Ghassān Kanafānī’s Children: Agency and Contingency

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Abstract

One of the major premises of Arab (post)colonial modernity is that the child could be a key bearer of change for a better future for the society. For the child to be successful as a bearer of change, she must first be transformed into a modern subject. In this article, I present the Palestinian case to explore this premise, examining the nature of the child as a modern subject with a particular type of agency. Specifically, I will focus on how Ghassān Kanafānī’s literary works represent the child as a socio-political agent. I analyze several literary genres, including dedications, letters, short stories, and novels. The article concludes by suggesting that this particular agency is a hybrid of child-adult agency, bounded by intergenerational succession in the context of patriarchal-colonial Palestine of the post-Nakbah era.

Keywords

Ghassān Kanafānī – children – agency – colonial Palestine – Palestinian literature – Arabic children’s literature

Staging the Modern Palestinian Child

On the morning of July 8, 1972 Ghassān Kanafānī was assassinated in Beirut by Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. His niece, Lamīs, was with him,
and she was killed as well.\(^1\) Lamīs was the daughter of Fāyzah, Ghassān’s older sister, who had lived in Kuwait since the early 1950s. Political commentators and researchers alike mention the murder of Lamīs as collateral damage in the assassination of Kanafānī. Almost none of them alludes to the special personal, familial, and literary relations that bound Ghassān and Lamīs. As family photos, personal letters, and literary works show, there was a distinctly generative bond between Lamīs and Ghassān.\(^2\) While this bond could be read on the personal and familial levels, the moment its literary products were published and widely circulated among Palestinian and Arab readers, it came to signify important structural changes for Palestinians in the post-Nakbah era. In this dynamic change, the next generations came to the forefront of social and political processes, while parents were relegated to secondary roles.\(^3\) In this article, I will explore the new positions Palestinian children came to occupy in the first two decades following the Nakbah. Specifically, I will demonstrate how childhood became a new socio-political category with a particular modern subjectivity, as it is constructed in literary works by Ghassān Kanafānī. Choosing Kanafānī is not a coincidence, for he is one of the few major literary figures of his generation in whose work the theme of children and the category of childhood occupy central positions.

The idea of “children” refers to a specific age group and the social and psychological field(s) related to it. For the aims of this study, children as an age group was initially a starting point in mapping the relevant thematic topography of Kanafānī’s literary corpus. However, this definition fell short in accounting for the range of roles that children play in this corpus. Recent trends in childhood sociology and studies of childhood offer us a range of more nuanced and critical approaches that go beyond the traditional implications of children as a mere age group yet to become adults.\(^4\) In her attempt to conceptualize childhood on the “macro-structural” level, Chiara Diana states that “childhood is constructed by social forces, political interests, cultural phenomena, and macro-societal and political changes.”\(^5\) She goes on to quote Jens Qvortrup, according to whom “childhood as a structural form [exists] more or less

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irrespective of children,” according to two postulates: “childhood is an integrated structural element in organized social life” and “childhood (as a structural element and a status position) changes in time and space in accordance with the dominant adult society’s needs and interests.”

This study accepts the argument of Diana and Qvortrup that childhood on the macro-structural level is a form that operates almost regardless of particular children. Moreover, to the extent that I view childhood as an integrated element in organized social life, I argue that it participates in the processes of generating meaning and institutional practices. This participation can take different shapes, in accordance with the structural form’s particular sociohistorical context. The crucial point for this study, though, is that the macro-structural level of childhood is inherent to and contingent on the nation-state and is not given a priori to it.

In the context of modern Arab societies, the processes of constructing childhood as a structural form began in the mid-nineteenth century in Egypt and the Levant (bīlād al-Shām). After the Nakbah of 1948, the level of institutional investment in children in Palestine—already compromised by Ottoman rule and the pressures of British colonialism—dropped off dramatically, although they remained more of a priority in the cultural and social spheres.

My use of the word “child” emphasizes a constellation of particular and paradoxical characteristics. On the one hand, it acknowledges the absence of an institutional level of childhood endorsed by the nation-state, and on the other, it recognizes an investment in meaning-generating processes as part of the Palestinian national resurgence. “Child” is a relational element on the macro-structural level; it is not given and static, but open and in constant flux. Moreover, I will contend that Kanafānī was active in reconstructing this “child” as a nexus of meaning re-generation in the post-Nakbah period of Palestinian colonial modernity. Writing across multiple modern Arabic literary genres, Kanafānī capitalized on certain literary devices and cultural premises in order to build the new Palestinian, and by extension Arab, “child.” In Kanafānī’s literary corpus the child operates as a topic, a theme, a relation, a character, or even as an institutional entity. This study traces the processes by which it does so, locating the contours of Kanafānī’s new “child” in its various manifestations, as a modern subject with a certain sociopolitical agency.

As an agent of change, “child” is a key signifier of Arab (post)colonial modernity. But the exact nature of the Arab (post)colonial modern subject, and the processes for attaining this status, remain open to debate. 

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7 For an overview of the positionalities of children in the Arab World, see for instance: Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., Children in the Muslim Middle East (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2001).
points out that by the late nineteenth century, three major rationales for reforming childhood had gained traction among Egyptian intellectuals:

First, Egyptian justifications and motivations for reforming childhood in Egypt emerged from resistance to imperialism, which translated into Islamic heritage playing a role in shaping new ideas towards childhood. Second, Egyptian intellectuals’ concern in reforming childhood focused on providing a moral education. Intellectuals equated the future of Egypt with personal behavior taught in childhood. Third, intellectuals in Egypt, unlike their contemporaries in Europe, articulated the actualization of the child’s self (or, in other words, the fulfillment of the child’s potential) as a rebirth for the whole community, more so than the individual.8

While Morrison maps Egyptian attitudes toward childhood, I contend that her tripartite scheme is also valid for other Arab countries, especially the Levant (bilād al-Shām). It is important to emphasize that these trends had been brewing since the second decade of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in the works of Rifā‘ah al-Ṭahṭāwī and his colleagues and students at Madrasat al-Alsun. For example, in his book al-Murshid al-amīn lil-banāt wa-al-banīn (The Trusted Guide for Girls and Boys, 1872), al-Ṭahṭāwī lays out a foundational narrative that frames the aims for the modern education of children and young people, linking them to religion, ethics, and the future of the nation.9 These three pillars of the narrative concerning child-rearing and education were elaborated and developed by later intellectuals, as well as by religious scholars such as ‘Āli Mubārak and Muḥammad ‘Abduh.10 Underpinning the second and third rationales identified by Morrison, wherein childhood becomes a structural determinant for intergenerational succession and the wellbeing of society writ large, is the basic premise that the education of children pertains to the future of the country. The realization of oneself is the actualization of the community, both national and religious.

