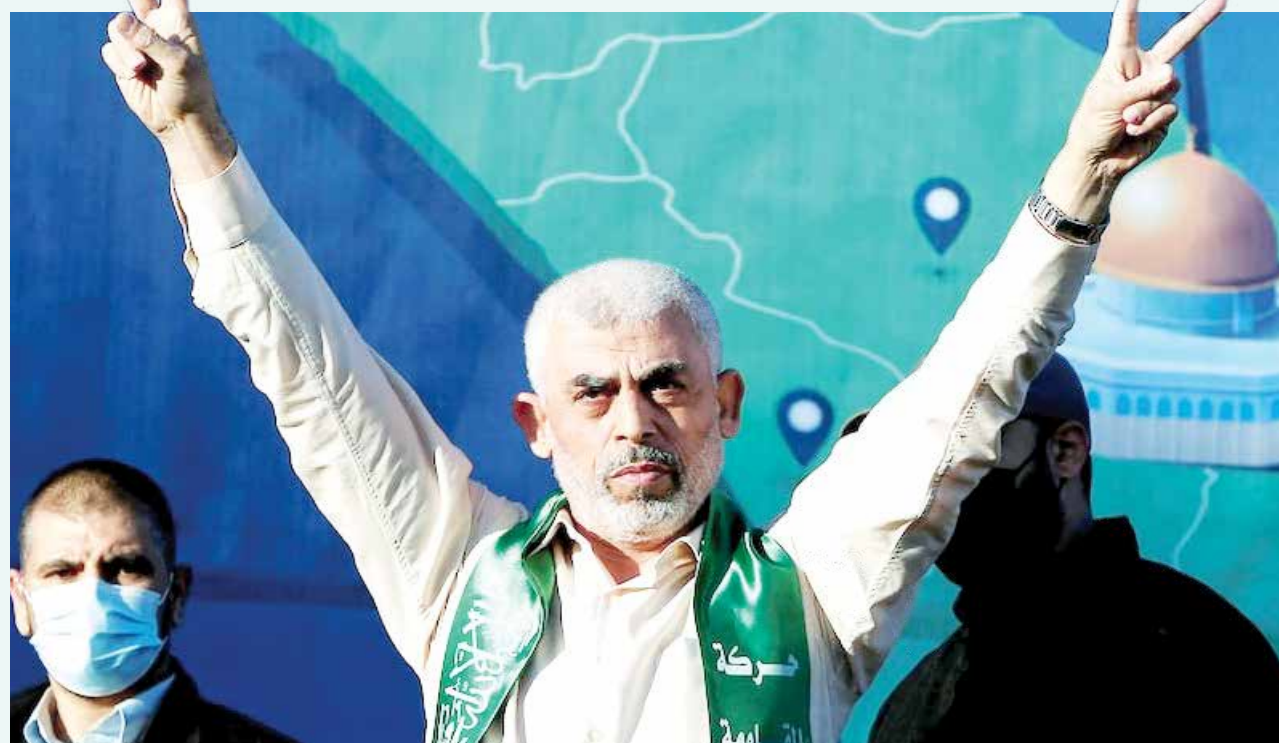


From personal struggles to collective strength: 'Self-Made' in resistance

Understanding secrets of Yahya Sinwar's brave struggle through lens of his novel

'The Thorn and the Carnation' is a captivating novel written by Yahya Sinwar during his long imprisonment in Israeli jails. The narrative offers a deep insight into the resilience and ethics of a man who played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse of Palestinian resistance. Written gradually over the years of his incarceration, the novel explores the psyche of a man confined by walls, recounts a story of endurance, and provides insights into strategic thinking. Regarding the book *'The Thorn and the Carnation,'* two specific articles have been written: one by Hesham Taha and the other by Haneen Odetallah. Taha's article is more of a review of the book, whereas the article titled *'The Philosophy of Hamas in the Writings of Yahya Sinwar,'* authored by Haneen Odetallah, is a deeper exploration of the novel. Originally published in Arabic, Haneen Odetallah uses Sinwar's novel, as a lens to analyze the mindset of contemporary resistance. The article delves into themes of self-reliance, sacrifice, and security awareness. It examines how these concepts emerge within individuals to enhance political supremacy and collective liberation, unveiling the strategic and existential dimensions of the resistance movement. It also offers a unique perspective on Hamas' ideology. In this essay, a translation and summary of the two articles are provided for the readers.



Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar flashes V sign during an anti-Israel rally in Gaza City, on May 24, 2021.
 MOHAMMED SALEM/REUTERS

A story of resilience

This captivating novel provides a profound insight into the flexibility and ethics of a man who played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse of Palestinian resistance. It explores the psyche of a man confined by walls, narrating a tale of endurance while offering insights into strategic thinking. Readers follow Sinwar's role in leading Palestine through the corridors of his mind, possibly where the seeds of the Operation Al-Aqsa Flood were planted, launched on October 7, 2023. This narrative serves as a testament to the spirit of a people enduring conflict, emphasizing the personal sacrifices represented by Sinwar and his comrades. The themes of liberation and resistance provide a glimpse into the essence of a movement and the heart of one of its most enigmatic leaders. The translation of this collection ensures that Sinwar's intensity and authentic voice remain intact, proving that the power of narrative transcends language barriers. *'The Thorn and the Carnation,'* now accessible to global readers, retains the emotional depth and political insight of the original work. As Sinwar currently orchestrates strategies against Israel from Gaza, this novel emerges as essential reading for those seeking to understand the ongoing tensions in the Middle East. This is more than a story—it's a slice of history and the determination of a man who is carving his role in Palestine's geopolitical landscape. As Sinwar's strategies unfold, his novel serves as both a reflection of the past and a prophetic glimpse into the region's future.

Not just a fictional work

The novel transcends traditional storytelling, offering an unfiltered glimpse into the daily struggles and ideological battles of its characters. The narrative, as fragrant as cloves and thorny as its namesake, intertwines the lives of a Palestinian family in a coastal Gaza camp, reflecting personal affairs amid harsh realities. This gripping story connects personal fates to broader political turmoil, demonstrating how individual lives are tangibly propelled forward through national struggles. We are

introduced to Mahmoud, the elder son, who becomes a beloved figure of resistance and the story's narrator. His journey from introspection to action challenges us to understand not only the hardships ahead but also the resilience and shared bond that drive this family—and, by extension, the Palestinian people—toward hope and perseverance.

'The Thorn and the Carnation' serves as a call to understand the reality of Palestine—a narrative written by someone who refuses silence and speaks directly to the heart of the global community. It is a tale of resistance, deep cultural identity, and an unyielding pursuit of freedom and justice, as reflected in the authentic voices of its characters.

Yahya Sinwar, a key figure in Palestinian politics, is known for his leadership in Hamas and his influential role in ongoing conflicts with Israel. His novel begins just before the 1967 defeat, when the strip was under Egyptian administration. Ahmed, the narrator, holds a hopeful view of the Egyptian soldiers, believing the Arab armies would crush Israel and free Palestine, allowing the refugees to return home. However, when they are defeated, he is left in shock.

Being child of fighter does not necessarily make one noble!

The novel recounts the beginnings of resistance against Israeli occupation. Ahmed's father and uncle are killed during a battle with the Israeli army. After this, Ahmed finds himself living in a house with his mother, brothers, sister, grandfather, and cousins, whose mother had left them after remarrying. Ahmed becomes politically aware through his older brother, Mahmoud, who joins the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) while studying in Egypt but is arrested after returning. His cousin, Ibrahim, plays a similar role. Ibrahim frequently meets a character named Sheikh Ahmed (Yassin), one of the founders of Hamas, who was assassinated by Israel in 2004.

