"The Question of Palestine": Power and Resistance in Fadia Faqir's *Nisanit*

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This study examines aspects of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict as depicted in Fadia Faqir's *Nisanit*. It explores both the methods of subjugation employed by the Israeli occupier and the forms of resistance undertaken by the Palestinian occupied. Drawing upon political perspectives that classify this encounter as a neo-colonial paradigm, alongside postcolonial critical views, the textual analysis of Faqir's text reveals that the settler–native clash is an existential conflict constructed on imposing an exclusivist identity in Palestine. *Nisanit* exemplifies that the Israeli authorities use a range of domination methods to achieve their goals of settler colonialism, including discrimination, violence, arrests, imprisonment, social segregation, and cultural stereotyping. Meanwhile, the Palestinians respond to the Israeli domination by adopting various models of resistance such as guerrilla warfare and revolutionary actions organised by the local resistance movements.

Keywords: settler colonialism, occupation, subjugation, resistance

1 Introduction

Fadia Faqir's *Nisanit* (1987) is set in Palestine after the Six-Day War (1967), which marked the triumph of Israel that paved the way for attaining extraterritorial privileges with the tangible increase in the establishment of Jewish settlements, on the one hand. On the other hand, it brought about the defeat of the Arab coalition, which resulted in giving up huge portions of the land of Palestine and, by extension, in the coercive dispossession of their Arab indigenous inhabitants. By centring on this transformative time, the novel deals with a decisive era of the social and political upheavals that witnessed momentous turns in the contemporary history of Palestine. Thematically, the text addresses the acute tension as well as the intricate ramifications arising from, what I argue for in this study, a colonial encounter between a dominant power structure represented by the Israeli hegemony and an anticolonial nationalist struggle represented by the Palestinian resistance movements. The novel problematises the idea of legitimacy over the contested land by juxtaposing

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the different perspectives of the two parties, each driven by its unique causes and impulses. Given this colonial feature, a postcolonial approach can prove valid in understanding the structures of control and defiance depicted in the narrative.

Indeed, postcolonialism can serve as an insightful theoretical framework for understanding the settler–native conflict delineated in Faqir's text. Emerging as a response to both colonialism and imperialism, this critical approach identifies colonialism – including its various paradigms such as settler colonialism – as an unrelenting exercise of dominance. It thus provides essential conceptual and analytical tools for examining not only the mechanisms of subjugation employed by Israeli settlers, but also the resistance strategies adopted by Palestinian natives. Moreover, postcolonial theory conceptualises imperialism as an ideological construct that endorses geographical and territorial expansion, offering a lens through which the Zionist enterprise can be interpreted as fundamentally driven by the acquisition of land. In this context, Robert J. C. Young makes it clear, in a way that can illustrate how the Zionist project is oriented on geographical growth, that "empires were political formations that were developed over time from particular geographical areas or through nomadic occupation" (2015, 9–10). This postcolonial scholar elaborates that imperialism is an "overarching concept or ideology" that advocates domination over the territories of other peoples of a different race. "Colonisation is the practice of actual settlement or occupation" (53). Said makes a comparable argument by asserting that "imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory" (1994, 78). Said further posits that colonialism "is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (9). When contextualising the Israeli–Palestinian situation within the postcolonial perspectives, it becomes evident that it shares a set of features with classical European colonialism by means of constructing colonial-like settlements that engender geographical expansion, even though the Zionist scheme diverges from classical colonialism insofar as it does not include the occupation of distant territories. A distinguishing characteristic lies in its foundation upon a religious doctrine, while a fundamental similarity is its reliance on racial divides.

Arguably, the Zionist project shares essential characteristics with classical settler colonialism in the sense that it features settler migration from the colonial West to foreign territories. This movement involves the permanent habitation of settlers – a conditional element and a tradition of settler colonialism, as articulated by Bill Ashcroft et al., who demonstrate that colonial settlers are those "Europeans who moved from their countries of origin to European colonies with the intention of remaining" (2013, 193). While settler movements in classical settler colonialism are most likely encouraged by particular causes and impulses, depending on cultural,

religious, social, political, and economic aspects, the Zionist movement is similarly influenced by these factors. According to Young, "colonies, settlements, or trading posts abroad were established for a number of reasons: freedom of religion, need for land for surplus population, or desire to accumulate wealth through trade or the establishment of plantations" (2015, 52). Further, Young holds that a "large number of millions who left Europe to colonise other parts of the world did so for the same reason most people migrate today: economic need. They were themselves often victims – of persecution or poverty" (33). In the case of the Israelis' settlement, their migratory movement has been basically undertaken for religious emancipation, since they have, as a matter of fact, endured an extended history of religion-based persecution within Christian societies (the most noteworthy experience to mention is their brutal victimisation at the hands of the Nazi tyranny). Such accumulated experiences of violence consequently made the Zionist leaders in Europe feel the urgent need to have a secure place where they could unite those disfranchised minority Jews and save them from anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic discrimination. This Zionist position, regarded as the foundational impetus for the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state, is observed by Shahak, demonstrating that the only solution that the Zionist leaders in Europe found to avoid the continuing anti-Jewish mistreatments is to "remove all the Jews bodily and concentrate them on Palestine or Uganda" (1994, 70). However, the question arises: to what extent do these rationales legitimise settling in an already populated location and causing the suffering of its indigenous inhabitants by subjugating them and forcing them to an institutionalised marginal position? This dilemma – of contested legitimacy and the suffering of indigenous inhabitants – lies at the core of many narratives portraying the Israeli-Palestinian strife, as exemplified in Faqir's *Nisanit*.

In the realm of the fictional representation of the colonial confrontation between the Israelis and the Palestinians (a contentious subject that has not only permeated modern Arabic and Hebrew literatures, but also diffuses into worldwide cultural, social, and political studies exploring the contemporary Middle East), Faqir's *Nisanit* is a significant case in point. Through the interweaving of both subjective and objective accounts, the novel provides an inclusive perspective on the conflict, while it also incorporates numerous allusions to the enduring Israeli–Palestinian clashes, unfolding across a variety of historical events embodied within Faqir's narrative. These conflicts engender varying degrees of suffering among ordinary individuals, with a particular focus on the most marginalised group – the Arab women. This is emphasised by the Jordanian–British Faqir, stating that the three main characters of her literary text are all "victims of history, geography and politics" (Moore 2011, 4), but it is also Eman, her Arab female protagonist, who is exposed to the highest degree of victimisation. Moreover, the text uncovers pivotal aspects of the

settler–indigenous confrontation, exemplifying not only colonialist but also cultural, political, and military strategies of domination employed by Israeli forces to assert prevalence on contested territories and maintain public security. Simultaneously, the novel portrays resistance methods undertaken by Palestinian fighters in reaction to their subjugation, driven by a quest for national freedom. This overlapping exploration within Faqir's fictional world provides a subtle understanding of the complex dynamics inherent in the Israeli–Palestinian clash.

The novel is narrated through the perspectives of three characters: it includes Eman's first-person narrative, as well as third-person narratives showcasing the viewpoints of Shadeed, a Palestinian Fedayee combatant and guerrilla fighter imprisoned in an Israeli jail, and David, an Israeli interrogator and a Holocaust survivor of Polish origins, respectively. Thus, the text presents the counter-relationship between the Israelis as the occupier and the Palestinians as the occupied in a distinctive mode that closely exhibits their conflicting sense of rootedness in and entitlement to the land. It also discloses how each side perceives the other, functioning as catalysts for their persistent actions of domination and resistance. The Israeli perspective, shaped by a master discourse, degrades Arab Palestinians, stereotypes their cultural traditions, and views their existence as a barrier to the realisation of the Zionist vision of occupying the contested lands. Conversely, Arab Palestinians take on a rejectionist stance rooted in decolonising aspirations, deeming the arrival of Israelis as a colonial aggression and a foreign settlement that encroaches upon their enduring desire for national liberation and self-autonomy. Faqir represents the beliefs underpinning these divergent perspectives. With those and its complex characterisations, Faqir's literary work can be seen as a compelling depiction of the layered complexities encompassing cultural and national identity, historical narratives, and territorial acquisition central to the Israeli–Palestinian encounter.

