

A Mask the Color of the Sky”: Prison Literature as a Counter-Hegemonic Discourse.

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Abstract:

Prison literature is a powerful tool of resistance that confronts various forms of oppression and tyranny. The prison becomes a space for building the self and transcending physical barriers to expose domination, repression, and all kinds of violations. . Its aim is to offer an alternative discourse that legitimizes marginalized voices by challenging official narratives through presenting truth from the victim’s point of view and restoring value to both individual and collective experience. This is what the novelist tried to show in “*A Mask the Color of the Sky*” by the novelist Bassem Khundakji, presenting writing and literary creativity as a means to raise awareness and influence public opinion that can profoundly change reality, based on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict This is the content of the prison novel that seeks resistance through exposing hegemony to reveal the tyrannical discourse of authority, which has widened the gap between the self and the other.

Keywords: literature; prison; discourse; counter-narrative; hegemony.

1. INTRODUCTION

The prison diary literature is a unique and distinctive form, not merely because it represents an artistic experience born from human pain, harshness, and confinement, but because it also offers an artistic and creative space that privileges a critical reading drawn from counter-narrative. Accordingly, its content acts as a reaction against the dominant and centralized discourse upheld by the system, turning the novel into a creative attempt to provide a specific reading of reality from the perspective of the detainee that opposes hegemonic narratives while seeking to mend the fractured self, build identity, and preserve it. In the midst of the conflict between the dominant/occupier and the resistor/prisoner, who represents the people in their crisis.

Usually, narratives written from the prisoner's perspective address issues such as justice, injustice, and punishment, often overlooking or ignoring the deep psychological and social dimensions and effects that imprisonment leaves on the individual and their surroundings. At times, such narratives may even present images contrary to the harsh reality the prisoner lives.

From this point arises the role of the counter-narrative presented by the prison novel to break the barriers of silence and reveal hidden truths. The novel holds a driving and influential power; it presents reality through the eyes of a prisoner who rebels against both authority and society. It opens a path toward the search for truth and the essence of meaning. Thus, counter-narration becomes an artistic tool whose purpose is to expose abuses and violations, restoring dignity to the suppressed self that struggles to reclaim its stolen and violated identity. This happens through the use of personal experiences shaped into diverse narrative forms that capture complex emotions embodying endurance in the face of oppression and injustice with the aim of making the voice of the marginalized and silenced individual heard.

Also, creative expression emerging from counter-narration can be viewed as an act of resistance against authority. The prisoner uses storytelling as a means to reverse roles between jailer and jailed through using this latter own unique perspective to present broad, critical reflection. Through narration, the prisoner rereads events from the victim's point of view, who tries to build an alternative memory that challenges the official stories. This resembles many novels that mirror the harsh conditions imposed by occupation as seen in the Palestinian novelistic experience.

The Palestinian prison novel holds a vital and far-reaching regional and national dimension for the Arab reader, precisely because it springs from

the womb of suffering, imprisonment, and captivity. It carries human experiences that represent living testimonies of Palestinian endurance and defiance in confronting occupation to preserve identity and existence under all forms of imposed siege.

In addition most Palestinian prison novels serve as documentary testimonies of the prisoner’s life under severe conditions, portraying scenes of detention, confinement, and torture under the repressive policies of the Zionist occupation. They also embody images of resistance and identity preservation. For this reason, the prison novel is considered a fundamental part of Palestinian literature. The prison represents an exceptional space that stands in contrast to the concepts of freedom and dignity as a repressive space resulting from the confrontation against the occupier.

From this context emerges *A Mask the Color of the Sky* by Basem Khandaqji, who employed creativity and imagination to defy the constraints of captivity. Through his novel, he depicted occupied Palestinian reality while offering his own vision of freedom. The novel is presented through interwoven scenes that combine emotions with personal and political states and employ history and myth in service of a humanistic vision that rejects oppression and elevates the values of love and friendship.

Through this critical reading, we aim to explore the prison narrative devoted to the Palestinian cause that functions as counter-discourse and creative resistance. We seek to show how the Palestinian prisoner-writer uses his experiences and thoughts to challenge grand, dominant narratives and preserve their identity.