With the establishment of modern state institutions and the emergence of mass-media print capitalism, childhood as a structural determinant became crystalized as a meaning-generating site in the public sphere. Moreover, the

“child” as a modern subject became a public arena in which different socio-political forces performed their modern personae. Following the end of World War I and the increased formation of Arab national consciousness, different socio-political forces started to displace themselves onto, and to overload, the arena of the “child” with various issues that were not necessarily connected to it. Among the different socio-cultural locations through, and within which, such displacements and overloading occurred were literature and education. Novels, autobiographies, and pedagogical treatises became such sites as early as the 1920s. For example, Tāhā Ḥusayn’s Mustaṣqal al-thaqāfah fī Misr (The Future of Culture in Egypt, 1938) followed in the footsteps of al-Ṭāḥtāwī’s al-Murshid—for although there were differences between the two Egyptian reformers regarding the positionality of Egypt in relation to the “Orient” and Europe, still they held the same basic beliefs regarding child-rearing and education. For both Ḥusayn and al-Ṭāḥtāwī, children’s education and the actualization of oneself are a communal, national matter, and not an individual matter.


11 Morrison, 43–61.
12 Ibid., 62–98.
These themes and their variations—education, family dynamics, and the larger community—are common aspects of the childhood experiences that are narrated in many Palestinian autobiographies written in or about the period between World War I and 1948. Examples of these autobiographies include those of Fadwa Tuqan, Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, and Ḥannā Abū Ḥannā, among others.¹⁷ In Palestine, as in Egypt, the education of children and the actualization of the self were communal and national matters.¹⁸ I contend that this pre-1948 Arabic corpus about children was the infrastructure upon which different Palestinian writers developed their own post-Nakbah pedagogical and aesthetic interventions. Prominent among them was Ghassān Kanafānī, whose literary, intellectual, and political writings frequently address the role of child and children’s education in the project of national liberation.¹⁹

One way to approach the significance and the distinctiveness of Kanafānī’s intervention regarding the "child" is by comparing it with other Palestinian writers’ ways of treating childhood in their literary and intellectual corpuses.²⁰ Many of Kanafānī’s peers feature child characters in their short stories, novels, and autobiographies. However, in contrast to Kanafānī, they tend not to weave their work around childhood as a theme, a character, or an organizing principle. For example, in Imīl Habībī’s “Ḥīna saʿīda Masʿūd bi-ibni ‘ammihī”


(When Massoud Became Happy with His Cousin), one of the short stories from the collection *Sudasiyyat al-ayyām al-sittah* (The Sixfold Nature of the Six Days War, 1968), the story presents the post-1967 socio-political condition of the Palestinians via interactions and events among a group of children in a village inside Israel. Here the children are not the main focus of the story. Rather, they are used to represent and criticize the socio-political divisions in adult Palestinian society as a result of the continuous chain of defeats.

Other Palestinian authors who wrote autobiographies recounting their childhood, such as Jabrā, and Abū Ḥannā, published them decades after Kanafānī’s death. These writers were deeply engaged with Kanafānī’s literary interventions, and one could trace the latter’s influence on them. In contrast to the literary domain, we notice a different pattern in the artistic interventions of Nāji al-ʿAlī, whose Ḥanẓalah, a cartoon sketch that has become a national symbol, represents the Palestinian exilic experience from the perspective of the child in the refugee camps. In this regard, the influence of Kanafānī on al-ʿAlī is noteworthy. Kanafānī “discovered” Nāji al-ʿAlī in the ‘Ayn al-Ḥalwah refugee camp in the early 1960s and was the first to publish his works. Moreover, the first appearance of Ḥanẓalah was in 1969 in the Kuwaiti daily *al-Siyāsah*, while the iconic Ḥanẓalah with his back to the viewer’s first appearance was in 1973.21 This is to indicate the complexity of the interrelations between Kanafānī and his peers, and his genuine, and at times pioneering, literary treatment of children and childhood.

The Palestinian literary field(s) were dismantled in the 1948 war. Out of the Nakbāh, three main literary “sub-fields” began to take shape separately: inside occupied Palestine, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and in exile in the neighboring Arab countries.22 In light of these developments, two salient characteristics prevailed in the Palestinian literary scene in the 1950s and 1960s. First, printed textual platforms gradually took precedence as one of the main sites in the Palestinian public sphere in which the processes of rebuilding the national collectivity took shape. In a sense, they came to make up in part for the grave loss of the material-semiotic infrastructure of Palestinian society in 1948.23 Second, a collective feeling of urgency to record the existence of the Palestinian collectivity emerged from the almost-total loss of

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21 Hamdi, 25.
this material-semiotic infrastructure. The act of literary documentation—of what was before the Nakbah, what took place during the Nakbah, and what consequences resulted from the Nakbah—prevailed as the main discursive formation in Palestinian printed texts. This act was carried out as if documenting survival in a printed textual format equated to survival in real life.\textsuperscript{24}

As a distinct social category, children played a crucial role in these processes of documentation as a way of rebuilding the collectivity. Subjected to familial journeys and the travails of exile and dislocation, children were reallocated within the family’s patriarchal structure to new positions and roles. In a sense, this transformation meant that children had to become “semi-adults” faster than they would have on the normative path of growing up. The semi-adult position entailed mainly more responsibilities in earning income for the family, coupled with an overinvestment in formal education as a means of acquiring symbolic capital. These dynamics of post-Nakbah exile led to the construction of the profile of the exilic Palestinian as a “knowledge peddler” in the Gulf region in particular, and in Arab societies generally.\textsuperscript{25}

The first post-Nakbah generation of Palestinian “knowledge peddlers” developed and instituted childhood as a structural form central to the succession of generations and the responsibility of the next generation in preserving and regenerating the collectivity. These intergenerational changes, though, did not produce the “child” as a ready-made modern subject. They set the stage for the yet-to-emerge “child” as a bearer of change who must first be changed himself or herself. Different Palestinian, Arab, and even global socio-political forces (the most institutionalized of the latter being \textit{UNRWA}) played a part in negotiating and determining the mold from which to generate the Palestinian modern subject “child.”\textsuperscript{26} Ghassān Kanafānī, as an exemplar of the second post-Nakbah generation of “knowledge peddlers,” played a key role in negotiating and determining the contours and contents of the Palestinian “child.” For Kanafānī, it was a way of coping with the shattered Palestinian collectivity and the urge to rebuild it anew, which demanded a new type of childhood as well as a new adulthood. I will demonstrate how his literary interventions are based on deconstructing and reassembling familial and intergenerational settings in

\textsuperscript{24} For more on documenting the Nakbah on the aesthetic level, see: Ismā‘īl Nāshif, “al Ta‘bīr ‘an al-Nakbah: Muqārabah nazariyyah,” \textit{Majallat al-dirāsāt al-Filastīnīyyah} 116 (Fall 2018): 186–210.

\textsuperscript{25} Jabra, “The Palestinian Exile,” 77.

order to create the new sensibilities of the “child” as a modern socio-political agent who would participate in rebuilding the new Palestinian collectivity.