The discord surrounding contemporary Palestine, which renders it, as Edward Said puts it, "a much debated, even contested, notion" (1979a, 4), found its origins in the imperialist epoch when the great colonial power structures, Britain and France, not only dominated the Near East, but also determined its destinies to great degrees. Said explicates this historical context by claiming that "despite their differences, the British and the French saw the Orient as a geographical – and cultural, political, demographical, sociological, and historical – entity over whose destiny they believed themselves to have traditional entitlement" (1979b, 221). As regards Palestine, after the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled the Arab Levantine regions for several centuries, Palestine subsequently became subject to the British colonial sphere of influence from the early 1920s until the late 1940s, which brought about a substantial change to its geopolitical configuration and influenced the social conditions of its Arab natives.

Faqir makes the following remark on this crucial turn in an interview with Lindsey Moore: "the demise of the Ottoman Empire was a tragedy," but it also "marked the beginning of the suffering of Palestinians" (Moore 2011, 2), since it was followed by another transformative activity of colonialism. Namely, it is the British Mandate which remained in place until the British authority gradually handed over parts of Palestine to the Zionist Party in fulfilment of the Balfour Declaration, regardless of the fact that it did not, at the same time, disregard the right of Arab Palestinians to constitute a territory of their own on the West Bank of the Jordan River. The following excerpt from the Declaration aligns with these facts:

> [h]is Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. (qtd. in Brenner 2018, 89)

The Balfour Declaration, a statement issued in the form of a political letter on 2 November 1917 by the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, and addressed to the Zionist leader of the British Jewish Community, Lord Rothschild, pledged the full support of the British government to reconstituting the land of Palestine as a national homeland for the Jewish people. Though the actual foundation of the state of Israel transpired only in 1948, the steady arrival of Jewish colonists started in the 1880s as an initial serious move towards achieving the Zionist vision of establishing a Jewish state, which continued and accelerated with the facilitation of the British authority during the Mandate time. In her studies on colonialism in the post-independent Arab world in general and Palestine in particular, Moore points out that "the Israeli–Palestinian context remains emphatically colonial," but it is ultimately the Balfour Declaration that created a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which was British-mandated, "with half of Palestine split off to become Transjordan (later Jordan). The remaining half of Palestine also came under the control of Britain and a sharp increase in Jewish immigration was permitted" (2008, 2). Similarly, Hisham Sharabi notes that "[t]he Jewish Zionists, late comers to the colonial arena, used indirect methods at first (e.g., purchase of land), but later on, when Israel was established, resorted to the standard colonial tactics of force and forced dispossession" (1970, 62). Despite these observations, the classification of the Israeli–Palestinian relationship, whether as colonial or otherwise, remains subject to a high degree of controversy.

The inhabitation of a populated land by immigrant settlers, apart from their identity, draws parallels with classical colonial practices in spite of distinctions such as the absence of a metropolitan centre for the colonial project. Limited to specific

paradigms of colonialism, supervising and backing the immigration and settlement of a group of people by a colonial power – the British mandatory government as the colonial power and Jews as the immigrant settlers in the Palestinian colony – echoes patterns in many instances of historical settler colonialism. The gradual territorial expansion by Jewish settlers and the successive dislocation of the indigenous Palestinian people complies with the expansionist aspects of colonial principles. This expansion is made possible through Israel's implementation of a powerful political system, including a military control, which also corresponds to administrative frameworks observed in historical colonial scenarios.

Besides, the enforcement of the cultural identity of the dominant group (the immigrant Jews), in which they seek to impose their cultural values on the indigenous population, is perceived as a basic facet of colonialism. In line with these premises, Said argues that "both the British imperialist and the Zionist vision are united in playing down and even cancelling out the Arabs in Palestine as somehow secondary and negligible" (1979a, 18). He implies that, based on their own racial and religious standards, the British and the Zionists create a discriminatory dividing line between a superior group that is relocated to occupy the centre and an inferior group that is, in turn, designated to occupy the periphery. This phenomenon of structured exclusion is not, however, circumscribed to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as it manifests itself in diverse historical and colonial contexts in which, as Frantz Fanon clarifies, "[t]he governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants" (1963, 40). This feature is conspicuous in the case of Palestine, where non-Arab Jews, arriving from different parts of the world as immigrant settlers, attain social, cultural, political, and economic advantages with the support of the imperialist hegemony of the British mandatory government at the expense of their Arab counterparts.

Challenging the prejudiced discourse implied in Balfour's proclamation and criticising how it dominantly contributes to reformulating the internal hierarchies of a colonised setting in a way that serves colonial interests, Said also argues that "Balfour's statements in the declaration take for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit" (1979a, 16). Aligning itself with the Zionist cause, as the declaration implies, the British hegemonic power deems it expedient to designate the Zionists as its beneficiary, positioning them as a replacement for the British authority in governing its mandated colony. In this way, the establishment of Israel as the Zionist enterprise on the Palestinian terrain is – partly if not wholly – a (re)production of Western colonisation in which a colonial space is, in Said's words, "transformed sufficiently so as no longer to appear foreign to the imperial eye" (1994, 226), since from the colonialist viewpoint of the white man "no Oriental was ever allowed to be independent and rule himself. The premise

there was that since the Orientals were ignorant of self-government, they had better be kept that way for their own good" (Said 1979b, 228). Moreover, this colonial endeavour is a fulfilment of Europe's will to maintain control over other territories through representative candidates of its superior dominant power. Joseph Massad sheds light on this perspective by arguing that "French and British colonial officials were explicitly advancing the idea of European Jewish colonisation of Palestine as part of the construction of a permanent imperial order in the region" (2001, 14–15). More precisely, it is a British intervention and a colonial making that takes the form of settler colonialism in which diasporic Jews immigrated to and then settled in a geographical area in the Middle East. As obvious from the arguments above, this particular migratory activity undertaken for permanent habitation is informed by an imperialist ideology that fundamentally targets the unity of Jewish communities as well as geographical expansion.

The imperialist ideological mission of Zionism, akin to a reproduced version of classical imperialism, is thoroughly discussed by the Israeli political critic and activist Israel Shahak in his seminal book *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (1994). Grounding his argument in religious underpinnings, Shahak asserts that Israel is a Jewish state with neo-imperial principles that aim at controlling far-reaching boundaries through conquering all the lands that historically belonged to the Jews from their perspective. According to this religious perspective, the historical (Biblical) borders of the land of Israel include Sinai, a part of northern Egypt, Jordan, a large chunk of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, a portion of Iraq south of the Euphrates, Cyprus, and a huge part of Turkey (1994, 9). This expansionist vision is symbolically represented in the Israeli flag, referenced in Faqir's narrative when Eman accompanies her friend Sammah to Nablus, which is located in occupied Palestine. Upon seeing the Israeli flag displayed on a building, Sammah whispers, "[t]he blue strips are the Nile and the Euphrates. They want their Biblical kingdom back" (1987, 204). The occupation of the land of Canaan (Palestine) is, however, made a primacy and a starting endeavour towards accomplishing the broad Zionist imperial interests of "imposing a hegemony on other Middle Eastern states" (Shahak 1994, 11). It is in this vein that Israel's occupation of Palestine complies with a paradigm of outright colonialism – a manifestation of what Said terms as a "new foreign colonialism" involving "a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient" (1979a, 8; 69), and Zionism is the imperialist idea or ideology that drives this colonial enterprise for expansive goals.

