

Kanafani, Ghassan. Introduction to *al-Adab al-Muqawama*. Translated by Sulafah Hijjawi. Baghdad: Directorate General of Culture, 1968.

The fall of Palestine to the Zionists in 1948 led to a disastrous change both in the number and the social structure of the Arab population in occupied Palestine. Nearly three quarters of the 200,000 Arabs who continued to live in their homeland were peasants. The cities were mostly evacuated either during the war or soon afterwards. This led to a shocking deterioration in Arab social conditions due to the fact that the cities had been the centers of both political and cultural effusion.

As the Zionist occupants closed their military ring, they started to impose their oppressive measures; the atmosphere was convenient for them. Their chief purpose was to eradicate every trace of the Arab personality and to implant the seeds of new trends which might grow and integrate within the Zionist political and literary life.

Palestinian Literature, up to this tragic fall had been part of the mainstream of the Arab literary movement which flourished during the first half of the century. It had got its sources from and had been influenced by Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese writers who led the literary movement then. Even renowned Palestinian writers had been indebted for their fame mostly to the Arab capitals which used to receive them and patronise their productions. Several factors had in fact contributed to diminishing the value of Palestinian literature at a time when Palestine was enjoying a prominent position in the political arena and the struggle for Arab nationalism.

After 1948, Palestinian literature succeeded in laying the foundations of a new literary movement which may be better described as the literature of Exile rather than Palestinian or Refugee literature. Poetry, the chief element of this movement, has been able during recent years to witness a remarkable progress in quality and technique. The short period of silence after the 1948 war was followed by a great awakening, and national poetry poured out reflecting the people's national fervor. It interacted with Arab and foreign literary trends and gradually broke the traditional rules of technique, rejected the old sentimental outbursts and emerged with a unique feeling of profound sadness more commensurate with the realities of the situation.

On the other hand, resistance literature inside occupied Palestine was confronted, with radical differences in tenets. The backbone of Arab literature

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in Occupied Palestine had disappeared with the emigration of a whole generation of writers and men of culture. The non--emigrants constituted a society which was mostly rural and was subjected to Political, social and cultural persecution unmatched anywhere else in the world.

The following points may shed some light on the real situation of the Arabs inside occupied Palestine:

1. The majority of the Palestinians who remained were not, owing to their social condition, up to the cultural standard which allows for the creation of a new generation of writers and artists.
2. The Arab cities which used to receive and encourage the talented young men coming from the rural sector were transformed into prohibited cities of the enemy.
3. The Arab population was completely isolated and had no contact with the Arab countries.
4. The Zionist military rule imposed on the Arab population tyrannical restrictions, and censored their literary productions.
5. Publishing and distribution means have been either limited or under tight restrictions.
6. Opportunity for Arabs to learn foreign languages is nonexistent. Very few are allowed to enter high schools and almost none are allowed to enter university.

It should be borne in mind when reading the literature which has been able to emerge, that the Arab population has been struggling through the dim night of persecution and torture to consolidate its existence and to express itself. It has now succeeded in forming its own expression crystallising it into a palpitating literature of resistance.

Under this hard siege, it is quite easy to realise why poetry was the first harbinger of the resistance call, for poetry spreads from mouth to mouth and lives without publication. This also explains why this poetry was at the beginning restricted to the traditional form which is easier to learn by heart and quicker to appeal to the sentiments. The first outburst was mainly characterised with love lyrics, but side by side with the traditional poetry,

popular vernacular lyrics began to appear to form the first kernel of resistance manifestation. In fact, popular poetry played a big role in the history of Palestine since the twenties and was famous all over the Arab world. Nearly every Palestinian knows and recites the following popular lyric which was extemporised by a Palestinian struggler just before he was executed by the British Mandate in 1936:

Night, stay a little longer, until the captive
Finishes his song.
By dawn, his wing will flutter
And the hanged man will swing
In the wind.
Night, lessen your pace,
Let me pour my heart to you,
Perhaps you forgot who I am and what my
troubles are.
Pity, how my hours have slipped
Down your hands.
Do not think I weep from fear,
My tears are for, my country
And for a bunch of fledglings
Hungry at home
Without a father.
Who will feed them after me?
And my two brothers,
Before me swung on the scaffold.
And how will my wife spend her days,
Lonely and in tears?
I did not even leave her bracelet
In her wrist
When my country cried for arms.