The “Child”: An Element in the Intergenerational Sequence

Taking intergenerational dynamics in a familial setting as a classifying theme, one observes that Kanafānī’s literary works represent three main generations: grandparents, parents, and sons and daughters. The last generation has two sub-categories: shabāb (youth) and aṭfāl (children). These generations take on their literary characteristics, and by extension their potential socio-historical roles, in relation to each other. At first glance, it seems that Kanafānī assigns each generation or generational sub-category to a different temporal period: grandparents in the past; parents in both the past and the present; the shabāb in the present; and the children in the present and future. A closer look at his short stories and novels, however, reveals how the narrator and his present time act as an extra-generational temporal layer and frame the intergenerational sequence. In many cases, the narrator is an educated Palestinian refugee who was a child during the events of 1948 and came of age in exile, and who is now looking back from the vantage point of the narrative present at the events of the pre-1948 era and the immediate aftermath of the Nakba. This gaze backward enables the intergenerational temporal sequence to be reorganized as a non-linear narrative. One of Kanafānī’s early short stories that set the tone for this dynamic and its later developments is “Arḍ al-burtuqāl al-ḥazīn” (“The Land of Sad Oranges,” 1958). The narrator relates the story of his family’s exodus from Palestine to his younger brother, who is so young at the time that he does not remember it. Recounting the events as he experienced them as a child, the narrator describes his parents’ devastation when they realized the impossibility of returning to their previous life.

This story exemplifies a narrative structure in which each generation is defined by its interrelations with the others, with particular attention to the relationship between father and son. It is noteworthy that these interrelations are presented in a binary manner: the parents and grandparents are shown as passive and physically weak, while the sons and daughters, both shabāb and aṭfāl, are active and engaged. Here, we notice a major difference between the shabāb and the aṭfāl. The former is active in the present as a well-defined sub-category. In contrast, the latter is an open sub-category, with its subjectivity

yet to emerge. While the focus of this article is the sub-category “child” as an open-ended structural element, in what follows, I will contrast “child” with the older generations and with the shabāb to fully grasp and delimit Kanafānī’s interventions in construing the child as a socio-political agent.

As a major structural element in Kanafānī’s literary corpus, the “child” occupies a variety of roles, such as son, daughter, brother, sister, sibling, grandson, niece, friend, and narrator, among others. These are positions in the inter-generational sequence in a familial setting, with the Palestinian present as its background. In “Judrān min al-ḥadīd” (Walls of Iron, 1963), little Ḥasān receives a bird in a cage as a gift from his uncle. The story revolves around the debates that unfold among the siblings concerning how to take care of a caged bird and the impossibility of being simultaneously caged and free.28 In “al-Ṣaghīr yadhhab ilā al-mukhayyam” (“The Child Goes to the Camp,” 1967), the relationship between a grandparent and a grandson provides both with a refuge from inter-familial conflicts and struggles.29 In “Haddiyyat al-ʿīd” (“A Present for the Holiday,” 1968),30 and “al-Munzalaq” (“The Slope,” 1961),31 the harsh realities of refugeehood are central in shaping a child’s self and subjectivity. “Waraqah min Ghazah” (“Letter from Gaza,” 1956) describes the deep and transformative relations between the narrator and his niece after she is injured in an Israeli bombardment.32 In every example, the main plot is woven around the child’s transformative experiences, demonstrating the transition from being a child—as defined by age alone—into becoming a “child” as a socio-historical agent.

In contrast to these dynamics, most of the characters in the shabāb sub-category in Kanafānī’s work exhibit a determined course of development, almost a pre-ordained one. The clearest examples are Sa’ād in Umm Saʿād (Umm Saad, 1969), and Dūv in ʿAʿīd ilā Ḥayfā (Returning to Haifa, 1969). These two characters do not evolve in the narrative present. Rather, Kanafānī shows them at a moment when the processes that shaped them are complete.33 The interesting exception in this regard is Ḥāmid and his sister Miryam in Mā tabaqqā

lakum (All That’s Left to You, 1966). Here in the narrative present, both characters develop and transform, as if Kanafâni is remaking them anew into children. The “child” functions as a literary apparatus of change that is not necessarily related to a specific age group.\textsuperscript{34}

In her book, \textit{al-Namîdhaj al-\'insâni fî adab Ghassân Kanafâni} (The Human Type in Ghassân Kanafâni’s Literature, 1999), Najmah Ḥabīb points to the literary devices that Kanafâni uses to articulate his artistic formation of the human and universal dimensions of the themes he treats.\textsuperscript{35} Foremost among these is what she calls the “type”: a character with certain features who embodies a particular existential dilemma.\textsuperscript{36} Of the thirteen human types that Ḥabīb enumerates in Kanafâni’s corpus, six—linked to childhood, motherhood, fatherhood, old age, women, and sex—are connected to the “child” in intergenerational sequences in familial settings, while the others address this figure indirectly.\textsuperscript{37} With the image and ethics of a middle-class urban Arab family as her point of reference, Ḥabīb describes Kanafâni’s literary children as characters who simultaneously take on children’s and adults’ roles. More importantly, they change in the same literary work, and across different works, exhibiting a continuum of child—adult functions in familial settings. They transgress the accepted intergenerational divisions of labor and norms of conduct.\textsuperscript{38}

Consider the following example that Ḥabīb provides from Kanafâni’s story “Ka’k ‘alâ al-raṣîf” (“The Cake Vendor,” 1959):\textsuperscript{39}

The child in “Ka’k ‘alâ al-raṣîf” oscillates between the naiveté and innocence of children, and the shrewdness and astuteness of an experienced man. For Ḥamîd is a pupil during the day, but he sleeps most of the time at school, which angers his teacher. When he [Ḥamîd] waits for the last bell to ring, it is not so that he can start playing like his peers. Rather, it is so that he can enter the world of manhood in the course of his nightly work [to support his refugee family].... He is also a clever child. He detects his teacher’s sympathy for him, and he tries to win more. He achieves this

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\textsuperscript{34} Ghassân Kanafâni, \textit{Mâ tabaqqâ lakum} (Nicosia: Dâr Manshûrât al-Rîmâl, 2013).
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 33–132.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 33.
\end{flushleft}
by inventing lies that invoke pity in the teacher ... he is a shoe shiner and
pretends to be a cake vendor, and when he is surprised by the teacher [he
says]: “I used to sell cakes, Teacher, but by the end of the night I would be
hungry, and I would eat two or more of the cakes.”

In her discussion of the “child” type in Kanafānī’s work, Ḥabīb draws a binary
distinction between the “normal” imagined middle-class child and Kanafānī’s
child. “Naivete” (sadḥājah) and “innocence” (barā’ah) are expected from a
child cared for by his family. “Shrewdness” (dahā’) and “astuteness” (tajribah)
are usually expected from an adult, but the child who takes care of his family
acquires these characteristics. Moreover, a supported child attends school and
participates in active learning, in contrast to a child who supports his family
and uses school time to sleep and rest from his real-life hardships.

