

## RETHINKING NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESISTANCE WRITINGS IN GHASSAN KANAFANI'S *RETURNING TO HAIFA*: A DIASPORIC STUDY

**Muhammad Khuram**

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Okara

Email: [m.khram@uo.edu.pk](mailto:m.khram@uo.edu.pk)

**Zulqarnain Haider**

BS English Department of English, University of Okara

Email: [zulqarnainhaider1435@gmail.com](mailto:zulqarnainhaider1435@gmail.com)

**Arbab Ishaq**

BS English Department of English, University of Okara

Email: [arbabishaq4119018@gmail.com](mailto:arbabishaq4119018@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*The concept of resistance holds significant importance in understanding the essence of human nature. This research centers on analyzing the oppression and resistance experienced by the colonized Palestinian population, specifically referencing Ghassan Kanafani's literary work *Returning to Haifa*. Kanafani discusses the hegemonies of Israeli hypocrisy, injustice, and colonialism. Kanafani contributes to the struggle for equality and dignity among oppressed Palestinian nations, regardless of whether the resistance takes on an overt or covert form. Covert resistance is considered to be more potent than overt resistance due to its ability to avoid the loss of valuable assets and lives, as exemplified by the unfortunate assassination of Ghassan Kanafani. While residing in Beirut, Kanafani extensively studies, delivers lectures, and publishes works related to "Palestinian resistance literature". Kanafani's literary works emerged as a response to "Zionist propagandist literature", reflecting his opposition to its influence. This qualitative research uses textual analysis of the selected work to emphasize the characteristics of national consciousness and resistance, using the theoretical framework by Helena Lindholm Schulz, to understand the diasporic Palestinians continued yearning for a homeland. The author elucidates the significance of resistance within the context of oppressed and colonial Palestine, as it serves as a means for the nation to assert its rights and contributes to its ongoing struggle for equality and dignity. As a result, Kanafani examines the consequences of "Zionist propagandist fiction" and the cultural sway exerted by "Arabic Literature" in conjunction with the superior political and military capabilities, culminating in the hegemony of a single nation.*

**Keywords:** Resistance, Hegemony, Oppression, Segregation, Propagandist Fiction

### Introduction

Palestinian Literature mirrors the narrative of its people. This narrative encompasses the dual experience of a colonized nation as well as the people living in forced exile. Diaspora is constituted by compelled displacement, dislocation, division, lack of citizenship, psychological distress, and resilience. In his book *Reflections on Exile* (2001), Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary critic, referred to our current era as the "age of the refugee" (293). This term is used to describe the significant and unparalleled number of individuals worldwide living as displaced and stateless individuals. Any act of strong discontent generates a counteracting force, in the shape of resistance, that has the ability to challenge the very state of being (Said 240).

Resistance, whether it is cultural or individual or other types of resistance, has to take place as a reaction to the action of the colonizers, which they exercise on the colonized nations. It is everywhere, particularly in the Third World, in some form or the other (Schulz 54). Palestinian nation raises various types of resistance against the endeavor of colonialism toward their countries and protesting against external domination. That was the natural reaction of any nation which lives under the colonial power of Israel.

There is a long history of "Resistance movements" and are closely connected to the emergence of the modern nation-state. Their origins may be traced back to events in the 18th century, such as the "French Revolution" and the "Boston Tea Party". "The Salt March" led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 is often regarded as the inaugural large-scale civil disobedience

campaign, although the “Cuban Revolution” emerged from Fidel Castro's 26th of “July Movement,” which can also be classified as a resistance movement.

This diversity can be more comprehensively understood by categorizing movements based on their explicitly stated objectives and methodologies. In their article "Unpacking Nonviolent Campaigns," Erica Chenoweth and Orion Lewis, highlight the differentiation in goals among Resistance organizations. These goals include regime change, policy change, or independence. Protest and resistance movements exhibit variations in their strategies to accomplish their objectives. These actions can be mainly nonviolent, such as protests, boycotts, and sit-ins. Alternatively, a movement may largely use violent methods to achieve its goals (Chenoweth, Lewis 21).

