

**POETRY OF RESISTANCE**  
**IN**  
**OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

**TRANSLATED**  
**BY**

**SULAF A HIJJAWI**

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# *PALESTINIAN LITERATURE*

Translated from: *Resistance literature In Occupied Palestine*

By Ghassan Kanafani

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 patronize 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 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 crystallizing it into a palpitating literature of resistance.

Under this hard siege, it is quite easy to realize 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 characterized 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 extemporized 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

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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 characterized as leftist. This is the outcome of the circumstances which dominated Palestinian life, which can be summed up as follows:

1. 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.

2. The very bad living conditions in which they live and the harsh tyranny which they meet in their struggle for daily bread.

3. 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.

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## **THE IMPOSSIBLE**

**Tawfiq Zayyad**

It is much easier for you  
To push an elephant through a needle's eye,  
Catch fried fish in galaxy,  
Blow out the sun,  
Imprison the wind,  
Or make a crocodile speak,  
Than to destroy by persecution  
The shimmering glow of a belief  
Or check our march  
Towards our cause  
One single step.....

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(2)

## **A LOVER FROM PALESTINE**

**Mahmoud Darwish**

Like a thorn in the heart are your eyes  
Lacerating, yet adorable,  
I shield them from the storm  
And pierce them deep through night and pain,  
The wound illuminates thousands of stars  
My present makes their future  
Dearer than my being  
And I forget as our eyes meet  
That once we were twins behind the gate.

Your words were my song  
I tried to sing again  
But winter settled on the rosy lip.

Your words, like a swallow, flew away,  
My door and the wintry threshold  
Flew away behind you, longing for you  
And our mirrors broke  
Sorrow grew  
So we gathered the splinters of sound  
But only learnt to lament the homeland  
We shall plant it together  
On the strings of a guitar  
And on the roof of our catastrophe,  
we shall play it  
For distorted moons and stones  
But I forgot, O you whose voice I do not know  
Whether it was your departure  
Or my silence  
That rusted the guitar.

I saw you last at the harbor  
A lonely voyager without relatives  
Without a bag  
I ran to you like an orphan,  
Asking the wisdom of the ancestors:  
How could an orchard be banished  
To a prison, to an exile or a harbor  
And yet remain, despite the journey  
And the smell of salts or yearnings,  
Ever green?

And I write in my diary;  
I love oranges and hate ports.  
Then I write again:  
I stood at the port  
Winter was pouring  
We only have the peel of oranges,  
And behind me  
There is the desert.

I saw you at the thorny mountains  
A sheepless shepherd being chased  
And among the ruins  
And you had been my garden  
And I was a stranger  
Knocking at the door, my heart  
Knocking my heart....  
The door, the window, the cement and the  
stones  
Stood up.

.....  
.....

I swear  
From eye lashes I shall weave  
A kerchief for you  
And weave on it a poem for your eyes

.....  
.....

I shall write on it a sentence that is  
Dearer than martyrs and kisses;  
"She was a Palestinian and she is still so"!

I flung the doors open to the storm

.....  
.....

Virgin mate, faithful wheat,  
Palestinian are your eyes and tattoo,  
Palestinian is your name  
Palestinian are your dreams and concerns  
Palestinian is your scarf, your feet, your form,  
Palestinian are your words and your silence  
Palestinian is your voice  
Palestinian in life and in death,  
I hold you in my old books  
A fire for my songs.....

.....  
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## **THE EXILE**

**Salem Jubran**

The sun walks through the border  
Guns keep silent  
A skylark starts its morning song  
In Tulkarem  
And flies away to sup  
With the birds of a Kibbutz  
A lonely donkey strolls  
Across the firing line  
Unheeded by the watching squad  
But for me, your ousted son, my native land,  
Between your skies and my eyes,  
A stretch of border walls  
Blackens the view!