Ḥabīb’s second dichotomy, contrasting the figure of the child with that of
the adult, relies on a patriarchal familial division of labor. In her analytic matrix
of dichotomies, the child is transformed into a “little” man by performing the
functions of the “real” man, namely by earning family income. While Ḥabīb is
correct in identifying these dichotomies in Kanafānī’s work, her analysis falls
short of gauging the inner dynamics between such dichotomies, and their rela-
tions with other typological or generational aspects of his writing likewise go
unexamined. I contend that the transition from one pole to the other within
each dichotomy is transformative for the characters who undergo this process,
and moreover, that such transformations are made possible in the first place
due to the particular Palestinian intergenerational sequence that commenced
after the Nakbah of 1948. These transformations comprise an aesthetic literary
horizon, or a synthesis of the poles of the dichotomies, that re-allocates the
“child” into a different historical track, according to a contingent development
rather than a normative one. To develop this argument, I will examine exam-
iples of Kanafānī’s writing in three different genres: book dedications, personal
letters to Lamīs, and literary narratives.

Book Dedications

In his now-classic book Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, Gerard Genette
reconceptualizes paratexts as part of the textual system, i.e., as integral to the

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Ibid., 36–37; my translation.
literary work itself. Moreover, he argues for approaching them via their spatio-temporal functions, in which the formal characteristics of a paratext are the most relevant aspects to be addressed. In his chapter on dedications, Genette argues for the importance of attending to the place, time, author, addressee, and function of dedications. Positioning dedications inside the system of the literary work, he proposes to analyze them via the relations among these various aspects. While Genette extends our analytical perspective to include dedications, his approach suffers two major shortcomings: the diachronic nature of dedications is not addressed, and the deep structural dynamics that this textual site allows are silenced. Several scholars have addressed these critical aspects of dedications as a paratextual site.

Of relevance here is Muhsin al-Musawi’s article “Dedications as Poetic Intersections,” in which he addresses both shortcomings of Genette’s model in the Arabic literary context. Al-Musawi’s major argument is that although the form of dedications in the Arabic literary context has changed over time, they remain a permanent communicative site in which the deep and conflicting relation between the subject and the socio-political order is treated poetically. The main problem with al-Musawi’s depiction of dedications is that he frames them as part of the textual body without analytically differentiating them from the rest of the text. I argue that in the case of Kanafānī’s dedications, the dedication is turned into a site to articulate what the author could not have said directly in the main body of the text. This, as will be shown shortly, enabled him to transgress the fiction-reality divide while repositioning family dynamics, education, and collectivity as elements in the suggested contingent development for the new “child.”

In most of the works published during his lifetime, Kanafānī wrote rich and dense dedications. This study examines eight of these dedications (see Table 1). Although only one dedication is addressed specifically to children (No. 4 in Table 1), comparing this dedication with the others elucidates the workings of these dedications and the figure of the child embedded within them. The dedications can be divided into three main thematic clusters: those that invoke familial relations, those that invoke national communal relations, and those that invoke both familial and national communal relations. Moreover, it is

42 Ibid., 117–136.
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<th>Literary work</th>
<th>Dedication in Arabic</th>
<th>English (trans.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Mawt sarîr raqam 12</em> (The Death of Bed Number 12) (Nicosia: Dâr Manshûrât al-Rimâl, [1961] 2013).</td>
<td>إِلَى أُخْتِي فَائِزَةٌ ... إن كان في القصص ما يُحقِق أن يَدَى للجزيرة شائِئٍ ... غسان</td>
<td>To my sister Fāʾizah ... If there is anything at all in these stories worth dedicating to dear Fāʾizah .. Ghassān</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary work</td>
<td>Dedication in Arabic</td>
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<td>al-ʾAdab al-Filasṭīnī</td>
<td>... إلى أبي وإلى روح أمي جناحي المقاومة اللذين حملاني عبر وعورة الهزائم والمرارة.</td>
<td>... To my father and to the spirit of my mother the twin wings of resistance that carried me through bitter and defeating adversity</td>
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<td>al-muqāwim taḥt al-iḥtilāl</td>
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<td>G. K.</td>
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<td>8. Umm Saʿd (Umm Saad)</td>
<td>الإهداء إلى أم سعد، الشعب المدرسة</td>
<td>Dedication To Umm Saʿd, the people and the school</td>
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as interlocutors. The difference between Fāyiz and Lamīs, on the one hand, and “the little ones,” on the other, lies in the transition from the particular individual to the “child” as a collective subject.

The second part of the dedication, the message, comes in two different forms: declaring an existent state, or indicating a state to be achieved in the future. The former form is restricted to two familial setting dedications that concern the category of parents and the sub-category of youth, shabāb: the dedication to Kanafānī’s parents (No. 7), and the one to Fā’izah (No. 1). The latter form of dedication centers on the idea of liberation and a return to Palestine. Moreover, this type of message has a universal layer embedded in its composition, such as “the little ones,” which could be understood to be children of any nationality.

The mediation between the summoning of the dedicatees and the message dedicated to them is a window through which to extract the inner dynamics of the dedications, especially the building of the “child” in comparison to other figures in the intergenerational sequence. It could be described as follows: in order for the summoned dedicatee to achieve the desired state, he/she must be an active agent in the process of transformation. The question here concerns the type of agency that is embedded in the dedication. For example, the sixth and eighth dedications give full agency to the men and to Umm Sa’d respectively, i.e. the categories of adults and parents. But in the dedication to the category of “child” (No. 4), we find a shared contingent agency between the dedicator and the dedicatee. Collectively speaking through the pronoun “we,” Kanafānī and other adults hope that the children will have a world of their own.

To expand on the nature of the dedication to the “child” exemplified here in No. 4 in Table 1, it is necessary to delve into the literary texts themselves in which these dedications appear. This dedication opens the collection of short stories ‘Ālam laysa lanā (A World Not for Us, 1965). Although the collection was published in 1965, all the stories but one were written between 1958 and 1963 in Kuwait City and Beirut. Of the fifteen short stories that the collection contains, four deal directly with children and the sub-category of “child.” Six relate the predicaments of young males and the sub-category of youth (shabāb), while the rest treat relations between parents and their children, focusing on the category of parents. The stories that address the “child” present transformative experiences, ignited by the demise of the father and the rise of the son into an exploring status. In contrast, in the stories about youth, the protagonists exist in a state of alienation from which there is no escape. In the third group

47 Kanafānī, ‘Ālam laysa lanā.
of stories, the parents—upon realizing their own social irrelevance—become afraid of their children and try to eliminate them on the symbolic level.

As suggested by Genette, stories and the dedications that frame them paratextually are related units in the same literary system. Therefore, we can attempt to discern the dynamic between these two units as they pertain to the “child.” In addition to being an intermediary between the “real” outside the text and the “fictional” inside the text—for it is directed from the text to “real” interlocutors—dedication No. 4 condenses the transformative experiences of the “child” that are detailed and amplified in the stories themselves. What is crucial in the detailing and amplification is the positioning of “child” in relation to the sub-category of youth and in relation to the category of parents. Here, the “child” is shaped by the dynamic binary relations with the other two generational categories, i.e., by the irresolvable predicament of the youth (shabāb) and the demise of the parents, all of which leads to the birth of the “child” as an explorative sub-category that would build and own a new “world.”