We will also attempt to decode the repressive rhetorical codes of power upon which the author constructed his narrative, and through which he negates the dehumanizing labels attached to the prisoner and presents resistance through creativity. By employing symbols that affirm both individuality and collective belonging distinct from the occupying entity, the novelist exposes the false narratives that dominate the political system discourse.

The writer’s purpose lies in revealing and utilizing mechanisms for self-construction and identity formation in the face of occupation and all forms of siege.

Through this paper, we will attempt to answer several key questions:

- What challenges face the writer-prisoner in building an alternative narrative, particularly within the confines of space/prison?
- How does the writer use narration to undermine dominant narratives, and what narrative mechanisms are adopted to embody resistance and steadfastness?
- Can narration alone change reality?
- How does prison literature reverse the conventional image of prisoners perpetuated by the established system?
- On what foundations does the writer-prisoner rely to expose the falsity of so-called justice?

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this research centers on prison literature as a space of resistance that transcends the mere documentation of physical suffering; rather, it evolves into what is known as "counter-discourse," aimed at undermining the jailer's hegemony and epistemic authority. To begin with, the analysis draws on Michel Foucault's vision of the prison as a tool for discipline and punishment intended to erase the prisoner's identity and redefine them as a submissive entity. However, prison literature emerges here as a mechanism to break this equation by reclaiming power through the act of writing. Furthermore, this counter-discourse manifests in the prisoner's ability to deconstruct the occupier's official narrative and present an alternative story that restores personal and national history. Consequently, the literary text produced behind bars is no longer a mere reflection of reality; instead, it becomes a means of penetrating intellectual prison walls and dismantling the dominant discourse from within. Ultimately, this transforms literature into a battlefield of knowledge, proving that the prisoner's voice is capable of transcending physical shackles and reshaping historical truth in the face of distortion. Counter-discourse in prison literature is one of the most complex theoretical frameworks, as it represents a "clash" between the consciousness of the imprisoned individual and the authority of the prison guard who seeks to erase it.

2.1 Discourse of Domination

Domination is a pivotal concept that refers not only to coercive physical control but also to the dominant class's ability to impose its

worldview and cultural values so they appear "natural" to society at large.. Furthermore, cultural criticism works to deconstruct this hegemony by exposing the mechanisms through which political and social powers shape collective consciousness. Consequently, the literary text-especially in contexts like prison or resistance literature-becomes a site for challenging this hegemony; where the writer seeks to unsettle imposed values and present a counter-discourse that rejects subordination. Ultimately, the study of hegemony aims to transform culture from a tool of discipline and control into a means of liberation and the reclamation of independent identity. “Antonio Gramsci introduced the idea of hegemony, emphasizing that control does not always come about solely through the power of the controller, but also through its ability to make us accept it and acknowledge its validity” (Shahib, 2025, p. 667). Based on this dependency, a counter-consciousness is formed that seeks to break this hegemony and attempt to embody a certain discourse stemming from the conscious self.

2.2 The concept of discourse:

In this context we can define “text as a spoken or written linguistic sequence that forms a communicative unit” (Al-Ayashi, 2004, p. 119). This is counterbalanced by the concept of discourse, which has been the focus of numerous studies that consider it to be a linguistic construct with semantic dimensions.

The concept of discourse in contemporary orientation has attracted the attention of critics and scholars, especially since it deals with linguistic formation in a different way. “The term discourse in its basic meaning refers to any speech that exceeds a single sentence, whether written or spoken. However, its conventional use has expanded to include another, more specific meaning...that speech has unspoken meanings that are understood by the speaker and listener without any obvious or clear signs” (- Al-Ruwaylī, 2002, p. 155). This requires a special reading of the text so that the reader can grasp the intended meanings.

2.3 Narrative and Counter-Discourse

The theoretical concepts of the two terms narrative and discourse serve complementary purposes that often use creativity as a means of expressing resistance. This happens through the employment of rebellious characters who produce a counter-discourse so “they expand their space of presence within both the story and life. Their discourse, from this

standpoint, takes on the nature of defence, and therefore, confrontation with the discourse of the Other” (- Al-‘Īd, 2011, p. 142).

