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Ghassan Kanafani as a Revolutionary Intellectual, Humanist and Pioneer of the Literature of Resistance

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to explore Ghassan Kanafani's character as a revolutionary intellectual, humanist and pioneer of the Literature of Resistance. He is the exiled Palestinian writer who insists on voicing his distinctive identity when his writings emerge as diverse, imaginative and revolutionary in both content and style. He is the voice of the voiceless. His novels and stories have been rendered into several languages worldwide, including English, German and French. Obviously, he was influenced by his country's history and culture and that's why he has sought to reconstruct that history, set the record straight and reclaim the lost homeland. An understanding and appreciation of his literary works must be dealt with from within the political and literary contexts of the twentieth century that overtook the Arab world in general and the land of Palestine in particular. His creative writings reflect the dignity, defiance, steadfastness and human resilience of its Palestinian people who have been living under harsh circumstances of displacement and dispossession since 1917 with still nowhere to flee to, even in the sun.

Key words: resistance, literature, Palestine, revolutionary, humanist.

غسان كنفاني المفكر الثائر والانسان الرائد في أدب المقاومة

الملخص:

هذا البحث هو محاولة لفهم شخصية غسان كنفاني المفكر الثائر والانسان الرائد في مجال أدب المقاومة. انه الكاتب الفلسطيني المنفي والمصر على التعبير عن هويته البارزة من خلال كتاباته المتنوعة فكريا وثوريا في كل من الأسلوب والمضمون. انه حقا صوت من لا صوت لهم. وقد ترجمت رواياته وقصصه لعدة لغات عالمية كالإنجليزية والألمانية والفرنسية. من الواضح أنه تأثر بتاريخ وثقافة شعبه، لذلك فهو حاول أن يعيد تأصيل هذا التاريخ لاسترجاع الوطن المسلوب. ان فهم وتحليل أعماله الادبية يجب أن لا يكون بمعزل عن السياق الأدبي والسياسي للقرن العشرين في العالم العربي بشكل عام وفي فلسطين بشكل خاص. وبالفعل فان كتاباته الابداعية تعكس كرامة وتحدي وصمود شعبه الذي يمر بظروف قاسية من النزوح والحرمان منذ عام 1917 مع عدم وجود مكان للهروب اليه حتى الى الشمس.

كلمات مفتاحية: مقاومة، أدب، فلسطين، ثوري، إنساني

Introduction:

A freedom fighter, humanist, and devoted military resistant, no other Palestinian author could conceptualize and embody Kanafani's ideological politics with such a profound faithfulness to cultural analysis and literary creation. As a writer and journalist he wrote short stories, novels, plays and political writings. In his diverse writings, he criticizes "Zionist literature" and defends what he called "Palestinian resistance poetry". That's why one can regard him as a clear example of a politically committed and engaged Palestinian intellectual. The *Daily Star* described him well after his assassination: "a commando who never fired a gun: his weapon was a ballpoint pen and his arena newspaper pages. And he hurt the enemy more than a column of commandos." (Harlow, 1987, P11)

It is not strange that the Israeli authorities prevented a Palestinian acting group in Nazareth in 1977 from staging Ghassan Kanfani's novella *Men in the Sun* (1962). The occupation authorities did not even allow the actors to start their performance on stage and was about to send them to jail. Actually the writer of the novella is a Palestinian writer who was murdered in a car bomb by Israeli intelligent men in Beirut in 1972 (killing his niece as well). It is not astonishing for regimes to repress literature if it does not conform to its ideology, but manslaughter is a serious decision which requires much more cautious scrutiny. Why would the Zionist entity feel endangered to go as far as murdering an author like Ghassan Kanafani? Is it simply because of his creative writing which is a threat to the so called state of Israel or what? Indeed, his artistic works, a reaction to the deprivation of the native land and the creation of a Zionist entity on most parts of the original land of Palestine, sheds the light on such notions of the painful past, identity, patriotism, suffering, and the role literature should play in the freedom and return journey. Elucidating this significant matter, one should not only examine the writings of this great and creative author but also explore his mentality and analyze how his works have turned out to be a source of inspiration for the Palestinian resistance movement. This paper is an attempt to shed some light on Kanafani as a revolutionary thinker and founder of the literature of resistance with special reference to his two influential texts, namely *Men in the Sun* and *Returning to Haifa*. My goal in this paper is to explain how such a dedicated literature of Kanafani represents the strong will and determination of an oppressed nation whose yearning for homeland, justice and freedom will never fade or decline.