Letters

Patrizia Violi offers a useful model for exploring letters. Violi frames the letter as a discursive genre that is determined by its communicative function. More specifically, this function is inscribed in the text and is a main compositional factor in shaping it. Hence, Violi suggests approaching the letter as an utterance with specific structural characteristics, including its use of deixis and the illocutionary force that this carries. Deixis here connects the narrator-narratee via the linguistic relation of I-you, and spatio-temporally through the use of the present tense within the internal spaces of the utterance. As for the illocutionary force of letters, Violi argues that the letter is mostly characterized by its act of communication, regardless of its propositional content. Violi’s model offers a structural functional entry point into analytically engaging with the letter as a genre. It enables us to approach the way in which the “child” is formed as a modern subject in Kanafānī’s letters to his niece.

Kanafānī’s published letters can be classified into three main categories: letters addressed to Lamīs, letters addressed to friends who report on them

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49 Ibid., 149.
50 Ibid., 150–159.
in their essays and memoirs, and letters to his lover, the writer Ghādah al-Sammān. As with the other letters, the posthumous publication of Kanafānī’s letters to Lamīs leads us to rethink them as publicly circulated literary products rather than private ones.

It is important to note that Kanafānī’s letters to Lamīs were not published as standalone documents but as paratextual elements in several of his books that address children. Here, I will take one example: *al-Qandīl al-ṣaghīr*, which Kanafānī wrote as a gift for Lamīs on her eighth birthday. This book has two editions, the first published by Dār al-Fatā al-ʿArabī in 1975, and the second published by the Ghassān Kanafānī Cultural Foundation in 2005. In the first edition, sections of a letter that Kanafānī wrote to Lamīs explaining his motivations for writing the story were placed on the back cover. In the second edition, the full text of this letter appears after the foreword by Anni Kanafānī, before the story itself.

The full letter regarding *al-Qandīl al-ṣaghīr* reads as follows:

١٩٦٣/١/١٢

إلى لميس في عيد ميلادك الثامن

عزيزة لميس

بعد كل هذه السنوات يبدو لي أنني عرفت، أخيرًا، من أنا وأين طريقي... ولذلك فإنني لن أستطيع أن أكتب لك شعراً لأنني لست شاعراً... ولا مقالاً لأنني لست كاتبً مقال.. وكي أحافظ على فهمتي أن أكتب قصة... وسوف أكتب لك تكبر معك كلما كبرت...

غسان

٣٦٩١/١/إلى لميس

مَن أنا وأين طريقي .. ولذلك فإنني بعد كل هذه السنوات يبدو لي أنني عرفت، أخيرًا، من أنا وأين طريقي .. ولذلك فإنني لن أستطيع أن أكتب لك شعراً لأنني لست شاعراً... ولا مقالاً لأنني لست كاتبً مقال .. وكي أحافظ على فهمتي أن أكتب قصة... وسوف أكتب لك تكبر معك كلما كبرت...

غسان

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To Lamīs 21/1/1963
On your eighth birthday
My Dear Lamīs
Finally, after so many years, I realize who I really am and where I am heading. Therefore, I will not be able to write you a poem, for I am not a poet; nor an article, for I am not a journalist ... and so to keep the promise for my gift to you I shall write you a story ... for, by profession, I am a story writer. The story that I shall write for you, The Little Lantern, will keep on growing with you as you grow older.

Ghassan

This is an exemplary letter according to Violi’s criteria. It is built around the I-you, narrator-narratee format, as Kanafānī addresses Lamīs; it is written in the present tense (“I realize”); and it has an illocutionary force as its communicative function takes center stage. Moreover, the letter is composed of three sections: a header containing the name of its addressee and listing the date and occasion of its writing, the body of the letter, and the signature. As the first and the third sections are formal characteristics of any letter according to Violi’s model, I will turn to the body of the letter in order to demonstrate its way of constructing Lamīs the “child” in a contingent manner with respect to her place in an intergenerational sequence extending from Kanafānī’s own generation to that of his niece.

The body of the letter opens with the narrator’s declaration that, after years of searching, “I realize who I really am and where I am heading.” Building off this realization, he enumerates for the narratee what he could not give her as gifts. Then he declares that his gift will be a story because he is a writer of stories. Behind this is the intimate “promise” that he has made her and his sincere effort to keep it. The last part of the body of the letter introduces the story which he gifts her, naming it (The Little Lantern) and vowing that it “will keep growing with you as you yourself grow older.” With this final clause, the narrator hints to Lamīs that she too will embark on a journey to realize who she is through growing up.

It is perhaps no surprise that the content of a birthday letter should be organized around the processes of realizing who one is. What is unique in this letter, though, is the manner in which these processes are performed as a communicative act, an event of forming both the narrator and the narratee. The narrator accomplishes this in three main steps: 1) he reveals his own realization of who he is, a writer of stories; and 2) he consequently identifies what

56 Kanafānī, The Little Lantern, 8–16 (Arabic and English are on the same pages).
he can do to be in harmony with his genuine, just-revealed self, i.e., he can write a story; and 3) he presents a gift that models this process for the narratee to pursue in realizing her own identity. Taking the narrator’s intervention as an example, the narratee is supposed to embark on a prolonged journey of first discovering who she is, and secondly actualizing this identity through practice. These constructing processes are not auto-generated by the “child.” Rather, the “child” embarks on them via her close relations with the adult, at least in the beginning—hence their dependency on the positionality of the “child” in the intergenerational sequence.

Looking more closely at the gift itself, the story *al-Qandil al-ṣaghīr*, we find similar dynamics playing out between the father/king in the story and his daughter/the princess. Before dying, the king writes out a will for his daughter, advising her that before she can assume her rightful place as queen she must bring the sun to the palace. In the process of fulfilling the conditions of her father’s will, the princess discovers herself, or more accurately reconstructs herself in order to be able to reign: after a tormenting search, she realizes that only by reconnecting herself to the ordinary people and dismantling the barriers between herself and them can she bring the sun to the palace. Just as the content of the dedications discussed in the previous section mirrors that of the stories they preface, the topic of Kanafānī’s letter to his niece receives further treatment within the fictional narrative that he presents to her. The relationship here does not play out solely in how the story details and amplifies the position of the child in the intergenerational sequence, but in how it proposes a resolution to the process of maturation that the “child” must undergo. This resolution resides in reconstructing the agency of the “child” as one that emerges from a collective self, rather than an individualistic one, in which the interrelations between the “child” and the adult enable them to experience several identities, build on one of them, and then assume the responsibilities associated with this identity.