The counter-narrative thus arises to represent marginalized and oppressed classes who confront official narratives and all forms of domination that work to restrict the spaces of existence available to certain groups. Consequently, narrative becomes laden with meanings, charged with symbols, and tells the stories that carry oppressed voices, which convey the perspectives of the marginalized and attempt to define their place within global existence.

This narrative fulfils what Immanuel Kant described as “the liberation of the individual from self-imposed dependency; that is, to have the courage to use one’s own reason.” (- Muṣṭafā, 2018, p. 14) Through this, an alternative memory is created. This memory carries the details of their true reality and expresses their identity, culture, and history, which lies under distortion and falsification.

Thus, colonized peoples, ethnic minorities, and socially despised groups appear as creative agents bearing the responsibility of seeking ways to assert the self. They employ different forms of expression to make their voices heard, such as through stories and novels. These forms become charged with meanings that aim to dismantle narrative domination and to give rise to a counter-discourse that serves the orientation of the marginalized and excluded.

3. Prison Literature: Narrative as a Voice of Resistance

When narrative is harnessed as a means of resistance, it becomes a bridge between reality and the aspired world. Through employing its various patterns, narrative serves the aims of resistance and confrontation, seeking self-construction and preservation of identity.

It represents an expressive power “clinging to the erasure of the colonial discourse from people’s minds for it carries distortions and intentions of humiliating the colonized peoples” (- Khalīf, 2024, p. 231). It also reflects the voices of minorities striving to be heard within the misinformation and concealment they face due to racism based on race, colour, or gender.

Thus, readers encounter narrative models that serve the visions of creators, among them, prison literature.

The general concept of prison literature emerges from the creative practice of detainees, who document their lives and experiences within confined spaces and attempt to find a way to confront injustice and the deprivation of freedom.

“These creative works have accumulated over time and have become a necessity of the era, not a luxury. They are creations written to honour humanity, to defend its freedom, dignity, and existence.” (Yūsuf, 2014, p. 07). Such works aim to break the barriers imposed on prisoners, to convey psychological and physical pain, and to transcend material restrictions. They simulate suffering in order to expose violations and oppressive practices endured by the prisoner. Writing thus becomes a method of resistance, and makes a space that transcends prison walls.

Through writing, the prisoner regains his stolen self, voices the unspoken, and reveals injustice and human rights violations, attempting to rebuild his identity. The goal is to shape an awareness that can mobilize public opinion toward uprising and change.

3.1 Prison Literature and the Deconstruction of Power Discourse

Prison literature works to destabilize the stereotypical image of the prisoner. The writer feels empowered by possessing a tool that can dismantle the discourse of authority in all its forms, offering alternative narratives to those promoted by official narratives that impose distorted concepts and shape social positions. Especially if it is against an occupier, the conflict takes on a religious dimension and has political and social implications. This is the case with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Whereas “There is a fundamental crisis in the Zionist project in that it arose as a foreign entity in a hostile environment, thereby establishing a state of constant conflict with the Arab environment” (shihab, 2002, p. 09). This is clearly evident in the narrative text, which conveys the meaning of the detainees.

Therefore prison literature thus provides definitions that reflect power discourse from the victim’s viewpoint, often from those who were political or ideological opponents, whose experiences became a motivation for creativity. “These ongoing religious and political conflicts not only inspired individual prisoners to write but also encouraged them to do so, and they also created a ready audience of readers who share similar ways of thinking; thus, new audiences for prison writings in general.” (Firman, 2022, p.373). Writing becomes a breathing space for prisoners, allowing them to break the chains even if only morally. This creativity is nourished by anti-authoritarian tendencies that oppose hegemonic power seeking to impose its ideas and suppress all forms of resistance.

Such creative acts, carrying the voice of defiance, reach readers who share a similar liberationist spirit, or an even wider public moved by shared human suffering. Prison literature, therefore, is not merely read for artistic pleasure, but it becomes testimony, documentation, and exposure of repression and the revealing of truth.