Actually what does distinguish Ghassan Kanafani from other Palestinian authors is his revolutionary and daring philosophy which encourages the masses not to submit to their conditions and to enhance their abilities to seek a new and promising future. This could be only attained by constantly searching for new possibilities to create decent life for Palestinians living under the

occupation or in exile and diaspora as refugees. Due to the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe) and its traumatic ramifications, the exiled Palestinians were desperately searching for their lost beloved ones and trying their best to launch contacts with those who endured the shock and remained in 1948 Palestine. Thus, in his *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and other Palestinian Stories* Kanafani was the first to take the lead and disapprove this somewhat passive response when he implicitly addressed his people to be in a stand by position to encounter the new calamities. “The only thing we know is that tomorrow will be no better than today and that we are waiting on the banks, yearning, for a boat that will not come. We are sentenced to be separated from everything – except from our own destruction.” (Kanafani, 2000, P5) At first glance on the previous quote, one may notice that our author holds a gloomy vision of the Palestinian situation; however, it is a cry and an appeal for his people not to be obsessed with their past or present conditions because the coming future will never be better as long as they continue behaving in the same manner of silence and passiveness. Comparatively speaking, the oppressed Palestinians assumed a passionate and nostalgic vision of Palestine, mourning the enforced departure and separation from everything including their own close relatives, possessions and native home. This expected and ordinary response to the tragedy was driven by the miserable economic situations in the refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and in several locations of the Arab world. According to Kanafani, nonetheless, it was vital to stop moaning, mourning and complaining which would at the end of the day lead to no solutions but further suffering and sadness as can be best seen in his *Men in the Sun* in particular.

In his article *Palestinian Literature: Occupation and Exile*, Salam Mir argues that “many Palestinian refugees, moreover, were able to relatively overcome their economic difficulties through education and hard work.” (Mir, 2013, P125) The Arab oil rich countries offered a unique opportunities and venues to many industrious and hardworking Palestinians. Such an experience of competitiveness and advancement also filter into the literature. For example, Ghassan Kanafani who was raised up in a refugee camp in Syria would later become a teacher in that same place. Then, he moved to Kuwait to teach and write as well. His novella *Men in the Sun* (1962) depicts the contentious attempt and tragic death of three Palestinian refugees who are being trafficked into Kuwait seeking job chances. The novella is one of Kanafani's influential texts where he also dramatizes the self-centered tendency of some people who are willing to feed off the calamity and exploit the others, for their own material benefits. Kanafani's next novel *Returning to Haifa* (1970) stresses the urgent need for resisting the Zionist occupation throughout the story of the couple Said and Saffiya, who insist on returning back to Haifa to look for and reclaim their lost house and child

Khaldun. Kanafani's journey of writing about Resistance literature comes to record his move from *Men in the Sun*'s hopelessness to *Returning to Haifa*'s promising and great expectations. It shows his shift from a somewhat naturalist portrayal of powerlessness and futility to a more dynamic manner of steadfastness and counter-hegemonic fight.

Kanafani's Culture of Resistance in his *Men in the Sun*

Men in the Sun is a typical representation of the helplessness and suffering of the dispossessed, exiled and stateless Palestinians. When published in 1962, Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* was received together with praise and criticism, even shock. Readers are familiar with the following proverbial lines from his *Men in the Sun*.

“The thought slipped from his mind and ran onto his tongue: "Why didn't they knock on the sides of the tank?" He turned right round once, but he was afraid he would fall, so he climbed into seat and leaned his head on the wheel. "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?" The desert suddenly began to send back the echo: "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?" (Kanafani, 1999, P74)