## **SAFAD**

**Salem Jubran**

I am a stranger Safad  
And you too,  
The Houses greet me  
But their dwellers  
Order me to go away  
Why are you roaming through the streets, Arab,  
Why?  
If you say hello  
Nobody would answer you  
Your relatives had been here  
Then went away  
And nobody stayed  
A funeral of a morning  
Sits on my lips

And in my eyes  
There sits a lion's humiliation  
Farwell  
Farwell Safad!

(5)

## A LETTER FROM A BANKRUPT

Sameeh Al Qassem

I may lose my daily bread, if you wish  
I may hawk my clothes and bed  
I may become a stone cutter, or a porter  
Or a street sweeper  
I may search in animal dung for food  
I may collapse, naked and starved  
Enemy of light  
I will not compromise  
And to the end  
I shall fight.

You may rob me of the last span of my land  
You may ditch my youth in prison holes  
Steel what my grandfather left me behind:  
Some furniture or clothes and jars,  
You may burn my poems and books  
You may feed your dog on my flesh  
You may impose a nightmare of your terror  
On my village  
Enemy of light  
I shall not compromise  
And to the end  
I shall fight.

.....  
.....

Enemy of light  
The signs of joy and the tidings  
Shouts of happiness and anthems

Are there at the port  
And at the horizon  
A sail is defying the wind and the deep sees  
Overcoming all the challenges  
It is the return of Ulysses  
From the lost sees  
It is the return of the sun  
And the return of the ousted  
And for their sake  
I swear  
I shall not compromise  
And to the end  
I shall fight!

(6)

## **THE REACTION**

**MAHMOUD DARWISH**

Dear Homeland

My chains teach me

The vigor of the eagle

And the tenderness of the optimist

I hadn't known that under our skins

There is a birth of a storm

And a wedding of rivulets.

They shut me in a dark cell

My heart glowed with suns of torches

They wrote my card's number on the walls

There grew a pasture of corn ears on the wall

They drew the face of my killer on the walls

The face was soon erased by the shades of braids

I carved the picture of your blooded face

With my teeth

And wrote the song of the departing pains

I plunged my defeat in the flesh of darkness

And put my fingers in the sunny hair

The conquerors, on the top of my roof,

Could only open the valves

Of my earthquakes.

They will not see except the glow of my forehead

They will not hear except the rattle of my chains

And if I were burned on the cross of my cause

I would become a saint in the garb of a struggler.

(7)

## **THE OLIVE TREE**

**Tawfiq Zayyad**

Because I do not knit wool\*  
Because I am always hunted  
And my house is always raided.  
Because I cannot own a piece of paper,  
I shall carve my memoirs  
On the home yard olive tree.

I shall carve bitter reflections,  
Scenes of love and yearnings,



For my stolen orange grove  
And the lost tombs of my dead.

I shall carve all my strivings  
For the sake of remembrance  
For the time when I'll drown them  
In the avalanche of triumph

I shall carve the serial number  
Of every stolen piece of land  
The place of my village on the map  
And the blown up houses,  
And the uprooted trees  
And every bloom that was crushed  
And all the names of the experts in torture  
The names of the prisons.....

I shall carve dedications  
To memories threading down to eternity  
To the blooded soil of Deir Yasin  
And Kufur Qassem.  
I shall carve the sun's beckoning  
And the moon's whisperings  
And what a skylark recalls  
At a love deserted well.

For the sake of remembrance,  
I shall continue to carve  
All the chapters of my tragedy  
And all the stages of Al- Nakbah  
On the home yard olive tree!

\* Reference to Madame Lafarge, who used to knit the names of the traitors  
and send them to the French revolutionaries during the French Revolution.