**Short Stories and Novelistic Modalities**

The critical approach that Louis Althusser and his students developed provides an apt lens for addressing Kanafānī’s focal issues, both historical (ideological) and formal (literary). Differentiating between art—a term which itself includes literature and other artistic media—and ideology, Althusser and his students argue that while both present “lived experiences,” they differ in the mode of presentation. As M. Sprinker puts it: “Both ideology and art present the ‘lived experience’ of a particular social formation at a given moment in history, albeit...”
in distinct ways. The presentation in art is perceptual or phenomenal: in it we see and feel the lived experience of ideology. The crucial point here is that while ideology screens “lived experiences,” art momentarily enables us to see the workings of ideology from a distance internal to the artwork itself and thus to recognize it as such. This recognition is one of the structural effects that emerge out of the interactions between the reader and the novelistic text.

Based on the genealogy of the concept of Darstellung in the Marxist tradition, Althusser uses the figure of theatrical production—mainly via the idea of staging (mise en scène)—to approximate the immanent presence of the dominant ideological structure(s) and their effects. The effects materialize in the processes of identification between the reader and the novelistic text, producing alienation. Contrary to previous interventions which framed identification as a psychological process, Althusser claims that readers recognize themselves in the characters of the novel because of the shared social and ideological grounds upon which the process of producing and consuming art is based. Sprinker, among other readers of Althusser, elaborates on this issue, contending that the Brechtian poetic structure which Althusser uses as a referent model is in fact an open one—more structuration than closed structure.

Recognition and identification are processes within this poetic structure; they are various moments which, while different from each other, constitute an inherently related whole. With reference to how audiences engage with plays, Sprinker writes:

Far from remaining within the ideological universe of the characters and their world ... [the audience is] thrust forward onto a new ideological terrain. If the initial premise of the play rests on the spectator's self-recognition of her position inside the world of the play, its ultimate outcome, which is an effect of the dramatic structure, is to produce a new subject that is no longer the subject of dramatic spectatorship.

This analytic description of the effects of the poetic or dramatic structure as potentially transformative for the audience seems overdetermined by the two-stage nature of the workings of art as a modality different from but bounded

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58 Darstellung literally means presentation. As a concept it refers to the manner of presenting a phenomenon before embarking on its analysis and explanation. Ibid., 90.
60 Sprinker, Imaginary Relations, 281.
by ideology. On the one hand, this modality treats the dominant ideological structure as raw matter and processes it. On the other hand, its outcome acts as a new ideology, engraving the new subject who is supposed to recognize and supersede the ideological structure(s) of domination. The tension between the overdetermined and the transformative aspects of the artwork is emblematic of the Althusserian approach, and it is not necessary to resolve it for my analytical purposes here. I contend that such tension is symptomatic of the contradictions of the colonial ideological structure of domination and the possibilities it entails for artistic processing. Put differently, art does not allow audiences to engage with it as they choose. Rather, the manner of perceiving, seeing, and recognizing is contingent on the specific colonial constellation in which it is steeped. To a large extent, it is a structured structuration.

In this regard, Kanafānī’s novelistic modalities use the ideological raw matter of the colonial condition in Palestine. He, then, stages it in novelistic manners, which entail the structural effects of the “child” as a contingent agent. These treatments of the ideological raw matter of the colonial condition in Palestine oscillate between the overdetermined and the transformative aspects of the main contradictions of the Zionist colonial regime in Palestine and the active efforts at liberation from this regime.

The “child” appears in several configurations in Kanafānī’s literary works. In his short stories, the two most prominent ones are the child as a protagonist and as a topic. Each of these configurations operates through a novelistic modality that enables the readers to perceive, to see, and to recognize the ideological colonial-patriarchal structure of domination in Palestine via lived experiences.

In many of Kanafānī’s stories, the “child” as the protagonist acts as a witness to the major events that engulf her family, the community, and their socio-material surroundings. In this modality of witnessing, the protagonist recounts, from a deferred point in time, these events using an inner reflective monologue addressing the reader. In this way, the narrative becomes the present of a reconstructed collective memory. In one of Kanafānī’s early stories, “Waraqah min al-Ramlah” (“Paper from Ramleh,” 1956), a Palestinian recounts the events of the day in July 1948 when he and his family were expelled from...
Ramla. After Ramla fell into the hands of Zionist forces, most of the surviving inhabitants took the road to Jerusalem seeking refuge:

أوقفونا صفين على طرفي الشارع الذي يصل الرملة بالقدس، ... وعندما لاحظ أحد الجنود اليهود أن أمي تحرص على وضعي أمامها كي أتقن نظرة الشمس، سحبني من يدي بعنف شديد، وطلب مني أن أقف على ساق واحدة، وأن أصلب ذراعي فوق رأسي في منتصف الشارع الترب ... كنت في التاسعة من عمري آنذاك، ... كنت أنا من تبقى لها، فأنا قد مات قبل بدء الحوادث بسنة كاملة، وأنا أخو أصغر أخذوه أولما دخلوا الرملة، لم أكن أعرف بالضبط ماذا يعني بالنسبة لأمي، لكنني لا أستطيع أن أتصور كيف كانت الأمور ستجري لو أني لم أكن عندما وصلت دمشق، لأبيع لها جرائد الصباح وأنا ... نادي وأرتتفه قرب مواقف الباصات ...

Two divisions of Jewish soldiers halted us at the side of the road which leads from Ramleh to Jerusalem ... When one of the soldiers noticed that my mother wanted to put me in front of her so that her shadow would protect me from the July sun, he dragged me roughly from her hands and ordered me to stand on one leg with my arms crossed above my head ... I was nine years old ... I was one of the ones she [his mother] still had left. My father had died a full year before the onset of these events. My older brother they took when they first entered Ramleh. I didn't really know what I meant to my mother, but I could imagine now what would happen if I wasn't with her when we reached Damascus, to sell the morning papers, shivering in the cold, near the bus stations.

Through this manner of recounting the events, Kanafānī sets the stage for the story by bringing together four time frames: the present in which the narrator is speaking, which is also the reader’s present; the time of the events in July 1948; the time before the recounted events of 1948, represented by the death of the father; and the time after these events, when the narrator and his mother became refugees in Damascus. The inner reflective monologue becomes a nodal point at which these timelines converge to make the narrative flow. This convergence constitutes the character as a witness, embodying the possibility of standing in the here-and-now of the narrative while looking

at and recounting the other timelines as sequences of apparently related events. Following on this opening, the narrator zeroes in on the main event of the story: the cold-blooded murder of Abū ʿUthmān's daughter and wife at the hands of Jewish soldiers and the man's ensuing revenge:

Uncle Abū Uthman wasn’t really my uncle. He was Ramleh’s barber and its unassuming doctor... We called him “uncle” out of respect and esteem. Standing upright now, he held his youngest daughter, at his side.... Abū Uthman stooped down to pick up in his two aged arms the body of his wife. How often I had seen her cross-legged in front of his shop watching him finish his lunch, so she could take the empty dishes home again.67