Obviously, the previous quote is full of angry and astonishing ‘Whys’ asked by Abul Khairazan—the truck driver in the story—who pleads to the dead bodies he places in the Kuwaiti desert, “couldn’t you say anything?” (Ibid, 74) Ironically enough, some of Kanafani's characters had expressed themselves in a completely different way as they pursued their troubled and exhausting journey from Iraq to a somewhat uncertain life in Kuwait. According to Barbara Harlow, the aforementioned lines from *Men in the Sun* triggered “an initial furor of critical response” (Harlow, 2012, 10) At that time, the Novel's readers questioned why and in what sense should Palestinians be characterized as the helpless sufferers or castaways, unintentionally smothered to perdition and annihilation in the heart of the desert between Iraq and Kuwait? One may ponder Why Palestinians in particular are depicted as the undesired and undeserved something of a central description, a global procedure that had disastrously transferred its Palestinians heroes into wretched asylum seekers and unlucky money-making refugees, searching for a humble and barely rewarded employment in the rich gulf countries?

Some critics and readers might argue that the general mood in Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* is that of hopelessness and in *Returning to Haifa* is that of great expectations. It shows his transfer from a portrayal of vulnerability and vainness to a more active mood of resistance and counter colonial

struggle. In a nutshell, *Men in the Sun* is a typical depiction of the painful outcome of the sense of dispossession. The end of the plot is the tragic and ironic death of the three exiled Palestinians where their corpses were emptied on a pile of rubbish in the middle of the desert. They lived unknown and died unknown as their absolute weakness and failure to meet the challenges of the exile is an indication of the struggle of getting rid of the stateless alienation and isolation. They were immersed in their own individual pasts and lives to the extent that their unity is thus never achieved. Their only shared act leads to death which is the end of the story line. Death sometimes could be a solution or a counter action but here it is quiet the opposite, as if being completely passive. And that's why they didn't bang on the walls of the tank and remained silent. In his *Man is A Cause: Political Consciousness and the Fiction of Ghassan Kanafani*, the critic Muhammad Siddiq claims that this proverbial question resonates at the end as he suggests that: "For fear of drawing the attention of the outside world to their existence, they succumb to their death without a single knock on the walls of the empty tank" (Siddiq, 1984, P87) The title's passive tense even evokes a sense of resignation and submission that they will be always men in the sun haunted by that similar condition.

In this regard, Mary N. Layoun claims that the novella's structural patterns "are rather ominous portents of the narrative fate of four Palestinians." (Layoun, 1990, P189) It is to a great extent a working class novel about homeless migrant refugees. In terms of comparison between the principal characters, it indicates a move in Palestinian literature from Jabra's intellectual characters to Kanafani's poor and deprived heroes. This same point is articulated by Radwa Ashur in her amazing study of Kanafani's fiction when she states that "In most of Kanafani's stories the national question is connected with the class question. Kanafani creates many crushed characters that throb with life and that testify to their creator's existential and intellectual conviction that the tragedy of losing a homeland is first of all a tragedy of the poor." (Ashur, 1977, P40) Rustic environment and intimate nostalgia to the land can be noticed in the first sentence: "Abu Qais rested on the damp ground, and the earth began to throb under him with tired heartbeats, which trembled through the grains of sand and penetrated the cells of his body." (Kanafani, P21) Whenever he breathed the fragrance of the land, as he lay on it, he imagined he was sniffing his wife's hair when walking out of the bathroom. These reflections, reminiscences of longing and interaction, are juxtaposed with the harsh reality of the present where he:

“Turned himself over and lay on his back, cradling his head in his hands. He started to stare at the sky. It was blazing white, and there was one black bird circling high up, alone and aimless. He did not know why, but he was suddenly filled with a bitter feeling of being a stranger, and for a moment he thought he was on the point of weeping.” (Ibid, P21-22)

Throughout the novella, there is an obvious contrast between the past and the present. One can infer that the past is a time of dignity, existence and memories of resistance and sacrifice which can be noticed through the teacher Salem. (Abu Qais’ school teacher) These are juxtaposed with the absurd waiting for nothing, feeling of loss and alienation of the present:

“In the last ten years you have done nothing but wait. You have needed ten big hungry years to be convinced that you have lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your village. People have been making their own way during these long years, while you have been squatting like an old dog in a miserable hut. What do you think you were waiting for?” (Ibid, P26)

Like Samuel Becket’s play *Waiting for Godot*, the general atmosphere in *Men in the Sun* is quite about waiting and the unwillingness to change or to start doing something to change one’s situation to the better. The idea indirectly articulated by Kanafani is that our world is unfortunately dominated by cash nexus and self-interest with no social justice or solidarity whether from the Arab regimes or the international community. In this case, it is not an easy task for the Palestinian victims to overcome the painful realities of exile, diaspora and isolation. However, they themselves are required to search for realistic alternatives and solutions. Aimless waiting and weeping will never return one back to his/her own village and home country. That’s why Kanafani cried in anger at the end of the novella “Why did not they knock on the walls of the tank” raising his voice against the purposeless silence and the scandal of weaknesses, helplessness and dispossession. As if shouting and requesting from his characters to get up and live the life of the phoenix.