These two characters and their influence on Ahmed stand in stark contrast to Hassan, Ibrahim's brother. Hassan, who had exhibited bad behavior since childhood, escapes to Israel, where he

lives with an Israeli girl before returning to Gaza to spy for Israel. Eventually, Ibrahim kills him. Through this character, the author shows that being the child of a freedom fighter does not necessarily make one patriotic or noble!

The novel, in its 30 chapters, also portrays the difficult choice faced by some displaced Palestinians to work in Israel. Some saw it as an opportunity to improve their living conditions for their families, while others viewed it as nothing but treason.

Ahmed describes the brutality of the Israeli occupation and the innovation and resilience of Palestinian resistance. Ahmed also recounts several attempts to smuggle weapons and ammunition into Gaza, which, despite their importance, were nearly impossible to accomplish at the time. As a literary device, Sinwar uses the character of Ahmed to represent the patriotic Palestinian who does not belong to any political faction, although he, like most Arabs in general and Gazans in particular, has a religious inclination. Additionally, Sinwar uses Ahmed's innocence toward Islamist resistance to present events in an unbiased, objective manner, relying on Ibrahim's character to convey this perspective. Ibrahim, tasked with identifying Israeli agents, ends up having to kill his brother, Hassan. One of the bitter ironies in this context is the killing of Fayez, Ibrahim's close friend, who was killed by the resistance after collaborating with Israeli intelligence during the first Intifada. It is worth noting that in real life, Sinwar was responsible for identifying Israeli collaborators, and his nom de guerre was "Abu Ibrahim."

Love still endures

Throughout the novel, the life of Gazans is marked by simplicity and humility, whether in their clothing, food, or even love. In one scene, a young Ahmed sends his mother to propose on his behalf after merely receiving a glance from a love interest. The novel also depicts the persistence of Palestinians in obtaining university degrees, even under the harshest living conditions. The narrator addresses a pressing question regarding the West Bank inhabitants' reluctance

to engage in resistance until the first Intifada in 1987. The explanation offered is that if the armies of three Arab nations could not defeat Israel, how could they? Thus, they embraced a policy of "live and let live."

The book also explores the divide among Palestinians over the Oslo Accords of 1993. On one hand, Mahmoud views it as a path to reclaiming the lands lost in 1967, arguing that factions should show restraint from attacking Israel. On the other hand, Ibrahim sees it as a waste of the blood spilled by the resistance.

After the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and Netanyahu's cabinet reneging on the Oslo commitments, confrontations between Palestinians and the Israeli army flared up, validating Ibrahim's stance.

During the second Intifada, the Israeli army assassinated Ibrahim with a missile. In the final scene, Ahmed ventures out holding Yasser, Ibrahim's son, and Mahmoud carries Israa, Ibrahim's daughter, both men raising Kalashnikov rifles, symbolizing Palestinian national unity and the importance of armed struggle.

This novel should not be seen as a traditional novel. The text includes descriptions of military operations intertwined with the social life of its main character. Sinwar mentions that he wrote this quasi-novel in 2004 in Be'er Sheva prison in Israel under the title *The Thorn and the Carnation* (Al-Shawk wa Al-Qarnafil), a title often used in recent Arab biographical literature to reflect the contrasting experiences of life—love and violence, hope and despair, gentleness and strength. A more fitting title might be something like *Resistance and Faith*, or even *Faith in Resistance*.

However, Sinwar is not a novelist, and he may be appreciated as a chronicler of Gaza post-1967. Furthermore, Sinwar did not limit his thinking and work to Gaza alone but shed light on the people of the West Bank and the resistance efforts there. From reading *The Thorn and the Carnation*, one can get the sense that the events of October 7, 2023, had been long in the making.

Fruit of years in prison

Sinwar spent 23 years of his life in



'The Thorn and the Carnation' serves as a call to understand the reality of Palestine—a narrative written by someone who refuses silence and speaks directly to the heart of the global community. It is a tale of resistance, deep cultural identity, and an unyielding pursuit of freedom and justice, as reflected in the authentic voices of its characters.