The Palestinian fiction writing, reflects through it some of the toughest times for the Palestinians, which is tragically referred to as the *Nakba* (or catastrophe) of 1948. The Palestinian faced the Israeli occupation in 1948. This made the diversion toward resistance and thus was born a new form of Palestinian Literature – "Resistance Literature." This stage is well described in the book *Palestinian Literature of Resistance Under Occupation 1948 - 1968* by Ghassan Kanafani (1968). Kanafani said, “In the period between 1948 and 1968, Arab intellectuals in occupied Palestine, struggling under the most oppressive conditions and cultural captivity, presented a historical model of resistance culture, with all its awareness, steadfastness and solidity, and more importantly, with all its persistence, escalation and depth” (9). The writing also flourished during this period, with common themes such as resistance, the Palestinian identity, national consciousness, motherland, diaspora, and socio-economic problems. Kanafani in his book, demonstrates about the occupation tortured, arrested, plighted, and put in confinement punishment such writers like Mansour Kardosh, Mahmoud Darwish, Saleh Bransi, Fakhri Jadi, Habib Qahwaji, Sameh Alqasim, and many others who were forced to live in exile.

The research focuses on the excursion on the resistance that constructs the national consciousness in relation to the diasporic identities. In exile, people engage their notions of identity, keep a connection with their motherland. The supposition of the study is beyond the Palestinian scenario and can be used by some other diasporas seeking refuge and assertion. Additionally, it adds to a broader discussion regarding diaspora experiences, resistance movements, and heritage upholding.

This study is important and relates to the different academic areas such as literature, historical narrative, ethnicity, colonialism, social and politics discourses. The diversionary aspect of Arabic culture allows researchers to investigate resistance in the Palestinian worldview and Literature. The study contributes to various dimensions of literary analysis, cultural discussion, socio-political reasoning, scholarly work, and debate on return, national awareness, and diaspora experiences towards Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*.

### Objectives of the Study

Here are potential objectives for this study:

- To analyze and identify the diverse forms of resistance depicted within Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* exploring how characters engage in acts of resistance in the context of diasporic life.
- To delve into the ways in which characters negotiate their Palestinian identity while existing in a state of Diaspora, examining the challenges, adaptations, and hybrid identity formations resulting from displacement and resistance.

### Research Questions

This study is an effort to sightsee the following research questions.

1. How did the novel *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani identify diverse forms of resistance to shape the Palestinian national consciousness in historical and political context of diasporic life?

2. What are the ways in which characters negotiate their Palestinian identity while existing in a state of Diaspora, examining the challenges, adaptations, and hybrid identity formations resulting from displacement and resistance?

Considering the features of National Consciousness and Resistance, the researcher uses the textual analysis as method to extract the meanings and understanding of the selected novel. As textual analysis examines the meanings and structure, elements of the text as a part of a larger historical and cultural context (Frey et al. 226). The theoretical framework of Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (2005) is used for Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*. The theory attempts to understand the diasporic Palestinians continued yearning for the homeland. According to Lindholm, the conceptualization of the way national identity is constructed into home territory can be limited only to notions about exile and exodus (Schulz 62). Here are some compulsory ideas that incorporate key elements.

The framework Schulz provides, is an introductory overview of diaspora theory and its application in the Palestinian context. Displacement, negotiating identities, and transnational connections in diasporic experiences and processes by which Palestinians in the Diaspora build their identities. It helps to understand the diasporic space enabling individuals to determine their cultural, national, and personal identity (Schulz 272).

Further, this framework builds a complex link between the Palestinian Diaspora and the Home Politics, also investigate the politics of diasporic communities related to Palestinians and those of Palestine relating to diasporic communities (Schulz 278). Considering the impact of transnationalism on forging relationships between the Palestinian Diaspora and the homeland. The thought on globalization and cross-border culture flows, examine the diasporic groups linking up to Palestine and engaging in politics from within the homeland. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the framework of the study can provide a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani.