Having said that, one may also add that the implied and symbolic significance of the Novella is to inaugurate and spread a new culture of resistance among all Palestinians which would proceed in two interrelated tracks; primarily, a refusal of any endeavor to regulate the refugee case, either by offering citizenships or job opportunities in the neighboring states they are in or compensations. Condemning and criticizing backward Arab governments and the way they deal with the Palestinians, the novella signifies that a promising and a hopeful future can be only accomplished at home. The tragic death of the main three characters in the water tank at the end of the novella obviously reveals Ghassan’s conception that he, as well as his fellow Palestinians, are unhappy with their status and that it is a matter of must to start acting doing something practical to live a decent

life as the other human beings. But how can they start working towards this better future? What is to be done? Simply speaking this can be achieved by becoming freedom fighters and joining the resistance and liberation movements. As a resistant writer, Kanafani believes that the armed struggle is the most appropriate means to liberate the stolen land given that Palestinians have nothing to lose but everything to gain. Instead of living their plight in diaspora as economic migrants, Kanafani's characters need to be transformed to become genuine resistance fighters. Thus Kanafani's novella occupies a crucial place in the emergence of the modern Palestinian history of struggle, its challenged contribution to a global narrative of nationalist aspirations and universal revolutions. The model of suffering and oppression set in so dramatically and terribly by Kanafani's characters in *Men in the Sun* continues to resonate in a contemporary setting we are living nowadays and is manifested by the unjust US destruction of the Middle East, Israeli military bombings of Gaza, and international double standards. As a vibrant remnant of resistance, the question of Palestine casts lots of challenges in front of the international community and Arab modern regimes.

The Culture of Resistance in *Returning to Haifa* (1969) and Kanafani's Humanism

Here, we can encounter different values and viewpoints regarding Kanafani's stand where he appears to be actively humanist, hopeful and looking for solutions. The repeated Whys in *Men in the Sun* are replaced by how and when in *Returning to Haifa*. What is dominant here is the current confrontation and conflict with the enemy on a daily basis. There is a strong desire and willingness among the main characters to change, to act and transform their conditions rather than submission or waiting. In other words, if *Men in the Sun* is about the acceptance of status quo and reality, *Returning to Haifa* is about their mindful awakening. The ironic return of the main characters Said and his wife Safiyya, after almost twenty years of life in the exile and diaspora, is part of a broader historical dimension. Actually their return or revisit opens the wounds again of the Arab defeat in 1948 and its ramifications. That's why the novel begins with their silence and traumatic shock. Out of a sudden their suppressed past erupts in front of them as though was forced by a volcano. Reading the initial parts of the novel, one may assume that *Returning to Haifa* seems to be a more romantic novel about a couple who are desperate to return back to their lovely old home before the tragedy. Their foremost primary aim from returning back towards their lost home was to find out what happened to their infant son Khaldun whose destiny has troubled them for twenty years. But if we examine their minds and hearts from a psychoanalytical point of view, we would rather claim

that their aim is not just to search for their lost son but to tell Zionists and non-Zionists that the displaced and refugee Palestinians have got every single right to return and live in their homeland, Palestine. The portrayal of Said's and Safiyya's feelings emphasizes this notion in the text. Moreover, *Returning to Haifa* is a revolutionary novel, encouraging the Palestinians to put the gloomy past aside and exert much efforts to live the moment and think how to create a better future for their coming generations. This is very noticeably demonstrated when Said asks himself and his wife a critical question "what is homeland?" (Kanafani, P5) and the answer comes from Kanafani's refusal of the reality of Palestinians "Do you know what the homeland is, Safiyya, homeland is a place where none of this can happen" (Ibid, P6). Said comprehends in the end of the day that what he looked for was not strong enough to regain homeland; he went back reflecting on his rusty dusty reminiscences and could not get what he anticipated: "For us, for you and me, it's only a search for something buried beneath the dust of memories. And look what we found beneath that dust. Yet more dust." (Ibid, P7)