Overall, one can conclude in accordance with the above-outlined critical views that Zionism coincides with conventional imperial schemes in relying on colonialist principles to accomplish its purposes of Jewish settlement and geographical enlargement. These schemes, in general, entail a colonial encounter in which

colonists claim certain reasons for their colonial activities. However, they do, at the same time, perform a set of actions of domination as colonialist strategies against colonised peoples (discriminating, segregating, expelling, dehumanising, subjugating, and abusing) in the interest of appropriating them and imposing absolute prevalence over the colonised location. This is notably the very feature of the Israeli–Palestinian framework: Jews, who had long lived as an ethnic minority in diaspora, have made their trajectories to Palestine in the name of relocating themselves away from anti-Jewish violation within their countries of residence, but they oppress the Arab Muslim Palestinians as the racial and religious other, denying them their right to national autonomy and self-determination.

In light of the above, this study aims at exploring the contemporary encounter between the Israelis and the Arab Palestinians in Faqir's narrative *Nisanit*, which involves specific colonial, political, cultural, and military strategies of subjugation and methods of native resistance. Drawing upon a range of political views that classify this encounter as a neo-colonial situation of migratory settlement, along with a set of postcolonial critical notions taken from Said, Fanon and Young, among others, the present paper also investigates political, cultural, social, religious, racial, and gendered aspects that essentially fuel this encounter, rendering it an existential conflict for confirming rootedness, fulfilling destinies, and asserting one's identity over the other in Faqir's novel. Thus, the study aims to contribute not only to a deeper understanding of a major novel by Faqir, but also to humanities research focused on the Israeli–Palestinian situation, as it provides multifaceted contexts for analysing the narrative with a stance of academic objectivity which takes into consideration the different standpoints of the two parties in conflict: the Palestinians and the Israelis.

2 Negotiating Occupier Power and Native Resistance

Narrated from various points of view, Faqir's *Nisanit* is a fictional depiction focusing on the victimisation of characters who, despite their distinct identities, endure multiple experiences of loss and suffering.

2.1 Through Eman's Eyes: The Cost of Occupation and Displacement

In a sense, the text narrates the Arab woman protagonist Eman's stages of life from girlhood to womanhood, unveiling various models of social and political oppression in the context of the Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The story opens with Eman

witnessing the traumatic arrest of her father, Mohammad Saqi, by Israeli soldiers for engaging in nationalist resistance and political activism. Reflecting Eman's experience of hardships and suffering, this incident exhibits an arranged raid on her family house, portraying the violations exercised by the occupying soldiers against her beloved ones.

Her frequent recollection of the soldier setting eyes on her cherished doll, Lulu, and harming it in this scene, mirrors the vulnerability of the disenfranchised girl Eman amidst the unrest of conflict. She describes this incident as follows: "I was looking at Lulu, the first and last doll I ever had, and praying that they wouldn't see it. One officer caught my eyes and very slowly inserted the point edge of his rifle-blade inside its belly. Struck with pain, I started weeping silently" (1987, 10). The mention of Lulu in this scene bears an emotional echo extending in its significance beyond a mere object; it represents Eman's innocence and the inner connection she establishes with her modest possessions in childhood. The idea that Lulu is the only doll Eman ever had can justify the intimate attachment she feels towards her own belongings, making its destruction painful for Eman. The soldier's act of piercing Lulu's body with a weapon evokes a striking rape metaphor. This violent penetration serves as an implicit representation of sexualised aggression, one that resonates with postcolonial readings of sexual violence as a metaphor for colonial control. As Justine Leach argues, "[b]y allegorically substituting colonial violence with sexual violence, postcolonial discourse can efficiently figure concepts of violent penetration, possession, and loss of autonomy" (2018, 95). In this context, the soldier's action not only asserts dominance over Eman's childhood innocence but also enacts a mode of gendered and colonial abuse, sustaining the oppressive power structures between the occupier and the occupied.

Beyond the traumatic arrest of her father in this raid, the armed soldiers violate Eman's sense of self and normal childhood. Here, Eman's anguished reaction of crying silently manifests both the intrinsic value that the doll signifies for her and the emotional and psychological abuse of her subjectivity. In the broad sense, this scene of violation can be read as emblematic of the collective violence prevalent in the Palestinian girl's environment. It reveals the dehumanising impacts of the oppressive force in which ordinary people and their beloved objects are not spared from inhumane brutality. At the end of the arrest scene, Eman's question, "[t]hey killed Lulu. Didn't they?" (1987, 11), encapsulates the profound suffering experienced not only by Eman but also by Palestinian children amidst the relentless practices of the occupier domination which underscore the devastating consequences of oppressive conditions on their subjectivity and self-perception.

As a result of this raid, Eman suffers from the loss of her father, Saqi, who is represented as a leading figure in the National Freedom Party. In the novel, Saqi does

not only rebel against the tyranny of the Israeli occupation but also protests against the unfair policies of the Palestinian government, which administers the Occupied Territories in the West Bank. In the area, most of the Arab Palestinian families are constantly dislocated and compelled to live in isolation, with a limited self-control and a subservient role that aligns with Israel's strategic goals of conserving a physical control of internal and external frontiers, thereby keeping its Jewish community homogenous and secured from any prospective clash with enraged Arabs. It is in this respect that Faqir's narrative is critical of the interlocking system of marginalisation inflicted upon Arab Palestinian citizens by both Israeli hegemony and the local Palestinian government.

The collusion between these entities contributes to the segregation of Palestinian people, confining them within a delimited space, characterised by stringent circumstances that pervade their daily lives. At a certain point, the Israeli interrogator David reminds the Palestinian prisoner Shadeed: "Look, Shadeed, even the head of your Movement met our officials last month in Japan. Can't you see? Can't you see who pays and who gets the profit? Be sensible, my boy" (1987, 60). These words signal a politics of contact among the leaders of the two parties, suggesting that the Palestinian local government is in some way controlled by the Israeli authority for attaining specific benefits. In other words, the quotation unravels a channel of cooperation and a level of manipulation resulting from the economic dependency on the part of the Palestinians. Hence, the ordinary Palestinian people find themselves situated as victims within overlapping structures of subjugation, wherein their local leaders fail to adequately reclaim their rights, instead serving the occupier's purposes of exerting absolute control over the whole region – and for gains for themselves.

The harsh circumstances emerging from this system of conspiracy and complicity are, however, elucidated by Eman through making a distinction between the prosperous village of Nahar, located within the territories incorporated into the State of Israel in 1948, and her impoverished village in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank. Eman's observation of dirty streets, filthy people, and "half-naked children […] playing with their excrement" (1987, 58) reflects not only the deteriorating economic conditions and lack of proper sanitation in the Rahmah neighbourhood but also the symbolic representation of deprivation, loss of dignity, and dehumanisation. The presence of excrement signifies the entrapment of Palestinian residents in a state of poverty and neglect in which their basic needs and human dignity are disregarded by the occupying authorities. This contrast in living conditions highlights the structural inequalities within the whole region, exposing systemic issues such as environmental degradation, pollution, and lack of essential facilities that continue to plague Palestinian communities due to their marginalisation in the larger socio-political context.

The novel shows the reliance of the Palestinian people on aid with their ongoing demand for humanitarian assistance provided by international relief agencies. This dependence is foregrounded through Shadeed's introduction of himself to David, contending that he lives in "Tel Al-Asaker refugee camp" in Nablus. He "went to an UNRWA school" and "ate UNRWA food since [he] was born" (1987, 60). Pointing to these essential human needs being aided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency proves the worsening of the living circumstances faced by the Palestinians as a result of occupation and dislocation, which, in turn, makes them desperate opponents of the regime. This reliance also underlines their disempowerment, highlighting the failure of global governance in addressing the root causes of their suffering. Instead of enabling Palestinian self-sufficiency, global governance maintains power imbalances, thereby reinforcing Palestinian dependency. On another occasion, when recounting her experiences to her lover Shadeed, Eman spells out the inevitable consequences of the hardships endured by her family and also by the people of Rahmah. She tells him that "education is a luxury" (222) in their disadvantaged village; she also tells him how her baby sister Amal died because her family was economically unable to take the newborn sick baby to any of the distant hospitals, which shows the low level of health care within the Palestinian villages.