Popular lyrics dominated the scene for almost ten years after 1948 before any standard well developed literature appeared. It was the medium by which the defeated people expressed themselves. It dominated every manifestation of their life. Wedding mornings, evening sittings and all other gatherings were transformed by the effect of those lyrics into fierce demonstrations heedless of the firing squads. Many popular poets were put in prison or confined under severe restrictions. And as the trend of popular poetry grew and expanded, the occupying forces extended their tyrannical, measures, killed some poets and prohibited all Arab gatherings. Such measures could not anyhow uproot this trend of resistance but rather kept it dormant for almost five years to

burst anew with intense force and vitality. With the beginning of the sixties, surprisingly enough, a remarkable new wave of literature appeared to light. The tenets of this new wave were courageous, full of vitality and optimism and highly charged with the spirit of defiance, unlike the literature of the exile poets of the same period, which was mostly sad and vehement.

The decade which preceded this new outburst can better be described as the period of integration of the personality and the identification of the Arab personality with the cause of struggle.

The defeated and the helpless that had resorted to love poetry during the few years which followed 1948 began at the advent of the sixties to develop into a real force of resistance, dauntless, brave and hopeful.

Love poetry was the outcome of the bitter feelings of loneliness and deprivation which overwhelmed the Arab population after 1948. The feeling that they were a defeated minority began with the passage of time to change into a feeling of defiance, and they succeeded in confronting their hard circumstances face to face.

Resistance was not an easy choice; it was rather a daily battle with a ferocious enemy who considered it a question of life and death. And as the measures of persecution became fiercer, resistance consolidated. Contrary to the poetry of exile, the poetry of resistance emerged with an astonishing revolutionary spirit completely free from the sad and tearful trend. Strangely enough, it quickly reverberated with all the political upheavals of the Arab countries.

Resistance poetry did not only witness a change in purport and poetic effect but also in form and technique. It rejected the traditional poetic forms and adopted modern techniques without losing force. As to purport, resistance poetry resorted to various mediums of expression:

1. Love: The love for woman is completely integrated with the love of the homeland. Woman and Earth are completely assimilated in one great love and transformed into the great cause of liberation.
2. Satire: The enemy and the henchmen are ridiculed and the acts of suppression are expressed with bitter irony. This trend expresses a lively and an unconquerable spirit which considers all happenings as an ephemeral and transitional condition which sooner or later must and will be changed and put back to normality.

3. Defiance and challenge. The enemy is exposed and put face to face with the staunch and fearless spirit of the fighters. It is noteworthy that resistance literature is chiefly characterised as leftist. This is the outcome of the circumstances which dominated Palestinian life, which can be summed up as follows:
 - a) The majority of the Arab population is rural and deeply involved in the revolutions and uprisings which took place in Palestine before 1948 against the British Mandate. It is they as well who received the hardest blow in 1948.
 - b) The very bad living conditions in which they live and the harsh tyranny which they meet in their struggle for daily bread.
 - c) The fact that the existence of the enemy is the outcome of the imperialistic, capitalistic schemes and that its continuation is mainly sustained by capitalism. Moreover, resistance poetry is a challenge to all Zionist beliefs. It deals with them all and discards them one after the other. It is a closely welded literature based on reasoning and not on sheer emotion. Above all, it remains an important link in the chain of the permanent Arab revolution and goes hand in hand with the Arab progressive movement. It has been able, despite all hindrances and obstacles, to grow into a real literature and to present the personality of the fighting poet.