The astonishment and surprise of the couple when witnessing and meeting their son and soul Khaldun wearing an Israeli army uniform and defending Israel is undoubtedly one of the most touching and dramatic scenes in the novel. Kanafani makes use of the dialogue between Said and his son Khaldun (now Dove) to convey a significant theme that what happened in 1948 should not be only remembered in terms of romantic values. "My wife asks if the fact that we're cowards gives you the right to be this way. As you can see, she innocently recognizes that we were cowards." (Ibid, P8) Concluding this dramatic dialogue, Said declares that his other son Khalid has already joined the resistance movement. It is this declaration in particular that provides hopeful optimism to Said and Safiyya and to most Palestinians; it is joining the freedom fighters movements. We can also infer from the text that Kanafani seems to articulate the idea that no human being should be forcibly expelled from his/her home and no human being has a right to force another into a life of exile and poverty. In this case, if the international community endorses and believes in such universal and ethical values, then the Palestinian case would be resolved and the occupation would be ended. It is this same idea that Edward Said called "the Palestinian idea":

"I had to keep saying that Palestinians were not only the opponents and victims of Zionism, they also represented an alternative: This was what they embodied in fighting for the idea of Palestine, non-exclusive, secular, democratic, tolerant, ...not about colonizing and dispossessing people but about liberating them. I was always trying to abide by universal principles and yet be critical at the same time." (Said, 1995, Pxix)

The novel's actions are mainly built on flashbacks as a distinctive stylistic device though it also contains some authorial intervention and digressions. The most painful part of the couples' calamity is the fact that when they were forced (because of the bombings and killings) to escape their home, they were also forced to abandon their infant boy Khaldun. Thus and luckily, the two Jewish migrants Miriam and Iphrat Koshen not only got a house but also found a son inside the house where they gave him a new name which is Dove. Dove was raised up by the Jewish couple and he is now a soldier in the so called Zionist army. That's how he does appear on the stage in Ghanam's recent dramatization of *Returning to Haifa*, as a completely Jewish soldier wearing military uniform and with no passions or feelings whatsoever towards his biological parents, Said and Safiyya. The first ironic and dramatic meeting between the two families raised questions about homeland, loss, parenthood, humanism and adoption. In this regard, Radwa Ashur argues that Mariam is the 'first humanized depiction of the enemy in Arabic literature.' (Ashur, 1977, P145) Kanafani tells us her story in a very honest and straightforward way with all its sophisticated dimensions. Mariam is a holocaust survivor who ends up migrating to Palestine in 1948, and quickly resolves to leave when she witnesses the atrocities and crimes committed by the Jewish army against the innocent and indigenous Palestinians. For example, when she sees two Zionist soldiers throwing a dead Palestinian child into the back of a truck, her husband Iphram asks her: "How did you know it was an Arab child?" She replies "Did not you see how they threw it onto the truck, like a piece of wood? If it had been a Jewish child they would never have done that" (Kanafani, P169) She could not accept or even tolerate this kind of degrading and savage behavior against the others. It is her love and sympathy with the infant and the victim Khaldun which keeps her in Palestine. By this sort of portrayal Kanafani was drawing a line between Zionism and humanism. Simply speaking, Mariam is a representation of human being who has nothing to do with Zionist ideology or discourse. Obviously this idea might not be welcomed by Arab or Palestinian readers, the idea of accepting Mariam (the other) as a non-Zionist Jewish migrant. Mariam occupies a house and she is fully aware that this house does not belong to her but to somebody else as if she feels that she is a stranger or outsider. Accordingly, she directly informs Said and Safiyya when they finally return and knock on the door: "I have been expecting you for a long time,you are the owners of this house. I know that." (Kanafani, 163) One might argue here that such a depiction of self-realization and truth telling does invite the readers to consider the humanity of the Other. Of course, this kind of discourse seems somewhat strange, controversial and difficult to be grasped at least to modern Arab and Palestinian readers. However, Kanafani the humanist insinuates that Mariam's humanity should not be ignored regardless of the fact that in practical terms she is, in the eyes of the couple