Suffering from these hard conditions, especially in the absence of her father, Eman makes the difficult decision to discontinue her education so that she can support her mother and three young brothers by working "as an apprentice to an Armenian tailor" (Faqir 1987, 88), a job arranged for Eman by her kind neighbour Um-Mussad. This prompts reflection on the oppression experienced by individuals in Palestinian villages and internal refugee camps due to their colonial status quo, compelling them to contend for the minimum requirements of their basic human needs. What is more, Eman's employment, being arranged and offered by women, can be interpreted as a mode of solidarity among subordinate women within the Palestinian community. Remarkably, this unity of women serves to oppose not only the gendered subordination inherent in the patriarchal sphere, but also the paradigms of discrimination imported by the occupation enterprise, which undermine the idea of 'living together' within a shared geographical space.

The solidarity, mutual empowerment, and self-empowerment of the inferior Palestinian women in the face of oppression manifest themselves in different events of the novel. Solidarity features in the relationship of Eman, her mother, her aunt Hanin, and her neighbour Um-Mussad in which they support one another within the patriarchal domestic sphere. This solidarity is also evident in facing the discrimination and injustice imposed on them by the occupier soldiers. For instance, when Eman, her mother, and other Palestinian women go to the Prime Ministry to ask for the release of their jailed men, they are violently restrained by Israeli armed

soldiers, even if they present a reasonable cause for their visit. Eman narrates this episode in the following manner:

> Um-Musaad tried to break through the soldiers' line. One of them struck her with his fist. She kicked him. 'You whore,' he shouted and punched her on the jaw. She hit back. Mummy gasped and together with other women attacked the soldiers. They pushed me and I fell down, but Mummy pulled me up. Another woman fell to the ground, winded. The crowd stepped on her, shouting at the soldiers, 'Prostitutes of the-government.' (1987, 34)

The women's individual and collective response in this duel exposes a spirit of women's resilience confronting the oppressive forces. In spite of the looming intimidation of violence, they steadfastly refuse to succumb and instead defy the soldiers, who represent the established structure of power, resorting to violence to keep up their leverage. The reaction of the women reveals women's solidarity and mutual support, displaying the durability derived from steadfastness, unity, and collective action. Moreover, this resistance by the women reflects a broad paradigm of defiance against the hegemonic order of the soldiers. It pertains to a fundamental pattern of the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, characterised by the dominance performed by a disciplined military apparatus, faced by native rejection and resistance among the Palestinian populace.

2.2 Caught in the System: David's Dilemma and Israel's Unjust Policies

The text suggests that the policies of the system, which the occupying authority implements as part of a dominating framework over the whole region, are formulated with the primary objective of ensuring the security and well-being of the Jewish community. This strategic orientation aims at alleviating the burden on expatriate Jews within the community, who grapple with the formidable desire of transcending a tragic historical backdrop characterised by harrowing experiences of victimisation in the Western context. This burden is evident in David's nightmare which, as the novel states, "started when he was four years old in Auschwitz" (1987, 80) but keeps revisiting him in the present. The nightmare depicts the trauma David has lived as a Holocaust survivor, leaving a deep and lasting impact on his psychological and mental state. The dream arouses a sense of horror, reflecting the anguish and helplessness David witnessed in his past, during the time he spent in Poland. Presented as a surreal, yet realistic image with "thousands of babies shot across the sky like a jet of gas, all on fire" (Faqir 1987, 80), this description seems to emulate horrifying events of the Holocaust in which innocent lives were cruelly extinguished in mass crematoriums and executions. The nightmare's recurrence since David's early life testifies to the inescapability of trauma; despite the passage of time, it refuses

to remain in the past, continually resurfacing in his dreams and psychological distress. Overall, because of the severity of those historical tribulations, the Israeli system, which exhibits a predilection for advancing the interests of Jewish settlers and safeguarding their comfort, necessitates a stringent approach towards other individuals, who do not identify as part of the Jewish community.

This can explain why Faqir represents David as a diasporic Jew and a traumatised Holocaust survivor, who emigrated from his country of citizenship, Poland, and settled down in Israel in quest for a distant and protected sanctuary with aspirations to a prosperous lifestyle. David serves Israel's project of the colonial settlement by engaging actively in the persecution of the Arab Palestinians, but he remains a relatively unprivileged and exploited Israeli citizen, which is depicted through his desire for a job promotion that keeps eluding him during long years of dedicated service in Israel's political body. The quotation, "[t]he dirty job for him and the clean interrogation for them" (Faqir 1987, 53), captures David's pivotal yet underrated position in the Israeli system.

Additionally, his extraordinary expertise in interrogation, which seems to qualify him for the promotion, highlights how he is overlooked by his leaders. As it is pointed out, "David was quite experienced. Because of that, he could see the limits. He hit artistically to cause the least harm and the most pain. Without him in that room they would never get a tiny piece of information. Later, they would blame him if the prisoner didn't confess. It collapsed on the head of the weakest." (Faqir 1987, 65) This passage discloses the acknowledged indispensability of David's role within the interrogation process in prison, his being instrumental to procuring intelligence for the Israeli authorities that satisfies their requisites. Nonetheless, he is subject to liability due to the risks associated with his assigned roles as well as the consequences of any potential minor failure. It implies that the charge of accountability is often thrown on those who are least able to stand it, which uncovers patterns of exploitation and injustice within the Israeli political hierarchy itself, too.

In the course of events, David leaves behind his ambition of having a job promotion within Israel's political system and seriously considers retirement from his duty upon his willing request, once he realises his wife's pregnancy. It is the fulfilment of a personal and familial desire described by David's wife Judith as "something we've waited for all our lives" (Faqir 1987, 200). Upon receiving this news, David resolves to resign, declaring to Judith, "I'm going to hand in my resignation today. We'll start a new life together. A fresh one" (201), signifying his dissatisfaction with his role in the prison system and his desire for a more meaningful future. The prospect of having a child can offer David the promise of happiness and fulfilment, providing him with the chance to rebuild his life based on familial love rather than on power and career ambition in which he probably loses interest.

At various moments, David grapples with conflicting attitudes with regard to his duties of interrogating and torturing Palestinian prisoners. Although he perceives these actions as serving his country's interests from a patriotic angle – "no matter what, he would protect his country at any cost" (1987, 127) – he shows empathy towards individuals like the tormented Shadeed. He recommends the guard to treat Shadeed well in the final scene in which he approves Eman's letter to be given to Shadeed in the cell. This behaviour is particularly significant following David's long-awaited promotion to a staff sergeant (239), highlighting his inclination to distance himself from being engaged with the process of suppressing the Palestinian prisoners, since getting the promotion does not mean that he becomes totally disconnected from such a morally complex activity. David also intervenes on Shadeed's behalf and notifies the guard that Shadeed needs urgent medical treatment, blaming him for not reporting Shadeed's collapse. However, he is still worried "[w]hat would they say about him giving a hand to an Arab? Not just any Arab, but a terrorist too." (126) This contradiction exposes David's inner conflict, caused by his worrying about societal judgement for offering help to an Arab, specifically one labelled as an opponent and a terrorist. Ultimately, David yearns for a peaceful family life, favouring domestic harmony over the fraught involvement of the prisoners' investigation.

Indeed, the transformation of David's individual interests and the inner conflict taking hold of his psyche can clarify how he is exploited. They can also exemplify how Israel's policies lack authentic indices of democracy; these policies involve hierarchal inequalities in which Israeli leaders – though enforcing a political system that endorses the superiority of the Jewish community on the whole – exploit particular segments of ordinary Jews, taking advantage of historical antisemitism and anti-Jewishness. In other words, these leaders make these segments superior to the Arabs, but they manipulate Jewish suffering by employing those ambitious Jews persecuted in the past to project abusive dispossession and structural racism on Palestinian occupied people in exchange for a partial supremacy. David conveys a perspective of the formerly victimised Jews like him towards their existence in Palestine as Israeli relocated citizens by saying that "whatever happened they would never leave it. The Jews had suffered enough. The amount of happiness in this world was limited, fixed. To be happy, you had to wrench some away from another person" (1987, 237–38). From a postcolonial view, this sort of aggression can be interpreted in Young's terms: "indigenous colonised people always seem prone to become the victims of the victims" (2015, 33) in a settler–indigenous contact. This is a definitive feature of the relationship between David and Shadeed in which a victimised Jew of the Holocaust victimises another group of people in a similar manner to preserve his newly acquired supremacy over the other colonised group.