The exploration of resistance as a fundamental factor in shaping the collective awareness of a nation, specifically within the diasporic context of Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, involves an extensive body of Literature that encompasses postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, and Palestinian Literature. The aim of this literature study is to analyze and synthesize the most important scholarly works that constitute the theoretical foundation for understanding the complex relationship between resistance, Diaspora and national identity in Kanafani's narrative.

An in-depth study and comprehensive reading of Kanafani's other work such as the novel *Men in the Sun* (1963) and short story *The Land of Sad Oranges* (1962) can help to appreciate the complexity evident in the narrative of his short story *Returning to Haifa* (1969). Employing these pieces, the author provides useful comments on style, recurrent topics, and a persistent sub-theme of challenging opposition.

The works of Raja Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House* (2002) and *The Ship* (1985) by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and other literary pieces not only constitute but also are contributing very much to the body of scholarly Palestinian diaspora literature. These works provide additional perspectives on the dynamics of dislocation, identity establishment, and the quest for national awareness as compared to the ones presented in the story.

Exile and repatriation are a central theme in Palestinian Literature. Prominent literary figures such as Mahmoud Darwish, renowned for his poetic works centered around the theme of exile, and Emile Habibi, whose novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1985) delves into the intricate aspects of the repatriation offer valuable and interconnected perspectives on the psychological and emotional aspects of displacement.

The works of George Antonius, specifically *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the National Arab Movement* (2013), and Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*

(1994), shed light on the significance of cultural and literary resistance within the wider framework of anti-colonial movements. These literary works provide a contextual framework for understanding Kanafani's writing in relation to a historical lineage of Literature centered around resistance.

Scholarly works such as *The Black Atlantic* (1993) by Paul Gilroy and *Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) Appadurai, Arjun, and MA Large, present a comprehensive outlook on the concept of Diaspora, offering a theoretical framework for examining the ways in which diasporic societies negotiate issues of identity and resistance within a transnational environment. This particular lens serves to expand the breadth of comprehension regarding the Palestinian Diaspora, situating it within a broader global context.

Schofield (2006) examines the impact of Palestinian Literature on national consciousness in *For those who have no doorway: Palestinian Literature and national consciousness*. By doing so, the author emphasizes the unique importance of Palestinian Literature within a framework where the absence of a tangible boundary compels a scattered populace to come together. Literature functions as a medium through which one may explore and engage with experiences of suffering, isolation, and disputes around territorial ownership, particularly in the context of challenging Zionist contentions. The present study aims to examine the gendered aspects of a nationalistic struggle, specifically focusing on the effects of portraying the land as feminine on individuals' ideas of national action. Schofield observes the ways in which Palestinian exilic Literature interrogates and transforms the notions of exile, return, and travel, so enriching the multifaceted understanding of nationhood and promoting a collective national awareness that encompasses many perspectives.

Mohammad & Meryan (2020) in the article "Ghassan Kanafani's Returning to Haifa: tracing memory beyond the rubble. Race & Class" sightsee the subject of resistance. The three literary works, namely *Men in the Sun* (1963), *Returning to Haifa* (1969), and *April Anemones* (1972), focus on cultural, social, political, critical, aspects of "resistance literature." These works also explore the significance of resistance literature within the specific context of Palestine, with a particular emphasis on the contributions of Ghassan Kanafani. Mohammad and Meryan primarily examine the function of literature in the Palestinian struggle and its contribution to the mobilization of patriotic sentiments within the population. Their work furthermore proposes, a cohesive entity, demonstrates resistance against the intricate nature of both exterior and internal dilemmas.