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(8)

## TO CHRIST ON HIS BIRTHDAY

Fadwa Tuqan

Lord, glory of the universes  
On your Birthday this year  
All the joys of Jerusalem are crucified  
All the bells, O Lord  
Are silent!  
For two thousand years,  
They haven't been silent on your birthdays,  
Except this year  
The domes are now in mourning  
Black is wrapped in black  
On the Via Dolorosa,  
Jerusalem is whipped  
Under the cross  
Bleeding  
On the hands of the executioner.  
The world is adamant to the tragedy  
The light has departed from that lost ruthless master  
Who did not light one candle  
Who did not shed one tear  
To wash the sorrows of Jerusalem

**The vinedressers have killed the heir, O Lord,  
And usurped the vine  
The vinedressers killed the heir, my Lord  
The bird of sin has feathered  
Within the sinners of the world  
And flew to desecrate Jerusalem's chastity  
What a cursed devil he is,  
Even hated by the Devil.  
O Lord, glory of Jerusalem  
Out of the well of agony  
Out of the abyss  
Out of the recesses of night  
Out of the horror  
Jerusalem's groaning ascends to you  
Mercy, lord  
Spare her this chalice!**

(9)

**ANTIGONE**

**Sameeh Alqassem**

**One**

**Two**

**Three**

**Forward**

**Forward**

**Victim of blind Gods**

**Immolation ram**

**At the alter of the lusts**

**Of this Dark Age**

**One**

**Two**

**Three**

**Hand in hand**

**Let us cross this lunatic path!**

**O Father**

**There are still two eyes**

**In your face**

**And you still have**

**Two feet on your land**

**So strike, across the night,**

**The worst catastrophe in the history of man**

**Let us create**

**Across the night**

**A dawn for life.**

**O Father,**

**If the devil of sorrows**

**Plucked your eyes**

**I am for you your night lamp**

**Drinking from the oil of faith  
And tomorrow, father, I swear  
I will bring you back  
What the pirate's sins  
Have stolen from you  
I swear, father, in the name of God  
And the name of Man!**

**One  
Two  
Three  
Forward  
Forward!**

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**(10)  
EVER ALIVE**

**Fadwa Tuqan**

**My beloved home land  
No matter how long the millstone  
Of pain and agony churns you  
In the wilderness of tyranny,  
They will never be able  
To pluck your eyes  
Or kill your hopes and dreams  
Or crucify your will to rise  
Or steel the smiles of our children  
Or destroy and burn,  
Because out from our deep sorrows,  
Out from the freshness of our spilled blood  
Out from the quiverings of life and death  
Life will be reborn in you again.....**

(11)  
**IDENTITY CARD**

**Mahmoud Darwish**

Write down  
I am an Arab  
My card number is 50,000  
I have eight children  
The ninth will come next summer  
Are you angry?

Write down  
I am an Arab  
I cut stone with comrade laborers  
My children are eight  
I squeeze the rock  
To get a loaf,  
A dress and a book  
For them.  
But I do not plead for charity at your door  
And do not feel small  
In front of your mansion  
Are you angry?

Write down  
I am an Arab  
I am a name without a title  
Patient, in a country  
Where every body else is very angry  
My roots sink deep before the birth of time  
And before the beginning of the ages,  
Before the time of Cypress and olives  
Before the beginnings of grass,  
My father belonged to the family of the plough  
Was not of grand stock  
My grand father was a farmer, without a pedigree  
He taught me the grandeur of the sun  
Before reading books  
My house is a hut  
Made of reed and stalk  
Are you satisfied with my rank?  
I am a name without a title!

.....  
.....

Write down  
I have been robbed of my ancestral vines  
And the piece of land I used to farm with all my children  
Nothing remained for us and for my grand children  
Except these rocks  
Will your government take them?  
So it is

Write down  
At the top of the first page  
I hate nobody  
I do not steel any thing  
But when I become hungry  
I eat the flesh of my marauders  
So beware....beware  
My hunger and fury!

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(12)

## ALETTER FROM PRISON

Sameeh Al Qassem

.....  
.....  
It pains me, Mother  
That you burst in tears  
When my friends come  
Asking about me  
But I believe, mother  
That the splendor of life  
Is born in my prison  
And I believe that my last visitor  
Will not be an eyeless bat  
Coming at midnight.  
My last visitor must be daylight.....  
.....