The act of witnessing is not a passive one in which the character observes a sequence of events and then reports them to the reader. Rather, the modality of witnessing unpacks the historical processes that led to the here-and-now of the current event, thus bringing to the forefront of the narrative their thick layers of lived experiences. Being a barber or sitting cross-legged waiting for the empty lunch dishes of one’s husband, are contingent, even ephemeral, moments of the past. Reinserting them as related moments of experience via the act of witnessing delimits the sequence of events that preceded the narrative present, as if recreating its “memory,” e.g., the barber as the unassuming doctor of the community. The “child” protagonist witnesses and carries the burden of retelling the story of a collective whose older members by now are dead or socially defunct by absence: the father, the mother, Abū ʿUthmān, and the protagonist’s elder brother. As for the reader, the structural effect of alienation is achieved here via the detailed staging of the moment of massacre, i.e., the murder of Abū ʿUthmān’s family in cold blood, as witnessed by the “child” narrator. Simultaneously, the massacre as detailed instantiates the colonial structure of domination in Palestine, seeing and feeling it from the internal distance of novelistic witnessing. The protagonist’s experience of witnessing entails the experience of identification on the part of the reader which thrusts

him or her into a structured manner of acting that is a direct negation of being massacred. The reader, then, adopts a course of action that will redefine his or her own relation of belonging to the community via the new collective memory and allow him or her to take on the roles of the other (sub)categories in the intergenerational sequence.

Most of Kanafānī’s short stories in which he treats the “child” as a topic are built on the staging of the impacts of lived experiences in colonial Palestine on the “child” and his/her immediate environment. What differentiates this type of configuration is that the staging and narration are in the third person. Readers do not hear the voice of the child. They see the child, so to speak, as he goes through lived experiences as mediated by a hidden narrator. As such, the “child” as a topic appears at an internal distance achieved by these and other narrative techniques.

“Kāna yawma dhālīka ṭiflan” (“He Was a Child That Day,” 1969) addresses the topic of the “child.”68 The story shows various forces acting on the child to shape his subjectivity, while we the readers are looking, from a distance, at the sequence of events. In “Kāna yawma dhālīka ṭiflan,” a bus carrying a number of adult passengers and one child departs from Haifa bound for Akka and the western al-Jalīl villages. Five minutes before it arrives in Nahariya, the bus is stopped by a Jewish paramilitary group and all of the passengers except for the sole child are massacred.

Kanafānī portraits this “child” as integrated intimately and organically within a setting that encompasses nature, the Palestinian built environment, and the group of adult Palestinians on the bus:

مسح الزبد المتوهج باحمرار الشروق رمال الشاطئ الفضي، وكانت أشجار النخيل المعوجة تنفس عن سعفها الكسلة المسترخية نوم ليلة البارحة، وترفع أذرعتها الشوكية إلى الأفق حيث كانت أسوار عكا تشدخ فوق الزرقاء الداكنة، وإلى يمين الطريق القادم من حيفا، مصعدا إلى الشمال كان قرص الشمس يطل من وراء التلال فيفيضف رؤوس الأشجار، والماء، والطريق بلو برجاوي متضرح بالحياة المبكر. تناول أحمد شبابة القصب من السلة وانكما في ركن السيارة وأخذ يتفح عتابا مروع، لعاشق أبدي، استطاع أن يعيش في كل القرى التي تتناثر كنجوم أرضية ساكنة، في طول الجليل وعرضه.69

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69 Ibid., 869.
The blazing redness of the morning sun anointed the sands of the silver coast. The twisted date trees shook last night’s sleep from their languid idle fronds and stretched their thorny arms skyward to where the walls of Acre [Akka] towered above the dark blueness. To the right was the road coming from Haifa. To the left the large round disc of the sun climbed into the view from behind the hills and tinged the tops of the trees, the water, and the road with the blushing hue of early morning shyness. Ahmad took a reed flute from the basket and leaning back in the corner of the car began to blow into it an injured air of rebuke [ʿatābā], of an eternal lover. He might live in any one of the villages scattered like the still stars through the land [of Galilee].

The passage starts by describing the dynamic rhythms of nature, as represented by the sea waves, the cycle of night and day, and the changing colors of the sun. These are directly connected with the Palestinian built environment: with the villages of Galilee, the walls of Akka, and the road coming from Haifa. Nature and the built environment together surround the bus and its passengers, including Ahmad the young flute player as he plays the wounded ʿatābā (a traditional Palestinian music genre) of the eternal lover. This setting provides an almost idyllic tapestry of being out of which the child emerges as the focal point of the plot. After describing the different passengers on the bus, Kanafānī focuses in on the character of the child specifically:

And one child, from Umm al-Faraj, whose mother had sent him to Haifa to see if his father was still alive and who was returning now with the answer ... The child laid his head in the lap of the old woman sitting

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71 Kanafānī, al-Āthār al-kāmilah, 870–872.
next to him and fell asleep. Another woman, who didn't know him, had prepared flat bread stuffed with boiled eggs, and was waiting for him to wake up so she could give him something to eat ... A man took off his coat and covered the child with it. Another man, named Salah, picked up an orange from his basket and peeled it ... a corpulent woman ... was telling a story about how the Jews had blown up an orphanage in Jaffa and how the bodies of the children had been strewn about the crater of Iskander Iwad Street mixed with the seeds of burst oranges. A bomb had been placed in a truck filled with oranges which was stopped at the steps of the orphanage.72

Kanafānī does not name the child on the bus, but the narrative zooms in and names every other act, place, and time in this passage. The child is from the village of Umm al-Faraj, a Palestinian village whose remaining inhabitants were expelled by Israeli forces in 1953. In rural Palestinian culture, it would be normal for a mother to send her male child to ascertain his father's whereabouts and activities. As the child is traveling alone, the passengers, women and men alike, supply him with security, warmth, and food. Then comes the twist: the difference between how Palestinians use oranges and how the Zionist paramilitary groups use them. Palestinians feed themselves and their children with oranges, while the Zionists bomb orphanages using booby-trapped trucks transporting the fruits. Here Kanafānī is referring to a particular historical event: the bombing of the Islamic Orphanage in Jaffa in 1948. In so doing, he calls attention to the topic of children and their positionality in the colonial conflict. The structural effects for the child pertain to the community as a sort of womb directly emerging from nature and history, while the colonizers seek to eliminate this same community from the nature and history of Palestine.

Shortly after the child on the bus wakes up, the massacre commences:

“- هيا - هيا اركض بأقصى ما تستطيع، سوف أعد الى العشرة ثم سأطلق عليك النار، إذا لم تكن قد ابتعدت بصورة كافية؛”

وهو لولاة لم يصدق الطفل شيئاً، ولما أثرت شأناً في الأرض كأي شيء.... وفي اللحظة التالية جاءته الضربة الأخرى بالعصا السوداء فأحسها تسلخ لحمه، ولم يكن له ما يفعله غير أن يطلق ساقيه للريح.... لم يدر كيف حدث ذلك ولماذا، ولكن كفاه في جيب سرواله وسار بخطوات ثابتة وهادئة... وبينه وبين نفسه فقط اخذ يعد عداً بطيئاً:

Five minutes before Nahariyya the child woke up. The sun was blazing ...