3.2. Prison literature reveals mechanisms of domination:

Through revealing methods of torture and humiliation experienced by prisoners, and by presenting imprisonment cases as injustices to provoke public empathy, these writings give a chance for the public to view such issues with compassion, issues that are often obscured by political tyranny. A writer who chooses to write while imprisoned expresses the suffering accompanying the passion for writing, describing psychological and physical pain, and thereby offering a deconstruction of the authorities' narratives.

The writer aims to shed light on official discourse and expose the violations it commits, for it "...always carries within it a belief in freedom whether time is long or short. The writer's message is embodied in his personal language, reflecting his lived experience inside prisons, which the writer shapes into literary form. This latter often seeks to affirm their universal human message: rejecting oppression and upholding the values of freedom and independence." (Maşārawah, 2020, p. 04).

Thus, the writer moves beyond personal aims toward a collective human goal: to critique tyranny, defend rights, and give creative depth to tragedy. The writer also condemns and critiques dominant discourses, aiming to influence readers who either live under similar conditions or share the struggle of defending the marginalized.

In doing so, the writer documents history not as passing events but as a living reality and destiny that continues to shape successive generations, confronting the fragmentation of self and identity.

4. Establishing an Alternative Memory

By collecting and documenting various creative expressions of suffering and recording their events and circumstances, prison literature seeks to limit the authority of the Other, who distorts the truth.

This effort builds a collective memory, constructed by creative individuals and circulated by diverse audiences, to eventually protect it from erasure and falsification.

From this emerge alternative narratives that restore dignity to prisoners and vindicate silenced voices. These works also restructure foundational

concepts, giving them new dimensions and meanings from the victims’ perspective different from the ones commonly promoted.

Concepts such as justice and security, which govern the global order, are now re-evaluated through the lens of oppression policy practiced by the other under various labels. Thus, they are revealed in their true form, and the classification of values is redefined through the perspective of difference.

Narrative as Discursive Resistance: A Critical Examination of the Manifestations of Resistance and Prison Writings in the Novel *A Mask the Colour of the Sky*

The novel “*A Mask the Colour of The Sky*” by Palestinian writer and prisoner Bassem Khandaqji is the winner of the 2024 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF).

The novel revolves around Nour, a Palestinian archaeologist living in a camp in Ramallah. Nour finds a blue (Israeli) identity card in the pocket of an old coat he bought at the Balata market, so he decides to wear this “mask” and impersonate the identity card's owner (Or Shpira) in order to enter the occupied territories and work on an Israeli archaeological excavation mission.

It is a journey in search of the “truth” buried under the dirt, and an attempt to restore the Palestinian narrative by infiltrating the narrative of “the other.” He chose to wear a psychological and intellectual mask, merging with the identity of the occupier in order to serve the Palestinian cause, thus living a journey of duality and inner conflict.

The novel presents a series of events showcasing *Nur’s* attempts to understand the nature of historical events and the relationship between the two peoples, through historical and political narration and the treatment of several essential concepts such as memory, identity, betrayal, friendship, and others. The novel also embodies The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most complex issues of modern times, where historical rights overlap with bitter political reality. The duality of “occupier and occupied” reflects an unequal power relationship whose effects are evident in every detail of daily life. This duality revolves around a political and legal system in which one party (Israel) imposes military and administrative control over another (the Palestinians). The latter live in specific geographical areas separated by military barriers and walls, making geographical and political communication nearly impossible.

This is reflected socially through the creation of a huge gap in rights and freedoms. For example, there is a difference between freedom of movement and siege: Palestinian citizens need complex permits to access their land or work, while the other party enjoys full rights. The existence of thousands of prisoners also reflects ongoing social pain, as prison becomes a “parallel society” that tries to preserve awareness and identity from behind bars. This is where the conflict of narratives comes into play: the occupation seeks to impose a historical narrative that denies the Palestinian presence, while the Palestinians cling to their right of return and self-determination, which we see clearly in the novel .