In addition to critiquing the unjust and exploitative policies within the Israeli system through dealing with specific groups of the Jewish migrant population, the novel also brings under scrutiny the lack of democratic principles towards the treatment of Arab Palestinians. In Saqi's, Eman's father's case, the Israeli prosecutor invokes the notion of democracy while calling for a heavy-handed action by declaring, "[a]lthough we are a democratic state, your honour, high treason must be crushed with an iron fist" (Faqir 1987, 110). This juxtaposition highlights an obvious contradiction between the purported democracy of the state and its actual practices, as Saqi's political activism, involving the possession of political leaflets at his house, does not rise to the level of high treason. However, the prosecutor's accusation of high treason against Saqi seems intended to justify a harsh punishment under the guise of shielding his state.

Within this context, Faqir also employs subtitling sections of the novel to challenge Israel's claims of democratic ideals in general. The multi-used subtitle "The Democratic State of Ishmael," the fictive equality of the Occupied Territories of the West Bank, carries a contrast between the democratic principles ostensibly upheld by the state of Israel and their practical application, particularly concerning non-Jewish Arabs. By invoking the name of the prophet Ishmael, revered as the ancestor of Arab peoples in both Jewish and Islamic religious traditions, the author points to the exclusionary facet of Israel's policies towards this demographic group. From a religious viewpoint, Shahak interprets the lack of democracy in the policies of Israel towards non-Jews by asserting that the state of Israel is not a democracy due to the application of a Jewish ideology directed against all non-Jews, who have to be officially excluded from inhabiting Jewish spaces (Shahak 1994, 3). Undermining the democratic principles that the state of Israel claims to elevate, Shahak's observation makes it clear that the absence of just treatment towards non-Jewish others stems from Israel's policies, derived from particular rigorous codes of the Jewish religion.

It is in this sense that structural racism and totalitarian practices permeating the Israeli policies are charged with prejudiced binarities between the settlers and the natives (Arab/settler, Muslim/Jew, Israeli/Palestinian, superior/inferior, and master/servant). Setting them in two opposing fronts on the basis of these conflicting binarities, these policies also craft a heated encounter in which each group fights bluntly to outwit the other, as they both follow a principle of exclusivity. David's wish that "all the Palestinians could disappear from Israel at a single stroke of magic, without his forcing them towards their graves" (1987, 126) indicates his personal desire not to be implicated in this process. In the broad sense, this, however, uncovers the not even hidden meaning of the Israeli alternatives towards Arab Palestinians: either evicting or killing them. This Israeli vision is also referenced through Sammah's remark to Eman, "they don't want us to stay here, so they try

to make life as hard as possible for Palestinians" (226–27), which signifies the Palestinian awareness of one of the motives behind their confrontation with the Israelis. In turn, the Palestinian resistance's pursuit of complete freedom reflects their desire to rid themselves of settlers and achieve an exclusivist existence in Palestine. Echoing Fanon's assertion on the dynamics of colonialism that "the zone where natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers" because "they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity" (1963, 38–39), this encounter, driven by exclusivist aspirations, manifests as a dichotomous conflict of affirmation and denial, with the Israeli occupier and the Palestinian occupied fiercely preserving asymmetrical identities and vying for solitary control over the contested geography. Making Palestine the site of this complex contest, the Israelis and the Palestinians are engaged in a complicated battle constructed on proving the real existence of their own history, the genuine sense of their belonging, and, by extension, the deserved ownership of the contested land.

In the novel, the recurring motif of the title *Nisanit* is used as symbolical of the reciprocal sense of rootedness in the lands of Palestine. The title itself – taken from the name of an Israeli settlement established as a military outpost in 1980 in the Gaza strip – carries the meaning of a desert flower that cannot be easily eradicated. It appears multiple times throughout the text, notably in the name of the daughter of the Israeli family visited by David and his wife in Tel Aviv, during Shadeed and Eman's walk in Nablus, and within David's dream garden. It also appears when David envisions transforming the barren yard of the prison into a fertile area. In this episode, it is stated that "[t]hey would try Nisanit. It would survive the heat since it was a desert flower, and practical too, because it took so deep a hole in the ground that it couldn't be rooted out." (1987, 239) Evoking the tenacity of this desert flower, Faqir's multi-use of the title acquires an emblematic weight, highlighting that both parties in the conflict have deep historical roots in the land, albeit from opposed perspectives.

This metaphorical depiction alludes to the ingrained connection of both Israelis and Palestinians to the land, thereby complicating the ongoing battle between them. Beyond the historical context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict with their discrepant experiences and histories, their different agendas, and their rooted narratives, this encounter between settlers and indigenous populations, taking the form of settler occupation, revolves around a clash over a geographical area in its essence. This pivotal dynamic is exemplified in an exchange between David and his Jewish friend Yahuda during David's vacation visit to Tel Aviv, where he meets with an old Arab Palestinian man working on Yahuda's plantation. Yahuda tells David that "Hajj is the previous owner of this place. He couldn't prove his ownership, so I paid him some compensation and offered him a job. He said that he'd spent most of his life

digging this soil so he might as well go on doing it." (1987, 180–81) This dialogue accentuates simmering tensions encapsulating land ownership; it mirrors an intricate history of discord over the land. Whereas Yahuda compensates Hajj for taking over the ownership of the plantation, the old man acquiesces to carry on working on it, albeit no longer being its rightful owner.

This dispute underscores a particular way in which Israelis consolidate their occupation objectives by asserting ownership and marginalising Palestinians, if not displacing them entirely, while Palestinians insist on their connection to the land, even when deprived of ownership. The elderly man's decision elucidates Palestinians' rooted affinity to the land as an essential aspect of their identity, imperilled by the growing Jewish settlement construction and the dislocation of Palestinian families. Their attachment to the soil becomes a means of resistance against occupation, of cultural resilience, and the assertion of their right to retrieve usurped lands. Not surprisingly, those conflicts for geography are a central concern within postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Said discusses the perspective of the coloniser by claiming that colonising, populating and depopulating others' territories occur on, about, or because of the land (1994, 78). This view can be applied to understand how Faqir portrays Israel's project in which migrant Jews construct settlements and simultaneously displace Arab populations in relation to the land. In the context of decolonisation, Fanon, in turn, argues that "[f]or a colonised people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (1963, 44). Linking the colonised land to bread – an essential human need – can assure key reasons behind native struggles and revolutions in general, but in Faqir's text in particular, these reasons are spelt out through Shadeed's perspective: in his view, the Palestinian fighters combat their enemy "[f]or bread, for peace, for real freedom" (92). In these words, Shadeed points to the intrinsic connection between the freedom of the land, the peaceful life of its indigenous inhabitants, and the fundamental human need for survival, which jointly propel resistance against the Israeli occupier.