and in hers as well, an outsider and a colonizer. This concept of humanity is even deepened when Kanafani suggests implicitly that any kind of solution to the case should take into consideration the reality of the situation and the preservation of human dignity for all human beings in the region. This notion does not contradict with what comes at the end of the novel when the protagonist Said arouses the need of armed struggle and that another military confrontation is required in order to put an end to this long and painful conflict. If we re-examine the last few pages of the novel, we may deduce that at a certain stage Kanafani would appear to be so close to an ethical rather than an armed confrontation. One of the significant themes of the novel is to highlight the Palestinian existence and plight and not to repudiate or cancel that of the other. This could be one of the reasons behind the popularity of the novel (and its adaptations into a play by the Cameri theatre in Israel) among some of objective Jews themselves. Mention can be made here to the essential dialogue between Said the father and Dove the son when Said tells him: “Man, in the final analysis, is a cause. That’s what you said. And it’s true. But what cause that’s the question!.” (Ibid, P183) Thus he continues:

“When are you going to stop considering that the weaknesses and the mistakes of the others are endorsed over to the account of your own prerogatives? You must come to understand things as they should be understood. I know that one day you will realize these things, and that you will realize that the greatest crime any human being can commit, whoever he may be, is to believe even for one moment that weakness and mistakes of the others give him the right to exist at their expense and to justify his own mistakes and crimes.” (Ibid, P185)

To Kanafani, Palestinians are human beings with national aspiration to live on their home land like the other human beings; they don’t want the sun or the moon. And they resist to live and exist.

The Intellectual Encounter between Ghassan Kanafani and Franz Fanon

In fact, Kanafani is pretty much like Franz Fanon in terms of ideology when believing in armed resistance and that what has been taken by force must be restored by force. He had the making of a Fanon when he combined Fanon’s theoretical and political commitments with a conception of culture that is universal, internationalist, and humanist. As articulated in his *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon’s conception of culture applies to Kanafani: “National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension...It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows.” (Fanon, 2001, P199) Fanon was precise when he addressed the Algerians in 1960 that just to substitute an Algerian

policeman for French one is not the aim of the revolution: a change of consciousness is. The state here is not a dictatorial entity but a legitimately instituted group fighting the injustices of social and political systems of hegemony. Kanafani's and Fanon's point is that culture too is entwined in this far-reaching struggle for humanist expression. By reacting to Palestinian and Arab history, mainly to the rise of the revolutionary stream with which he came to be linked, Kanafani engraved out his own unique philosophy in front of his readers and admirers as realist and revolutionary. In his *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* Roger Allan commented on the outcome in a very concise way when he said about Kanafani:

“No modern Arab novelist has been able to project the tragedy of the Palestinian people in fiction with greater impact than Ghassan Kanafani. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that he devoted his life to the illustration in both fact and fiction of the circumstances of the Palestinians and to the investigation of the complexities of Arab attitudes to them.” (Allan, 1995, P147)

Kanafani's main interest and passion was to literature and journalism where, as a school teacher in Damascus and Kuwait, he wrote fiction and political revolutionary journalism for the Arab Nationalist Movement. Reflecting on his writing, one would argue that he was not in favor of art for art's sake, but art for the sake of society. Literature should be used to build up and rehabilitate any given community. Thus he was influenced by what was going on around in the area which created a shift from intellectual skepticism to self-generated expectations as he once put it in an interview:

“My political position springs from my being a novelist. In so far I am concerned, politics and the novel are an indivisible case and I categorically state that I became politically committed because I am a novelist, not the opposite. I started writing the story of my Palestinian life before I found a clear political position or joined any organization.” (See Stefan Wild, 1975, P13)

Obviously and according to Kanafani, literature had got the upper hand and it did not only precede politics but led to it. This means that his literary involvement with Palestinians realities of misery and deprivation urged him to act politically, acknowledging both the importance and uniqueness of the artwork. Reality, not literary movements or schools, had a great and remarkable impact on his fiction and writings. The Palestinian case would require practical solutions through the sort of politics that is deeply informed by the circumstances of Palestinian actual life that he examined in his fiction. He wanted to bring about an end to the occupation through fiction which in turn is based on the truth hoping that his fiction would have the same influence on others; hence the urgency and proximity of his work.