It also provides a critique of the dominant narratives that control the nature of the relationship between Arabs and Israelis with a deep reading of the image of the self and the other. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not merely a border dispute, but a clash between a deeply rooted historical right and a colonial reality that time and place are attempting to shape.

Thus, the novel searches through the corridors of history for the truth, starting from the idea of establishing a different way of thinking amid widespread deception and the distortion practices that affect various facts. Furthermore, the novel portrays the individual will of the character, who seeks to draw diverse forms of resistance, to confront the occupation through multiple means, and to cling to identity while insisting on the right to remain on the land.

1. Counter-Discourse and the Deconstruction of Dominant Narratives in the Novel

Counter-discourse begins with deconstructing and analysing reliable data, which form a preventive curtain that criminalizes rebellion against them, because these are considered fixed truths attached to various blocs and orientations, regardless of their differences.

Therefore, the alternative narrative deliberately confronts what is dominant, criticizes the hegemonic narratives, and seeks to build awareness amid systematic falsification and obscurity, with the aim of correcting the path, re-reading history, and examining declared truths from a critical perspective.

The novel states: “And history is, in the end, just a rationalized imagination” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 12). Throughout the novel, Basim Khandaqji questions certain historical facts and inherited events that are taken as absolute, for he believes that the historian narrates historical events

infused with imagination, governed by reason, and supported with evidence, interpretation, and analysis. This is achieved by creating a parallel history through the systematic theft of symbols and transforming myths through imagination into political instruments of ownership to influence global consciousness.

In addition, he gives interpretations stemming from his own method, thought, knowledge, values, and ideology, since “Ideology, in general, means belonging to a certain group, sect, or doctrine. The individual’s submission to these ideas or ideologies makes the historical truth painful for the historian if it contradicts their own ideology. This may lead the historian to conceal the truth.” (- Sayfī, 2017, p. 59). This means that the historian cannot separate themselves from what they write, thus negating the objectivity of history, its events, and its researchers.

From this principle, the novelist questions the very foundations upon which civilizations and nations were built, suggesting that historical events presented as truths may, in fact, have originated in imagination, later transforming into dominant narratives that attempt to control cultures and societies.

In addition, The novel continues its critical reading of reality, scrutinizing motives and consequences, as illustrated in the following passage:

“As for his own camp, no massacre worth mentioning has yet been committed there. That is also the difference between the camp and the Jewish ‘ghetto’ in Europe: the ability to mythologize tragedy and to indulge in imagining it. They mythologized and imagined as they should, to the point of creating a camp and a diaspora, and they turned to Nur and his likes.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 16). Here, the author clearly expresses doubt about Jewish history and what they have authored regarding their own tragedy, what some historians consider truths, yet the novelist firmly believes are merely a set of events supported by imagination and myth, dramatized and recorded historically, exaggerating their suffering and calamities.

As Malek Bennabi notes: “To understand a world, it is not enough to study only its apparent manifestations, but rather its spirit that hides behind these popular appearances, which resemble an invisible magic lamp projecting prearranged images onto the screen of history.” (Bin Nabi, 2012, p. 41).

Thus, the core truths and essential meanings lie behind the visible surface, while the dominant values that move and shape intellectual, social, and cultural orientations remain hidden.

“What matters to the observer is that intelligence and the hand that craft this artificial, false history, which lie behind it and cause its outcomes.” (Bin Nabi, 2012, p. 41). From this, we see the novel’s deep concern with uncovering fabricated, distorted historical truths, presented in alignment with predetermined ideological templates that serve specific preconceived concepts, aiming to shape collective consciousness or serve a particular ideology.

These then evolve into grand narratives upon which myths are built and later adopted as historical truths, transmitted through successive generations as cultural tools and parts of collective memory.

This is the case, as the novel points out, of the Jew, whose history is portrayed as one “chasing an impossible dream founded on universal brotherhood in a world that meets it with rejection.” (Gibson, 2013, p. 54). Thus, there appears to be an implicit rejection of what is Jewish, despite continuous efforts to construct an alternative memory that sanctifies their own history.