The novel further represents policies of the Israeli system that exclude Arab Palestinians through exemplifying the restrictive practices of the occupying power, which leave the Palestinians in social and political constraints. Eman's endeavour to attend university in Nablus necessitates taking an uneasy permission from the Israeli authorities. As she laments, "it takes time to get a pass from here. The permission from the occupation authorities arrived last week" (1987, 197). Embarking on her journey to Nablus, Eman encounters a series of checkpoints, undergoing a criminal-like interrogation and an attentive check by Israeli soldiers. Through the obligatory procedures of interrogation, she also experiences a gender-constructed violation when an Israeli policewoman orders her to take off her clothes for inspection:

"Come on. Your underwear" (204). This reveals a form of gender abuse infringing upon Eman's feminine privacy and agency, as her naked body is submitted to invasive surveillance. Eman's description of her feelings towards the situation – "I stood naked and shivering between them. It was the first time I had taken off my clothes in front of a stranger" (204) – reflects her sense of humiliation and vulnerability. Overall, this incident discloses ways of Arab women's oppression from a gendered aspect, but it also unveils the collective marginality of the Palestinian people in the sense that they are excluded, and their freedom of movement is restricted due to the existence of discriminatory separating borders that split them from their Israeli counterpart. Responding to the influence of Israel's policies on the actual conditions of the Palestinians and the Israelis in the aftermath of the Six-Day War (the timeframe of Faqir's narrative), Said points out that Israel's high-handed strength translates into reality in that its military body manages to set up checkpoints and barriers at will, at which Palestinians have to go through endless interrogation and search. In contrast, Israeli settlers wander about with unrestricted freedom (1979a, 123). This glaring disparity can expose mechanisms of power and discriminatory dimensions shaping the lives of Palestinians and Israelis as represented in Faqir's text. From a postcolonial standpoint, this is consistent with Young's explanation of the racial division created between natives and settlers in a variety of colonial situations which, as he describes, requires "some special physical arrangement, a different and distinctive spatial order to maintain the distance between them" (2015, 43). Referring to a group of colonial cases in which such a prejudiced distinction between the coloniser and the colonised is established by the colonial superior power, Young mentions the Palestinian colony: "such juxtaposition of two divided zones is most visible in the Occupied Territories in the West Bank in Palestine, where the Jewish settlements are built onto the landscape with high concrete walls dividing them from overcrowded towns and villages of the Palestinians, accessed by special sealed-off highways to which local Palestinians have no access" (35). Young's account illuminates how colonial hegemonies make use of spatial practices to construct prevalence, marginalise indigenous groups, and keep up systems of oppression, which can correspond to Faqir's presentation of the spatial procedures created by Israeli settlers in an attempt to preserve dominance over Palestinian natives.

2.3 Uneven Grounds: Power Disparities in the Conflict

The narrative delineates the loss suffered by Eman over the fall of her lover Shadeed at the hands of the Israeli forces as well. The Palestinian rebel fighter Shadeed promises to propose to Eman upon the successful execution of a revolutionary operation targeting a guarded settlers' committee in Hebron. This operation underlines

strategic objectives of national resistance organisations and guerrilla warfare, as evidenced in the discussion held amongst Shadeed and his fellow Palestinian fighters while on their way to the operation's location. In their discussion, the fighters distinguish between prospective encounters with Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and targeting members of the Settlers' Committee in Hebron, "killing soldiers at checkpoints was not his idea of guerrilla fighting. It would be less significant than killing members of the Settlers' Committee. The first would be 'an operation,' while the second would be, as Che put it, a means to achieve an end. Settlements were the hottest danger" (1987, 16). This highlights the resistance movements' prioritisation of targets depending on the perceived impact or effectiveness in advancing their causes. Confirming the centrality of Jewish settlements as the target of the attack mirrors the wide geopolitical backdrop of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in which the dispersal of Jewish settlements is regarded as a symbol of occupation as well as a primary obstacle to the realisation of Palestinian self-determination and statehood.

Days following this operation, Shadeed is captured and placed in one of the Israeli prisons, where he gets brutally tortured at the hands of David and other Israeli officers, until he succumbs to a nervous breakdown. Specifically, Shadeed is taken to Beer Al-Sab'a prison: "the police station of the British, the prison of the Zionists and the administrative centre of the Ottomans" (Faqir 1987, 44–45), where Arab Palestinians used to be subjected, which can be interpreted as a critique of dominant institutions run respectively by the latest colonisers of Palestine. Faqir's critique of contemporary colonisers of Palestine also extends to the biased intervention of the British mandatory government, which facilitated the transition of its colonial legacies (governmental institutions) to Israeli settlers, enabling their dominance over Palestinian lands and people. Among these institutions, the prison stands out as a private space, where the conflicting parties, the Israeli as the jailor and the Palestinian as the jailed, meet and interact with each other. The prison functions as one of the penal policies that the Israeli power uses to isolate, punish, and dominate Palestinian rejectionist individuals. Sharabi highlights that the systematic arrests of guerrillas following the Six-Day War involve "imprisonment for long duration, interrogation and torture. It constitutes a central mechanism of pacification and repression" (1970, 13). He further explains that "systematic arrest, then, aims not only at apprehending the guilty, but also at crushing the will to resist" (1970, 14). In the novel, Shadeed, in particular, undergoes various forms of torture for resisting the occupier, with the intensity escalating, as he continues to defy the jailer's orders throughout the investigation.

Featuring a substantial disparity, the power dynamics within the prison system are further emphasised through the variety of subjugation methods available to the Israeli jailor over the Palestinians inside the tightly confined cells. Attempting to

compel Shadeed to surrender to his decree, the Israeli officer, Shin Beit, intimidates Shadeed, "I have everything at my disposal, dogs, electricity, chemicals, as well as psychologists […]. I have many alternatives: to kill you, to make you crazy or to expel you" (1987, 114). This intimidation illustrates the extent to which the Israeli authorities are prepared to go to maintain control and dominance over Palestinian prisoners, ensuring the powerful options at the Israeli hand and the powerlessness of the Palestinian inmates. Michel Foucault's notions of how power operates within institutions like prisons through a variety of strategies, including intimidation and the manipulation of physical and psychological punishments, can provide a theoretical lens through which to understand this fictional scenario. According to Foucault, power is not only exercised through outright coercion but also through subtle mechanisms of surveillance, normalisation, and the control of the body (1980, 11–12). In the case of the Israeli prison system, the utilisation of intimidation tactics and the projection of authority by the Israeli officers resonates with Foucault's conception of power as being exerted through a range of punishment and disciplinary mechanisms. While the use of such alternatives in dealing with prisoners during interrogation processes is not unique to any specific culture, Shahak asserts that flogging, imprisoning, expelling, and, in threatening circumstances, killing the religious other are main features of the Jewish system to achieve the principle of social closeness and cohesion in Palestine (1994, 14). As represented in Faqir's text, the institute of incarceration can be seen as a mode of oppression and a form of exclusion among a constellation of eliminatory practices, policies, and regimes imposed by the Israeli governance on the indigenous people to maintain a hierarchy of power.

Apart from the hierarchy of power embodied both inside and outside the incarceration system, putting the occupier and the occupied in proximity illuminates certain politics of cultural stereotyping in Israeli–Palestinian perceptions. David refers to Shadeed in prison as "[s]tupid, lazy Arabs. Bare feet. Bare minds. They don't grasp whatever you tell them. How many things did the Jews have to teach these grinning Arabs" (1987, 51). This statement displays how David tries to shape his relationship with Shadeed within a master–slave framework, not only by abusing him but also by demeaning his cultural identity as uncivilised, primitive, and backward. Likewise, Yahuda perceives the old Arab man as someone who "resents the change" (181), stressing his own efforts of modernising the plantation in an attempt to justify his usurpation of this property. He further generalises this perception to all Arabs by saying "they're all lazy and unimaginative" (181). This narrative constructs a framework of Jewish superiority in modernisation and progress, viewing Arab Palestinians as resistant to development from Yahuda's point of view. Additionally, this perspective serves to rationalise and perpetuate entrenched inequalities between

Israelis and Palestinians, sustaining the unequal positions they must occupy in society. The novel exemplifies this inequality through referring to the Palestinian people living or working in "1948 Palestine": they work "for the Jews," and not "with the Jews" (210), which also fits into a superior–inferior relationship grounded in the cultural perception espoused by the Jewish community.