From Realism to Universalism

The transfer from Palestinian realism to Palestinian universalism can be touched when he represents Palestine as a comprehensive human symbol for humanity at large. So when he writes about a Palestinian family, he is in reality writing about a human experience. There isn't an event in the world that is not represented in the Palestinian tragedy. In other words, when he depicts the suffering of Palestinians, he is in fact exploring the Palestinians as a symbol of misery in the entire world. The distinctive aspect about Palestinians is the miserable conditions, abject poverty and ongoing displacement that they share with others elsewhere. The common thing that marks them is their human wretchedness and oppression. To Kanafani, Palestinians are types of human sufferers who, by their strong will and determination, later become prototypes of revolutionary fighters. They exemplify particular conditions and universal values that address all human oppression, injustice and suffering. Kanafani developed this general and universal tendency in his own literature before it became a conscious political commitment in his post 1967 internationalism. He also explored it in his literary critical writing under the heading of what he entitled 'resistance literature' or what we can call combative literature moving from a sense of despair in *Men in the Sun* to participatory challenge and defiance in *Returning to Haifa* as an outcome of 1967 *Naksa* (defeat or relapse).

Palestinian Resistance Literature 1948-1968

In his long essay *Palestinian Resistance Literature 1948-1968*, Kanafani argues that a representation for committed literature is to be found in the works of Palestinian writers living inside Palestine 1948 (Israel) such as Emile Habiby, Samih al-Qasem, Rashed Hussein and Mahmoud Darwish. (Kanafani, 1998) In fact, Kanafani lifted the suffocating cultural and political siege imposed by Israel on 1948 Palestinian writers and as Darwish put it, 'declared their poetic birth' in the Arab world. What is significant about such authors is not only their resistance for the occupation but also their cultural commitment and conscious challenge to social and political authority. Kanafani believes that 1948 Palestinian writers produced "literature that doesn't moan or cry, doesn't surrender to despair and avoids the phenomena of subjective romantic setbacks (Naksat) seen in most Arabic poetry these days". (Kanafani, P133) What is required here is a deep and responsible consciousness that provides a model for commitment and engagement that All Arab writers should follow. In order to overturn the Arab defeat, we do need a coherent challenge in

politics and a realist commitment in literature. Kanafani's particular art is an authentication to that. The best answer to defeat the imperial hegemony is the public effective resistance.

Moreover, Kanafani doesn't underestimate the value of individual responsibility but he takes a different course when he thinks that resistance literature has particular critical definitional values and perspective artistic qualities. Kanafani's *Palestinian Resistance Literature* can be portrayed as both a historical explanation of literary form and advocacy. Indeed, he is the pioneer to provide a clear analysis of this particular strand of Palestinian literature and to bring it into focus as committed and didactic literature. Its objective environment of possibility as cultural form of confrontation and struggle are thus explained. The two main subjects which can be drawn here are the cultural and political siege under the military administration and peasant rural social sway of life. Kanafani illustrates the essential conversion in remnant Palestinian society brought about by the 1948 *Nakba*. (Catastrophe) Since all key cities were dispossessed and almost evacuated, Palestinians who remained there were mostly left in isolated and separated villages, without the intellectual and political leadership of urban centers. Needles to mention the unjust military siege imposed during the Israeli military administration from 1948 to 1966 which disallowed free movement, constrained political expression and assembly, and cut off the remnant off from its natural Arab environment and cultural horizon.

To Kanafani, this 'cultural siege' has its own peculiar features such as: a social situation of deprivation that obviates against the production of art; cultural severance from modern Arab literary trends; the military authority spreading its own distorted literature; restricted publishing outlets, subjected to strict control by the Israeli censorship; and finally a weak command of foreign languages leading to additional isolation from world literature. (Kanafani, P11-12) As a ramification of the siege, the 1948 Palestinian writers missed the boat of poetic performance and free verse that was very common in Beirut and Baghdad and found themselves pushed towards making use of traditional cultural forms for more urgent and instant political purposes: those of defending and maintaining Arab culture and identity under the threat of obliteration. According to Kanafani, this produced 'a popular poetry' where poets reflect their social and political affiliations within popular movements such as Communism and Arab nationalism. In such resistance poetry the principal theme was going against the Israeli oppression and its deliberate misrepresentation of collective Palestinian identity. Regardless of their pain and deep wounds, being alienated and marginalized, orphaned and forced into minority status by the *Nakba*, abandoned and besieged, the