2. Examining the Mechanisms of the Discourse of Domination in the Novel

The novel is based on deconstructing the culturally consumed symbols and meanings that dominate the various dimensions under colonial control through the powers and institutions that produce meanings and values. The novelist followed a critical style to resist and dismantle the discourse of authority and its domination, which appeared in several narrative passages, among them:

“Colonialism is made of small details. It is an obsession with control, and these small details eventually tighten to form a complete and integrated structure... cognitive, historical, cultural, and psychological details. Therefore, we must fight it with the same details.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 25) Colonialism, with its broad and comprehensive control over all fields, whether visible or hidden, has built its influence on the smallest of matters. It did not stop at political and military dimensions only but extended to all areas, including culture, history, and knowledge. Scholars of colonial discourse see that “in it, political power merges with knowledge and cultural production” (- Al-Ruwaylī, 2002, p. 158). where material power unites with cultural domination to impose the destructive control sought by colonial states.

On the contrarast, if the other/ the colonized wants to escape that domination, they must confront the retaliatory systems that aim to distort historical truths and

control cultural and intellectual production. This resistance must match colonial power in precision and comprehensiveness. The novelist summarized this in Murad’s letter to Nur when he said: “We must confront this colonial monster by building our own intellectual reference.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 48).

Thus, to cut the rope of dependency on the other, one must adopt multi-dimensional approaches to get rid of colonialism and its effects, through knowledge and cultural systems born from one’s own philosophy outside the models and templates shaped by colonialism.

The novel also sought to expose destructive methods and to strip legitimacy from the discourse of tyranny, as seen in the following passage:

“And with utmost care she pushed toward me, warning of the danger of the situation and the possibility of my being attacked by Arab rioters and vandals in these difficult times. That is what she said, with great fear... She found no difficulty in uttering such dehumanizing classifications.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 136) .

The novelist tries here to depict the terrifying image spread among the occupiers about Arabs, portraying them as a threat to their existence, presenting them in a negative and extremist way using words that express savagery and baseness. They are labelled as vandals and troublemakers, making them appear as a total threat. The phrase “with great fear” points to an artificial and false fear meant to make her appear as someone who constantly needs protection, thus providing justification for all forms of violence and violations committed by the occupation. This creates an opposite narrative that frames repression and tyranny as a security necessity.

3. Constructing the Self and Identity in *A Mask the Color of the Sky*

The prisoner often lives a state of psychological conflict inside prison because of harsh conditions. Yet in *A Mask the Color of the Sky*, the prisoner turns the prison into a rich space for discovering and developing the self, showing resistance to prove his existence and move toward self-betterment. The novel presents several creative scenes in this direction, such as:

“A son of this camp-and all camps are the same. So, what is the need for names? That’s what he used to say in his inner confessions, not with others.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 15). Here the novelist tries to portray the shared condition among refugees in the camps, where everyone has been stripped of homeland and identity; no one differs from another, for they all belong to one shared identity under the same conditions. The camp becomes a tragic geographical field in which each individual reflects the image of the oppressed people (displacement, poverty, loss, deprivation) carrying meanings of shared suffering. Thus, the camp becomes a symbol of a human condition reflecting the loss of homeland.

Yet what stands out is that, despite the widespread suffering, it remains trapped within inner dialogues and conflicts that reveal the fragmentation and confusion of the self, which repeatedly searches for answers through a continuous journey of seeking knowledge and truth. This is not mere intellectual luxury but a conscious tool to reach truth and understand the world.

This path is what the prisoner Murad followed, as “he also used the roads of his suffering in detention to turn them into a path of knowledge and culture that led him to freedom, at least his inner freedom.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 22). Murad represents a positive image of the Palestinian prisoner, a strong character who turns frustration into positive energy, using knowledge and culture as tools of liberation. He values thought as a means of resistance and challenge, based on the awareness that freedom begins from inner faith. The individual must first free oneself intellectually and spiritually, gaining the consciousness that grants him the ability to choose. When a person builds inner confidence and believes in freedom, they can achieve it in reality and turn obstacles into motivation.

