to find way around censorship and get published are people who become privileged at a certain point as they manage to move to a safe place or get access to the privileged free world. Despite the fact that these authors might still be affected by the control of their colonizer in certain ways, the relative safety they enjoy enables them to write and publish. For instance, the four authors exemplified here were living in a safe place while writing or publishing, so part of the process became possible because they had access to a privileged place, unlike the colonized people they are representing. This contradiction makes it possible for some resistance literature texts to get the chance to be recognized, but also indicates the massive renunciation to accessing thousands of resistance literature texts that would be considered in an alternate free and fair world. It further explains the hinder in adapting a critical theory that analyzes them fairly within their true historical, cultural, and anti-colonial aspirations.

### **Conclusion**

Resistance Literature as a genre of written texts should be studied within a critical theory that conveys the ultimate message beyond them, which is supporting colonized people like the Palestinians; especially that literature can be one of the most influential means of unarmed resistance in long-term struggles. Although the relationship between literature and political power has been extensively discussed within postcolonial theories, texts that advocate for the colonized are rarely acknowledged or recognized in the West and among the imperial powers during the time of colonization. Although resistance narratives can be conveyed and preserved by different oral, visual, or written means, without a critical theory to present a platform to acknowledge and appreciate the endeavor of such narratives that strive to participate in decolonizing and liberating, these narratives struggle with censorship and stay ineffective. Barbara Harlow's book *Resistance Literature* (1987) introduces such a theory, but it has not progressed in the literary theory canon. Harlow's proposal considers the political, cultural, historical, and current conditions of the colonized which provides a solid base for advancing a critical theory that can offer efficient platforms for resistance literature narratives to operate effectively in favor of the oppressed. Within such a theory, the authors can be protected as advocates for legitimate fights for freedom. The Palestinian example is one of the strong cases that can be further studied and benefit from this proposal as one of the still colonized countries in recent history. Notably, the authors who eventually manage to get published are the ones who succeed to move away from the colonized lands or get

exceptional access to privileges that empower them. Therefore, whether it is writing or a different form of solidarity, it is still undertaken away from the war zone which indicates the fierce conditions in the colonized areas and hence the cruciality of advancing a theory that embraces more of their writings. This further explains the complexity of implementing a critical theory that amplifies the voice of the victims against powerful oppressors. Nonetheless, resistance literature could be considered a starting point in a long and challenging journey of empowering the oppressed and henceforth opening a window of hope for the colonized to safeguard their culture, history, and story.

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