Palestinian poets challenged their oppressor in both poetry and politics. That's why Kanafani believes that this resistance poetry is as vital as armed struggle itself considering it the foundation that nurtures vibrant resistance. He praises the 'combatant writer' whose art he describes as leftist, anti-imperialist, and socially progressive:

"In the period between 1948 and 1968, Arab intellectuals in occupied Palestine presented, under the worst conditions of repression and cultural imprisonment, a historical model of resisting culture, with all its awareness, consciousness, steadfastness, and steeliness. More importantly, with all its continuity, upsurge, and depth." (Kanafani, P85)

It is the writer's mission to use his/her art in order to promote liberating social and political values at the same time. Accordingly, committed literature has two main characteristics that Arab writers should abide by. First, it is connected to 'a social horizon' and is faithful to 'the toiling classes' who bear arms and safeguard the destiny of the resistance. Second, it is committed to 'revolutions of liberation' around the world. (Kanafani, 147) In his *Resistance Poetry as Seen by Ghassan Kanafani*, Kanafani argues that loftier literature is politically and socially revolutionary and committed humanistically. (Kanafani, 1970, 140) What distinguishes Kanafani's literature is its political and humanist aspect that can be touched in his fiction and writing. For him, for example, Zionist literature is propagandistic literature as it forces anti-humanist ideological positions on its characters, legitimizing and justifying both Zionism and the eraser of Palestinian rights and presence. Both the 'humanist value' of art and its artistic quality are shrunk and nearly distorted by such Zionist constraints. It is almost the opposite with the Palestinian literature because it is based on a just struggle against colonial authority. This means that the most appropriate way for Kanafani to resolve the artistic conflict between the two nationalisms (the Zionist and the Palestinian) is through their correlation with humanism. Being humanist, the Palestinian is acceptable and enlightened while the Zionist is unacceptable and intolerant because of being anti-humanist. As he indirectly states in his *Returning to Haifa*, justifiability depends on the sort of issue one would like to defend. I can simply assert here that the Palestinian case is anti-colonial and anti-oppressive while the Zionist one is colonial and dispossessing. Any realistic depiction has to take this into consideration if it wants to be faithful to the truth. The charge against Zionist literature is that it distorts the truth and fabricates the realities as it is simply built on unjust and unjustified cause. And this is how Kanafani supports his own moral, literary and political obligations; on the basis of universal freedom and social justice. Resistance literature should challenge the oppressive powers and seek to build up a better future for the native people. This is a central ethic or value we

can figure out in his Resistance Literature which is a message of hope and anticipation that living a decent life can be achieved via struggle. As mentioned by Milton in his epic poem *Paradise Lost* Long and hard is the way, and I would continue by adding: but there is hope.

Conclusion

To conclude, as one regards Palestine and the role of imaginative literature in what may be conceptualized as part of the national liberation struggle, it is fair to assert that Kanafani is a leading nationalist as well as a brilliant writer who has been credited for coining the term ‘Resistance Literature.’ As a revolutionary resistant writer he helped the resistance movement become more common among the masses and the oppressed who believe that resistance is the most appropriate way of changing their life and future to the better. Resistance literature is expected to play an overt political role which means that it is a means of struggle against the colonial imperialist authorities and it can transform the legacy of loss and dispossession into creative possibilities. As well as becoming an inspiration for the Palestinian revolution, his writing has become a landmark and an example in modern Arabic literature in general and in modern Palestinian literature in particular. In fact, Kanafani’s contribution and influence on modern Arabic literature lies in his legacy as the founder and pioneer of the literature of resistance. His art as well as his culture are revolutionary ones which will become an active armament alongside other weapons in the long fight of revolution to gain liberty and freedom. His Palestinian literature of resistance is at the heart of the Palestinian struggle. Indeed, his literature is a faithful mirror reflecting the Palestinian reality.

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