The novelist writes:

“Murad faced the iron of the prison with his steel will, defeating his bitter loneliness with the hope that flowed from the ink of his pen, to fight deprivation and the systematic extraction of humanity from its time and place.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 23). Murad thus transcended his passive existence in prison, turning it into a new opportunity to rebuild himself, making it stronger in the face of global powers of oppression and tyranny. He becomes a model of endurance born from inner faith in the self, nourished by the love of reading, learning, and writing, which become the engine of resistance.

This is also the case of *Noor*, who chose to build his Palestinian self while using an Israeli identity. He says:

“I find immense pleasure in successfully passing myself off as Or Shapira. This name is fascinating; the mask gives me complete fulfilment... To live this name in the colonial reality is itself a violation of the other name that violated me since I was born from the womb of the alleys.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 56). The protagonist resorted to hiding behind a mask to conceal his true identity and his suppressed and oppressed self. Through examining this passage closely from different angles, we see that the central character found a way to assert his self and take revenge on the colonizer, dealing with him as an equal, not inferior. Noor justifies his act as an attempt to embody the colonizer’s identity that violated land and culture under a colonial system that “in collective consciousness created racist stereotypes that portrayed the Other as savage, barbaric, backward, and inferior, associating difference with irrationality and inhumanity” (Al-Brahmī, 2025, p. 27).

Such descriptions by the colonial system reached the level of demonizing and dehumanizing the colonized. They were not just as labels but as real barriers preventing the acceptance of the Other as different. This influence extended to shaping cultural and intellectual patterns that controlled relations between peoples negatively, even justifying exploitation and inhumane practices.

These images, in their varied meanings, appear throughout the novel’s text and are met by the protagonist’s unique form of resistance when he decides to wear the mask of a settler and embody his character. He then lives an internal conflict oscillating between falsehood and truth, between merging with the Other and holding onto his identity. The novel says:

“Noor gasped again to breathe his origin as a refugee, displaced, deformed, and afflicted... Noor did not withdraw from the identity of Or Shapira, but faced it... he wore it this time fully aware of its roots; that awareness granted him immunity, preventing his transformation into a being made of black skin and a white mask.” (Khandakji, 2023, p. 63).

After critically analysing this, we sense a strong suggestion of self-awareness and commitment to one’s original identity. Noor, though deeply marked by social shocks, marginalization, and suffering, remains attached to his roots through pivotal active stances, using the false identity as a mask, but with full awareness of its historical, social, and political origins. This consciousness shields him from self-alienation.

4. CONCLUSION

Finally the novel « *A Mask the color of the Sky* » by prisoner Basem Khandaqji is a remarkable example of confrontation and resistance, with the ending representing the triumph of the Palestinian narrative over attempts at Israeli domination.

After a critical reading of *A Mask the Color of the Sky*, several results can be summarized, representing the main axes of the novel's deeper meanings:

- The research centred on the counter-discourse in *A Mask the Color of the Sky* came as a critical attempt to read the Palestinian reality ruled by oppressive conditions embodied in the prison narrative that used events and characters as tools to deconstruct narratives and ideologies that erase truths and falsify history.
- The reading exposed the mechanisms of colonial and Zionist domination and its impact on the social and political reality.
- The novel motivates the conscious reader to reread history, give justice to the marginalized, and uncover silenced issues.
- It aims to strip legitimacy from authoritarian discourse and dismantle the narrative structures of power.
- The main characters in the novel played central roles in showing forms of resistance and in criticizing the structure of repressive discourse in its various shapes.
- The characters sought to produce a counter-discourse and to form a history that reflects their lived reality through raising the voice of the oppressed and creating space for alternative narratives.
- The events embodied human suffering, the effects of oppression, their psychological and social reflections, and their effects on values.
- The novel maintained the image of resistance despite the harshness and pain expressed through its narrative events.
- The main character used the (Zionist) mask to prove his attachment to his Palestinian identity despite inner conflict and psychological and social struggle.
- Finally, the novel proved effective as a means to break the barriers of silence and create a counter-discourse through techniques and

devices that deconstruct elements of domination, turning them into testimony against both overt and hidden oppression.

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