The paper authored by Abu-Remaileh (2021) entitled *Country of Words: Palestinian Literature in the Digital Age of the Refugee* delves into the exploration of embracing the unorthodox, fragmented, dispersed, transnational, exilic, and refugee aspects of Palestinian Literature. Centering the refugees as the focal point of the narrative in Palestinian Literature prompts significant inquiries regarding the suitability of the national framework as the predominant method of examination. This study examines the structure of Palestinian Literature, which involves various sources, investigative literary work, and an expanded set of methods to collect its fragments. It also demonstrates the digital realm, specifically the field of Digital Humanities, that can be used to store, convey, and visually represent the data fragments of Palestinian Literature.

This literature review established an ideal framework for this study, which involve an elaborative description of significant theoretical frameworks and literary works to create a solid foundation for research. Such a premise laid down grounds for an informed analysis of the complex issues of Palestinian Literature and philosophy.

## Discussions

The term "resistance" refers to the range of human social life activities and conduct in all of its expressions (individual, communal, and institutional) and in a range of contexts, such as political systems, entertainment, and literature. Many scholars presciently argue that looking



at resistance in relation to only power and domination is not always enough to understand the various shades and contexts of resistance. But for the purpose of clarity, this study intends to only focus on different ways in which political tyranny is resisted by the oppressed people. As Hollander and Einwohner, in their article "Conceptualizing Resistance" have said, the term "resistance" is commonly associated with social movements or "contentious politics". Consequently, activities typically linked to these phenomena, such as marches, picketing, and the establishment of organizations, might be classified as forms of resistance (535).

Traditionally, history books are written by the victorious, and the victors frame the narrative, "rebellion" and "revolution" with two distinct connotations. When a collective attempt to overthrow a government or regime is successful, it gets venerated as a revolution. But when the same attempt gets foiled, it fails to achieve legitimacy; and is often pejoratively termed as a "rebellion".

Since the Zionist occupation continues to plague the Palestinians, the Palestinian intellectuals, too, have played a very vital role in this resistance, creating an equal to the armed resistance. The Palestinian Literature, whether it is poetry or prose, was influenced by the political situations that affected the Palestinian people since the 1948 *Nakba* (catastrophe) and 1967 *Naksa* (setback). This Literature contributed to preserve the Palestinian identity, preserving the history of Palestine and describing resistance as the best way to liberate Palestine. Literature of resistance disseminates the cultural awareness among the Palestinians, whether they are in Palestine or in the Diaspora. It highlights the importance of the homeland and the need to not desert it at any cost. As Sulafa Hijjawi says in her book, Poetry of resistance in occupied Palestine exerted significant influence in the historical narrative of Palestine, particularly from the 1920s forward, garnering widespread acclaim throughout the Arab world" (5).

As Mir Salam says in his work "Palestinian literature: occupation and exile," that "Palestinian literature" is important to the core of the "Palestinian resistance" (111). Also, the contribution of Fiction is no less than poetry. There are many fiction writers who concern themselves with the theme of resistance such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Fawaz Turki, Yahia Yakhliif, Khalil Beidas, Emile Habibi, and of course Ghassan Kanafani. Kanafani is arguably, the most iconic figure in Palestinian resistance literature. He is the author of some very important books in this genre. They are considered as the main references to any research work tied with the resistance movement of this country. Such books are *On Zionist Literature* (2013) and *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine 1948 -1968* (2013). Kanafani says, in the introduction of his book *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine 1948 -1968*.

"Armed resistance is not a crust; it is the fruit of a farm that has its roots deep in the ground. If the liberation stems from the barrel of the gun, the gun itself stems from the will of liberation, and the will of liberation is only the natural and logical product of resistance in its broad meaning: Resistance is a commitment of rejection, and firm adherence to roots and positions" (Kanafani 9).

Kanafani is one of the pioneer Palestinian writers in "resistance literature". He shows how Literature as a means of resistance is as essential as armed resistance. As a famous saying goes, a pen is mightier than a sword. As Amirah Mohammad Silmi points out in her thesis, "A life of struggle is life for Kanafani" (Silmi 91). Further, she points out that Kanafani, is a revolutionary writer. His style in writing is influenced by his personal life, and this is clearly illustrated in his novels and short stories as well. In *Returning to Haifa*, Kanafani manages to preserve the Palestinian history and their identity. He makes a very forceful case for the right of the Palestinians to return back to their homeland.