[at the checkpoint]. The driver got out first, holding the child [sic] ... The short officer ordered a soldier standing next to him to call the child ... [but] the child standing next to him paid no attention to any of it.... The tanned man looked at the child. Leaning towards him, he took his ear cruelly between his fingers: “You see? Remember this well when you tell the story.” He straightened up, and cuffing the child from behind with his black stick, pushed him forward. “Let’s go. Run as fast as you can. I’m going to count to ten and if you aren’t out of here by then I’m going to shoot.” The terrified child couldn’t believe any of it and remained fixed on the spot like one of the trees planted around him.... The next instant he had received another blow with the black stick and felt it cut his flesh. There was nothing for him to do but throw his legs to the wind.... He didn’t understand what had happened or why, but he stopped. Putting his hands in his trouser pockets, and without looking back, he walked with quiet deliberate steps.... He began to count slowly to himself: one, two, three ...

Until the order from the commander, the child is part of his natural community: he wakes up, the sun is shining, and the driver is holding his hand. As the preparations for the massacre ensue, the child is transferred from his community to the custody of the military commander and his troops. The transfer in itself does not alter the child’s awareness, but the killing of the other passengers and his being addressed by the commander begin a process of change. After being ordered to run away or risk being shot, he begins running only to stop seconds later and walk calmly instead. He starts to count in anticipation of the deadly bullet from the commander’s gun. If the first stage of the

73  Kanafānī, al-Āthār al-kāmilah, 872–877.
74  Kanafani, “He Was a Child That Day,” 137–139.
structural effects leads readers to recognize themselves within the community of the passengers, in this turn of developments they enter a new ideological terrain in regard to the “child” as a topic. The womb-community is eliminated: i.e., the intergenerational sequence is cut, and the child is thrown into a new reality with which he alone must cope by taking on a new role that would normally be performed by the older generations. In one sense, the child is forced to transform himself from a site acted upon by opposing forces into a subject bounded by the determining tragedy of reality and its impact on him. In this novelistic modality of determined transformation, we as readers follow the structured changes that the topic of “child” goes through. These changes are the tools of engraving the new subjectivity of a contingent agent for the child as well as for readers themselves.

In these two representative examples of the “child” as the protagonist and as a topic in Kanafānī’s short stories, we find that both novelistic modalities share in the act of witnessing. In the first modality the witness is the narrator, and in the second one the witness is the reader. As a starting point, we could frame these two types of witnessing as occupying different relational positions in the poetic structure of Kanafānī’s short stories. Seen from this broader view of the poetic structure, the narrator-reader binary becomes less sharp and more interconnected. For each time the narrator is the main witness, the reader witnesses the events of the plot through him. And each time the reader is the main witness, the unaware character is witnessing events through his own lived experiences. These dynamic interrelations of witnessing create the internal distance via the almost-structured movements between various positionalities of witnessing that the novelistic modalities allow. The widespread interpretation of bearing witness in the context of Palestinian literature and art is that it enables one to tell the story of the colonized and establish an archive for the erased history of Palestine. But in line with recent scholarship on witness literature, I argue that Kanafānī’s novelistic modalities of witnessing go one step further. They offer what could be dubbed, after John Berger, “ways of seeing” inherent in the internal distance that is composed of the many positionalities of witnessing and the structural constraint to keep moving between them. These ways of seeing are new sensibilities potentially instilled in the

75 Hamdi, 21–24.
76 See for example: Kelly Oliver, Witnessing: Beyond Recognition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Cassie Premo Steele, We Heal from Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the Poetry of Witness (New York: Palgrave, 2000).
“child” and in readers as part of the determined transformation or structured actions of the new subject as a contingent agent of history.

**Conclusion**

In her book *After Lives: Legacies of Revolutionary Writing*, Barbara Harlow discusses the legacies of three assassinated writers and intellectuals: Ghassân Kanafâni, Roque Dalton, and Ruth First. She moves analytically between their texts and the posthumous futures of their societies. In this manner, Harlow revitalizes these figures and offers a viewpoint to trace the future trajectories of their literary, intellectual, and political interventions. In line with Harlow’s argument regarding the afterlife of Kanafâni, I would like to conclude this article by suggesting that his niece Lamis has her own afterlife that emerges from her role as the prototypical child in contrast to Kanafâni’s adult persona. As a literary persona, Lamis stands for the Palestinian “child” in its post-Nakbah trajectory, precarity, struggles, and ideals. In the dedications, letters, and short stories that this article has examined, the child is remolded into new structural positions that entail the possibility of a reborn modern subject. The possible birth of this subject is presented as an aesthetic, literary resolution to the lived, irresolvable sociopolitical contradictions of post-Nakbah Palestinian society. Hence, the agency of the “child” is hybrid, multi-faceted, and inherently contradictory. This contingent childhood development takes different variations in the three genres presented in this study. In the two paratextual locations (the dedications and the letters), adult narrators stage the “child” as a modern subject who is an agent yet to be born. The novelistic narrative, as a system, sets in motion the possible birth(s) of the agent “child.”

We could read these literary aesthetic interventions concerning the contingent development of the “child” in at least two ways. First, the literary staging of the birth, and the birth itself, are an adult project for the “child” at the former’s moment of utter and tragic defeat and ensuing sociopolitical death. In this project, the agent “child” is not a new child; it is rather the reformed version of the defeated adult. Such a reading elides the sociohistorical conditions of possibility for the “child” in the patriarchal-settler colonial context.

A second reading incorporates these conditions of possibility into the literary, aesthetic interventions of Kanafâni’s corpus. Through this incorporation, the “child” is perceived not as a static structural form, but rather as an arena constantly in the process of structuration, due to the different sociopolitical forces active in re-shaping it. As it would be naïve, if not ideological, to think the “child” independent of the other categories in the intergenerational sequence,
this structuration process must be understood as a relational one encompassing all the categories. As I have sought to show, Kanafānī was acutely aware of the structural impasse of the Palestinian adult, due to the post-Nakbah context of the patriarchal-settler colonial context. The result is the ubiquitous presence of the Palestinian “child” in his literary corpus and in his attempts to expedite the intergenerational succession cycle. Partly, at least, the allocation of the agency to the “child” as a modern subject will lead to the rebirth of the child as an adult.

Both of these readings re-draw our attention to the conditional nature of an Arab (post)colonial modernity premised on the idea of the “child” as a key bearer of change for a better society. If the “child” itself has to be changed in order to be a key bearer of social change, the adult could not be a given permanent category. The “child” and the adult must be conceived in their relational positionalities. Kanafānī’s message is that any desired change could be attained only if both child and adult are changed accordingly, i.e., develop contingently. The notion of disposing with the dead adult and recrowning the “child” to become an adult in the Palestinian context is only one variation on the conditional nature of the premise of change.