In return, labelling the Israeli settlers as "aggressors, occupiers, colonialists, killers" (Faqir 1987, 21) from the Palestinian perspective challenges the legitimacy of Jewish settlement in the region. It denies or disputes the historical narrative put forth by Jewish settlers regarding the redemption, reclaiming, and governance of land in Palestine. Considering them "aggressors" and "killers" implies a perception of Israeli settlers as operators of conflict and violence, while deeming them as "occupiers" and "colonialists" reflects viewing them as a foreign domination. Overall, the ways the Israelis and Palestinians view each other encompass the deeply entrenched and contrasting narratives that form perceptions on both sides of the conflict, contributing to unceasing tensions and hostilities among them. Within the context of the novel's representation of the cultural dimensions of the conflict, the Israeli people distort the image of the Arab Muslim Palestinians by classifying their national resistance organisations as extremists, whose existence and actions are a growing threat to the domestic and public security. A report announcing the success of an Israeli intelligence operation states that it "was carried out successfully. Two terrorists were killed, and the third [Shadeed] gave himself up" (Faqir 1987, 41). In the same way, the soldier, who arrests Shadeed, also says while pointing his rifle to his face that "he's just an Arab, a terrorist" (44), which reveals an overgeneralised perception taken on by the Israelis to cover and legitimise their exercise of power, violence, and subjection against the revolutionary Arab Palestinians. Though actions like Shadeed's attack on civilians (the members of the Settler Committee in Hebron) are condemned as terrorism, the conflation of "Arab" with "terrorist" reflects patterns of generalisation in Israeli perceptions of Arabs.

In the text, many incidents imply that the Israeli subjugation is based on a thorough knowledge of Arab Palestinians, their history, culture, traditions, religion, race, character, language, society, and possibilities, which they utilise as a dominating apparatus to confront Palestinians and weaken their resistance. One incident exemplifies this when an Israeli soldier, familiar with the language and cultural codes of the occupied, searches for the fighters hiding in Nablus. This soldier deceives an old Palestinian woman by pretending that he is an Arab man from Gaza and "a member of the Resistance Movement." To conceal his identity in a persuasive way, he talks to the woman in a good "Arabic language plus the right social behaviour": these are for him "the keys to his success" in finding out the hiding Palestinian fighters. Since the woman does not fully trust him but still adheres to the cultural

standard of hospitality, she hosts him, then she runs "to their hiding-place to warn them" (Faqir 1987, 30–32), which gives them away, since the soldier follows her. His knowledge of Arabic and behaviour patterns coded in the culture allow him to manipulate the situation with the old woman effectively. He uses deception as a tactic to obtain clues and control over her. His betrayal of trust represents Israelis as willing to exploit vulnerabilities within the Palestinian community and to take advantage of its cultural values. Theoretically, this can arguably resonate with Foucault's account of the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault asserts that "the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information", elaborating that "[i]t is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (1980, 51–52). Grounding the analysis of the text's portrayal of Israeli tactics in Foucault's theories, one can posit that the soldier's utilisation of manipulation to extract information from the Palestinian woman demonstrates how power drives the accumulation of knowledge, which, in turn, produces specific forms of power strategies.

Based on their knowledge of the Arab Palestinian culture and the individual tendencies of some of its people, the narrative shows that the Israelis target, exploit, and recruit a particular group of Palestinian people as informers and traitors, who are more or less ready to betray their people for their own personal interests. The expected outcome of using the strategic role of informers is evidenced in this observation: "[a]s long as there was a Palestinian informer, they would never free their country" (1987, 45). While this observation is narrated from the Israeli perspective, it also highlights internal divisions within the Palestinian community. This division asserts the primary role of informers in undermining Palestinian resistance efforts towards liberation and self-determination. The novel presents Captain Abdel-Qader Lafi as a Palestinian informer, who gives clues about Mohammad Saqi's political activism, which ultimately leads to the arrest of seventeen members involved in the local resistance including Saqi. Lafi appears in court to testify to what he proclaims against Saqi and other rebellious Palestinian men in the last session of the case in which Saqi is eventually sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until he is dead in the mosque yard" (111), with a group of Palestinian locals, including his family, witnessing the execution.

This, however, uncovers another strategy of the Israeli regime among the various forms, techniques, and apparatuses of the settler-occupier control, which is the deliberate publicisation of subjugation through acts such as physical punishment and violence against Palestinian dissenters, as well as the dazzling success of its intelligence operations. Eman elucidates the arrest scene of her father by saying that "[a]ll our neighbours were standing by their windows watching Daddy, handcuffed, being dragged to the army vehicle" (1987, 10), which testifies to publicising

violence, with the neighbourhood witnessing the act of authority and oppression. Announcing the arrest via "the loudspeaker of the armed forces headquarters" and "Radio Ishmael broadcasting from Rahmah" (11), the Israeli authority signals approval of the successful execution of the action, which is an indication of the Israeli authority's control and surveillance of institutions in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, providing them with a channel from which they can address the occupied Palestinians. Whether publicising violence or intelligence, this ultimately aims at creating an atmosphere of fear, powerlessness, and disempowerment that can manipulate the collective consciousness of the Palestinian people and occupy their imagination. It is to (re)direct them to a persistent state of submission, but it also functions as a method of disintegrating the unity of the Palestinian community by accusing their resistant individuals of aberration and thereby becoming a forsaken group rejected by some of the locals.

In the novel, Eman becomes a castaway member of her local society because of her father's resistance actions, even though she is not personally responsible for his political engagement. Eman narrates, "My father tried to overthrow the government and was trying to develop Islamic socialism. That's what people told me later" (1987, 222–23). She also tells that as a schoolgirl, she used to sit alone, as her schoolmates were unwilling to socialise with her because her father was a member of the local resistance movement: "people called me the prisoner's daughter and avoided me as if I had alopecia. I didn't know." (150) Eman's local ostracisation reveals her struggle to find acceptance even in her own society; it further shows an aspect of an unfair social judgment over innocent people arising from societal prejudices and also the successful deployment of division as a form of power and control. In another instance, Eman narrates that her uncle refuses to help her family by giving them the money they need to hire a lawyer for her jailed father. Eman's uncle responds to their request for help by saying that "[h]e used to be my brother not after what he did. […] He showed me up. Humiliated me. How dare he put his head next to the ruler's? Ridiculous. […] What he did – no, what he tried to do – affected my business. Nobody wants to make deals with the traitor's brother, of course." (57) His stance highlights a local conflict of interests and divergent approaches, which are the outcome of the institutionalised dismantling of the Palestinian society and its individuals created by the manipulative occupying power. While Eman's father is dedicated to fighting the occupier regime as a means of alien aggression against his country, her uncle consents that the Israeli settlers are the legitimate rulers of the country and resisting them is an unacceptable disobedience since he is, as his words to Eman indicate, submitted to the domination of the occupier, but he is also concerned to maintain his personal interest of promoting his business and not losing his clients.

2.4 Many Faces of Defiance

In Faqir's text, Saqi, Shadeed, and Eman are agents of resistance; they face oppression on different fronts and with vibrant steadfastness. Their exercises of defiance are motivated by different impulses, depending on their gender and also on their lived experiences. The Arab male characters, Saqi and Shadeed, struggle to overthrow the oppressive forces of the Israeli authority. They join the local resistance movements because they are actual victims of the violence of the Israeli occupation. Meanwhile, Eman navigates the challenges of patriarchal standards in her society, contending with unfair gender norms in her struggle for female liberation and autonomy.

Saqi is presented as a participant of the Six-Day War, experiencing the Arab defeat and the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their lands. This experience pushes him to leave behind his personal life, prioritising the sacrifice for his country, as he decides to dedicate himself to resisting the Israeli subjugation until his country gets rid of the strangers. As for Shadeed, he is motivated by a sense of belonging to his homeland which comes out of a personal loss inflicted upon him by the violent actions exercised by the Israeli troops over his family members. Shadeed tells Eman that the hardest loss in his life caused by the Israelis was that "[t]hey killed my father and nine brothers and sisters. I was young then. When I grew older and was able to understand the size of the calamity, you can't imagine the pain that struck me" (1987, 219). He also says that "'Palestine runs in my blood. Even if they expel me, we'll never part because it lives here,' he hits his chest. 'It's like a fungus on my skin.'" (222) As these words indicate, Shadeed participates in revolutionary operations against Israeli soldiers in retaliation for the killing of his family members, but he is also empowered to resist David's torture in his captivity because of his patriotic sense, which because of the harshness of his ordeal becomes much firmer.