Kanafani believed in armed resistance, and he expressed this in his rare interview with the Australian reporter Richard Carleton in 1970. Kanafani says, "The Palestinian people exhibit a preference for sacrificing their lives while maintaining their stance, rather than

experiencing defeat in their cause" (Kanafani 67). Resistance exists in almost of all his works particularly in his well-known novel, *Returning to Haifa* (1969). Kanafani tries through this novel to depict what had happened in 1948 - how the Palestinians lost their land and cities and even their children. This chapter of Palestinian history and the resistance, it has spawned the most important themes in this novel.

The plot follows the tragedy of Said and his wife Safiyya, the family that was forced to flee with thousands of families from Haifa after the invasion by the Zionists. The tragedy of the city's displacement seems simple compared to the tragedy of this family, which was unable to bring their five-month-old son, Khaldun, along with them. Owing to circumstances beyond their control, they were forced to leave him in the house alone. Later he was given as a precious gift with the house to one of the immigrant Jewish families, fleeing Hitler's atrocities in Poland. Said's family has lived with the tragedy for many years in Ramallah.

The story moves forward when the Zionists temporarily allow the Palestinians to visit the city they had left behind after twenty years. Said and his wife decide to visit Haifa. There, they find that their house has become a home of a Jewish family. Their son 'Khaldun' has become 'Dov', the son of the Jewish family, raised among them, as one of them. He refuses and ignores to recognize his Arab origin, and denies his roots. He declares that he stands on the other side of the confrontation, and this left a great resonance in Said's heart. Before coming to Haifa, Said was very much against the proposition of his younger son becoming involved in the resistance against the occupiers; but now it becomes his ambition to go back and see young Khalid join the *Fedayyen* (freedom fighters).

*Returning to Haifa* has many themes; one of the major themes is resistance. Kanafani emphasizes the importance of resistance in liberating the occupied Palestine. In the novel Said says "I have no desire to see Haifa. It is a shameful and unacceptable situation. If the people of Haifa find it disgraceful, then it is much more disgraceful for both you and me. Why subject ourselves to torment?" (159). Kanafani tries to make the point here that Palestinians should regret leaving their homes and land in spite of the cruelty of the occupiers. It would have been better for them to resist and fight till death, better than losing their case. It is a form of self-flagellation, proving that their conscience is still alive.

Kanafani points out that those who resist and fight, defending their land and their nation, will either survive as winners or will become hallowed martyrs. This is illustrated by the contrasting stories of Bader LebDAH, who was killed by the occupiers while he was fighting against the occupiers. Said left his home, his child, choosing safety over resistance. This was a grave mistake in the eyes of Kanafani, and it seems that he shows retribution coming to Said, in the form of his child becoming a part of the Zionist army against his own people. Bader, on the other hand, may have lost his life, but even his portrait is shown reverently protected by the Palestinian family who remains in occupied Palestine.

In the aftermath, Said realizes the importance of resistance and he wishes that his young son joins the Fedayeen. Said says in the end, "I pray that Khalid will have gone- while we were away!" (188). Kanafani tries to make it clear for everyone that only through resistance people can achieve their freedom. Said himself stopped his son Khalid to join resistance, but now he wishes that he can see his son with the freedom fighters. Said understood what Palestine needs as he says "Palestine is something worthy of a man bearing arms for, dying for. For us, for you and me" (187). Though Khalid is still young he knows the value of the land and will sacrifice his life for it. Khalid is the symbol of the young generation. Muhammad Siddiq describes the difference between the old generation, which is the past, and the young generation, which is the present and future. He says:

Due to his inadequate political awareness and adherence to outdated beliefs, Said was unable to effectively convert his personal concerns into meaningful political endeavors. In contrast, Khalid, his son, has personal familiarity with Haifa and hence lacks any emotional or

sentimental connection to it. However, this lack of attachment allows him to fully engage in impactful political endeavors due to his possession of political consciousness. Khalid is clearly a symbol of the current and future Palestinian generations that were born in the Diaspora after 1948 (58-59).

