The Human Occupation & Wellbeing Journal

Book Review

Book Review: Olive Growing in Palestine: Stories of Everyday Forms of Resistance, by Juman Simaan

Chantal J. Christopher, B. OT, M. Phil Groupwork, PG Dip. HIV Clinical Management, PhD[1]

Affiliation:
[1] Discipline of Occupational Therapy
University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban
South Africa

Corresponding Author:
Dr Chantal Juanita Christopher
Email: Christopherc@ukzn.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 19/06/2026
Accepted: 09/07/2026

Article citation:
Christopher, C. (2026). Book Review: Olive Growing in Palestine- Stories of Everyday Forms of Re-sistance by Juman Simaan. *The Human Occupation & Wellbeing Journal. 2(2)* https://doi.org/10.18552/hye1ga46

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Scan QR Code to share

Simaan, J. (2026). *Olive growing in Palestine: Stories of everyday forms of re-sistance.* University of Georgia Press | 188 pages | ISBN-10: 0820374873 ISBN-13978-0820374871

The Opening

Like the author, I kept returning to this metaphor, which he wrote early in the Prologue: "…my thoughts keep turning back to the bees, returning with their nectar from across the barrier, from flowers planted by the occupiers, enjoying a freedom not possible for their human keepers…" (page 4). This metaphor centred my reading of this important book: Olive Growing in Palestine- Stories of Everyday Forms of Resistance. The metaphor threads its way through the five chapters of this book, which frame everyday resistances in Palestine through the Study of Olive Growing (chapter 1), Olive Growing for *Sutra*- doing for well-being (chapter 2), Olive Growing for *Awna*- collaborative doing (chapter 3), Olive growing for *Sumud* (chapter 4), and Everyday Resistances (chapter 5). The metaphor framed my reading of this graceful telling of the minutiae of doing in troubled times, a telling which records the lived experiences of Palestinians while navigating the political difficulties of their lives, identities, and stupefying life force (these last two words replaced my first-choice word of soul). This is an important read for readers in occupational therapy, occupational science, sociology, anthropology, decolonial studies, human rights and social justice.

A Summary

In chapter 1, the author introduces himself, places the lives of Palestinians in socio-ocultural and historical space and frames the book through occupational science and a decolonial lens. This is important as it forms the backdrop of the book and the style of writing and method of inquiry. Although in the opening paragraph the author presents (through the poet Barghouti) the complex meaning behind the act of olive growing and hence extrapolated the complexity of human doing, this appeared almost as a teaser.

Chapter 2, sought to extend the Eurocentric framing of doing and wellbeing- as noted by the author primarily through the exploration of *Sutra*. Here we feel and travel the spatial and political geography of a family's lives, reading in the everyday doing that belies: the "triad of privileged occupations" from Whalley Hammel (p.46) of self-care, work and leisure and nuancing doing as complex *Sutra*, of embedded

Copyright: © 2026. The Author/s. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work first published in *The Human Occupation & Wellbeing Journal* is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author/s or with their consent.

meaning, dignity and collective wellbeing. This resonated with me, a Global South academic and a community-based practitioner in resource-constrained contexts in South Africa and I did wonder, if this was a romanticism that I was reaching for, transplanting this concept to the local context? Was I lapsing into decontextualised borrowing by assuming that the forms of collective doing articulated through Sutra could be meaningfully transposed to my own local realities, which are shaped by both dissimilar and similar oppressions including poverty, precarity, and enduring structural inequality?

Chapter 3, and the concept of *Awna* opens with John Berger's words that remind us that paths are "tradition handed down by instructions, examples and commentary" (page 60). Here we hear narratives about reclaiming as multidimensional, sharing and connection. The author expands on *Awna* through linking it with Belonging, Bonds, Collaboration and Connection. In the closing pages of the chapter *Awna* is described as resistance particularly in response to occupational apartheid (p.89).

Chapter 4, which I had looked forward to reading as *Sumud* has crossed over to describe the contemporary condition of life for many in the Global South. Particularly for me in South Africa, the connection is clear; however, indeed in echoes and quiet lives in the Global North as well. Here, Um Nedal and Abu Nedal describe Sumud in granular detail. Interestingly, *Sumud* through the narratives is hopeful- "when you plant a tree you are saying 'I have a future" (page 97) and axiological but also action-based- a "third way" (page 98). While the author reports that Said described *Sumud* as "elementary resistance" (page 99), he expands on the understanding of *Sumud* from both an ethnographic recording as well as occupational science. This was my favourite chapter. Chapter 5, the shortest chapter, appears to provide a meta view of the previous chapters, where everyday forms of resistance are framed by the narrator in this case Abu Nedal, creating for the author both ontological and epistemological framing.

A Critical Analysis

For occupational science and scholars, this book provides a good example of how to disseminate good research and work, in a palatable and rich narrative with underlying academic rigour. The work illuminates everyday resistances with humanity and socio-political layering, making for indelible and profound reading. For people who follow the intricacies, dehumanisation and settler colonialism of contemporary Palestinian life, the tales are familiar and unnerving. For Global South residents, these everyday resistances will sound familiar and resonant to everyday resistances (in other forms) occurring seamlessly in their societies. What the book does so well is that it elevates the everyday, reminds us of the depth of our humanity and meaning-making in marginalised society while insidiously reminding us of the contrary, i.e., of the conditions, people and politics that dehumanise, marginalise, strip, kill, exploit, and plunder – driving those same everyday resistances.

This tension that did not dissipate through my reading of this easy read, consolidated a worried thought that I had failed to let go of. What if people read the book and see only the beauty and strength? What if pain, death, and undignified existences were forgotten in the hubris of recognising and elevating resistance as outside readers? Perhaps my concern is less an issue with the book than an acknowledgement of its openness. Simaan trusts readers more than I do. He offers no singular takeaway, no recipe or

axiological course, only an invitation to wrestle with the ideas on their own terms- an offer of recalibration perhaps.

The contribution and a conclusion

This book makes humanising research possible, which makes it into the mainstream consumption. It reminds us as academics what should fuel our quests for knowledge and understanding. The book, in its deep resonances to majority world conditions and lives, not only reminds us of our connections and continued struggles as humanity, but that we should not give up- aluta continua!

The telling, although not overtly political, will challenge those who hold certain beliefs and assumptions on Palestine and hopefully open new ways of seeing. In the case of texts concerned with principles such as *Sumud*, perhaps the more pressing question is whether the book helps us understand not only how people survive oppressive conditions, but how they continue to create meaning, community, and possibility within them. In this way, it gives us a rich understanding and makes invisible everyday resistances visible.

Finally, this book also opened a productive tension with my own work on "*Un-becoming"* that is currently underway. Everyday resistances are well documented as doing. However, what if it also requires *Un-becoming*? Within my theorisation, this possibility compels me to ask: What happens when survival requires unravelling, refusing, or shedding learned ways of being and enduring, or stepping outside prescribed paths and presumed fates (see Berger, p.60). There is a potentially a delicious intellectual friction here. So much to ruminate on, but first read the book.