Being brutally tortured in prison, Shadeed turns to silence in order not to make confessions, thereby betraying the local liberation movements to which he loyally belongs. He succumbs to a nervous breakdown rather than surrender to the imprisoner's order. According to Faqir, "the Palestinian prisoner resists his interrogators by maintaining silence. But because he can't speak any version of the truth that won't either be exploited or ignored by the Israeli authorities, he goes mad" (Moore 2011, 6). Analysing Shadeed's resistance in prison, Sowmya Srinivasan makes the remark that the Palestinian Fedayee withstands an unbearable and inhumane physical and mental torture by crafting an imaginative space of his own in which "he lives in his self-made world where human beings look like giants and his only companion is a tiny ant" (2017, 68). This shows that when being incapable of resisting his enemy due to confinement, Shadeed rather creates self-empowering tools of withstanding, silence, and contemplation rather than obeying the oppressive order of the Israeli jailor.

Whether being tortured or left in the filthy cell, Shadeed retreats into his imagination to transcend his ordeals. It is narrated that he "remembered other times and places when he sat on the cold floor between his mother and father. The bubbling fountain sprayed his dry face with water. The smell of citrus flowers and the twittering of sparrows seeped through him" (1987, 115). This passage offers insights into Shadeed's adapting mechanism amidst his harrowing conditions in prison. He utilises imagination as a means of psychological escape from the present agony. The physical suffering and discomfort that he endures prompts him to mentally transport himself to a different time and place, when/where he sits between his mother and father, suggesting a sense of comfort and security associated with parental ties. This reminiscence likely portrays a time of emotional warmth and closeness for Shadeed, in contrast with his current isolation and suffering.

Perceiving the cell of the prison as a nest, Shadeed conjures up that he is a six-legged "tiny creature" living with the ant in the desert and would like to stay hiding in the nest so as to escape the "the two-legged giants" (1987, 187), the Israeli jailors. In his self-created world of imagination, Shadeed establishes an intimate relation with the ant, missing it, offering it food, and taking care of it. At a certain point, he talks to the ant, "you are lucky because you have a lot of joints," asking it "how is the weather outside?" (138). This reveals Shadeed's tribulation in imprisonment, as he assumes that the ant has the free will to move, while he is deprived of his freedom in a solitary cell. The ant symbolises freedom and unrestricted movement that Shadeed lacks in his own confinement, highlighting his feelings of entrapment. The idea that an insect – traditionally a symbol of the abject – has more agency than Shadeed reflects the depth of his helplessness. It shows how imprisonment has stripped him of autonomy, leaving even a creature as lowly as an ant with more control over its existence. Shadeed's dialogue with the ant, particularly referring to her as if she were his lover, suggests that he projects his longing for affection onto the small animal. "He gave her his right hand, then picked her up with his thumb and forefinger gently, making sure not to press hard on her tiny body" (138). On another occasion, Shadeed "asked her to stay, but she insisted on going away to sit her exam. He wished that she would come back and hug him." (139) This implies a sense of emotional yearning for companionship in his isolated situation, especially in the absence of his lover, Eman. Shadeed's wish for the ant to stay mirrors his desire for Eman to remain with him, indicating his reluctance to be away from her, further underlining the depth of his emotional attachment to Eman and his struggle to cope with her absence while he is imprisoned. Significantly, although escapism is typically an indicator of disempowerment, it becomes a source of agency for Shadeed. By seeking respite in an imaginative world, where he feels closely connected to his loved people, he gains the strength to cope with his current situation.

In the case of the Arab female character Eman, the methods of resistance are different due to her gender on the one hand and her upbringing in a family house with an absent guardian father, on the other. As Srinivasan puts it, Eman does "devise a mode of resistance in the space provided to her" (2017, 73), as she lives in a conservative and patriarchal society in which feminine roles are restricted. However, Eman goes beyond these limitations and breaks the conventional image of the Arab Palestinian woman as a disempowered individual by crafting unique models of agency. This is portrayed through Eman's continuing rejection of being called a "girl," which can be seen as a gendered offence that degrades her status and autonomy, reducing her to a childlike or inferior role. In many social interactions in which Eman engages, she expresses her feeling of upset when someone – her uncle and one of the tailor's customers – calls her up as "girl," since she prefers her real name, Eman.

The narrative represents Eman's pursuit of educational growth as a means of self-empowerment. At a certain point, she decides to retake the school exams she missed when she was young, then complete her university education because she is willing to fulfil her dreams of becoming an independent and well-educated woman. She also fulfils her mother's will: "I kissed her hand and said, 'I'll be the way you want me to be. A teacher?'" (1987, 37) This indicates the responsibility Eman feels towards her family in lieu of a father. However, she explains the efforts she makes for this uneasy move as follows: "I tried to save every month in order to pay the exam fees. Something inside pushed me toward education" (150), which can be understood as a strong inner motivation, commitment to self-fulfilment, and to resisting her multiple subordination, as well.

The narrative also shows that Eman finds agency through her work as a seamstress. As she tells, "[m]y work introduced me to the touch of silk and the odour of delightful perfumes. I used to see myself flying like birds wearing the colourful dresses I was sewing and ironing. Soaring high in blue silk, orange satin, printed georgette, crepe de chine, chiffon, taffeta, velvet. Yes, velvet." (1987, 89) Eman's work as a seamstress allows her to transcend the rigid constraints of her circumstances, providing her with a sense of empowerment and control over her life. Through her craft, she does not only earn a livelihood, but she also gains a sense of liberation, fulfilment, purpose, and achievement.

Eman's personal traits create the impression that she is a determined and resolute woman. Her narrative reveals that she manages to override the distressing news of Shadeed's arrest and going mad in prison after long years of waiting, as she recovers shortly and goes to school as usual. On that day, the garbage collector Shamma'eh motivates Eman by his wise words, "if you give up they will crush you" (1987, 247). Eman's steadfastness is shown in her response to Shamma'eh, "since the birds flew

over Rahmah, that meant that we existed on the map. I grabbed the folder and walked to the school." (248–49) Eman's decision to continue her journey, symbolised by her action of grabbing her folder and heading to school despite distress, reveals her determination to react with perseverance and resilience to the accumulated hardships of her life: the loss of her father, her baby sister, and her lover Shadeed. Ultimately, it reflects the sense of faith she has in the everlasting existence of the Palestinians in their occupied land, which is also embodied in the Arabic meaning of her name, "faith."

3 Conclusion

The current study explores Faqir's *Nisanit* by analysing it in the context of the territorial conflict between the Jewish settlers, who established a Jewish state in the Middle East, and the Arab Palestinian natives, who reject settler occupation that restrains their right of having an independent statehood. It also focuses on investigating the representation of different strategies of subjugation performed by the Israeli authority to overpower the Palestinian local revolutions and methods of native resistance undertaken by the Palestinian fighters to decolonise the power structure of the occupier domination. On the one hand, the Israeli authority makes use of a range of subjugation methods to achieve their purposes of settler colonialism such as discrimination, violence, arrests, imprisoning, social segregation, and cultural stereotyping in *Nisanit*. On the other hand, the Palestinian characters of the novel respond to Israeli domination by adopting different models of resistance depending on their individual experiences. Saqi and Shadeed participate in guerrilla wars and actions of revolution organised by the local resistance movements, making it a nationalist responsibility that they never give in to until their country gains a state of self-determination. As for Eman, she resists her double subordination by establishing an extraordinary sense of agency through responsibility, self-fulfilment, determination, education, work, empathy, and social solidarity.

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