Kanafani's argument in favor of resistance starts with the couple Said and Safiyya when they meet in the crowd of the refugees who have been swept from their homes. The couple tries to resist the fleeing human tide, to turn back to get their sleeping son, but they keep being pushed further and further away due to firing and the closure. "Amidst the continuous procession of individuals, she stood like a solitary tree engulfed by a torrential surge of water. She reversed her direction, exerting her full power to withstand the overwhelming surge" (Kanafani 157). It was a terrible situation, even more because it was beyond everyone's control.

Said and his wife, who represent the Palestinian people, were so weak and helpless, so Kanafani wants to say that do not blame the weak people for their mistakes. As what happened with Said when his son Khaldun/Dov blamed him, why he did not ask about him for years. Said responds "The gravest transgression any anyone can commit, regardless of their identity, is to entertain the notion, even momentarily, that the vulnerabilities and errors of others entitle them to exist at the cost of others and vindicate their own missteps and transgressions" (Kanafani 186) and Said adds " And do you, personally, believe that we will persist in committing errors? If the occurrence of errors were to cease at some point, what would remain for you thereafter?" (186). Kanafani wants to criticize those who blame the Palestinians for leaving their homeland. At the same time, it is a message to the Palestinians not to make the same mistake in the future. This means to keep struggling and sacrificing to achieve their freedom.

The ways Kanafani has sketched the character of the abandoned baby Khaldun, who grows up as the Jewish Dov, is equally poignant. In the eyes of his biological father, Said, Khaldun is a traitor, someone who has turned his back on his Arab identity and gone over to the enemy's side. Said's views are the fallout of his traumatic experiences, but the author even while sympathizing with him, yet distances himself by giving Dov a chance to put forth his side of the story. Whatever be the unfortunate circumstances which led to his being abandoned, the fact remains that the five-month-old Khaldun got a chance at life and a normal, happy childhood owing to his Jewish foster parents. Kanafani was a strong votary of Palestinian Liberation and even lost his life owing to his convictions.

Thus, even while condemning the Zionist occupation throughout the novel, he shows how Dov refuses to abandon the widowed and ageing Miriam on meeting his biological parents, because the humanistic concerns take a stronger hold on his conscience. Struggle is inevitable because safety is not living. Life is not only about being happy, it is also about feeling strongly for someone or something, strongly enough to fight for the truth and justice. This proves the importance of resistance as has been interpreted in the chapter through two novels.

Hence, "Resistance" is the soul of humanity. The traits of the characters discoursed in against the injustice, hypocrisy, selfishness and colonialism. As mentioned above, an indefatigable attitude in the face of adversity is to be found in the characters of Kanafani. The study shows, Kanafani brings his activist persona into his writing as well and makes very direct references to places, people, and events, as is evident in *Returning to Haifa*. This study also shows that the Kanafani's works, as divergent to the contemporary's writers who mostly got settled in the U.K. or the U.S.A, are compromised because of the use of vernacular medium. The moment a text moves from one context into another, the alternative ideological, political, and aesthetic imperatives influence it and introduce their own connotations.

This study shows that, there is no exception to the possibility that whatever aspects of racial oppression and resistance have been discussed in the preceding pages still have not lost relevance in the present scenario, though expectedly related, but newer issues have also cropped up. There is an enough scope for research on the burgeoning refugee crisis, the trauma of exile

and fractured identities, and the diasporic experiences of the people of the Palestine. Palestinians continue to struggle against Zionist occupation, though its forms change from time to time and the ways in which the same fraternity is undertaking the accounts for the liberation of one nation and the continued oppression of the other nation.

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