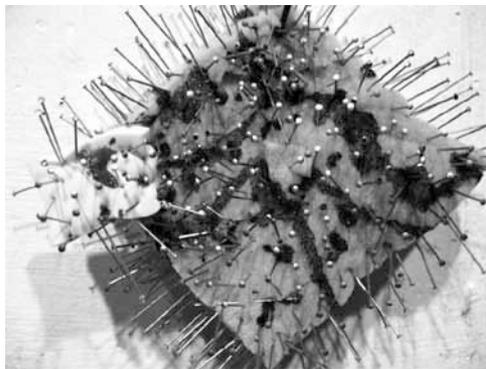
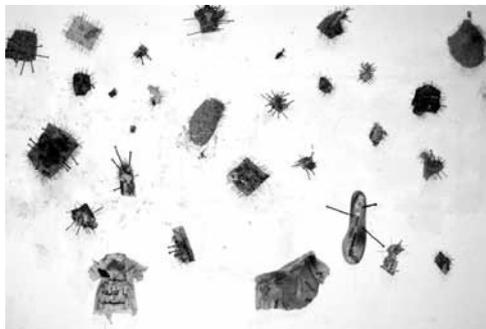


# Artworks

## Sumayyah Samaha

The art work below is prepared by Sumayyah Samaha a Lebanese artist living and working in New York City. Her art works addresses political and personal issues. In the last few years she has been making art that addresses conflict situations in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.



◆ **CLUSTER BOMBS FALLING**, mixed media installation about the bombs dropped by Israel on Lebanon, summer 2006.

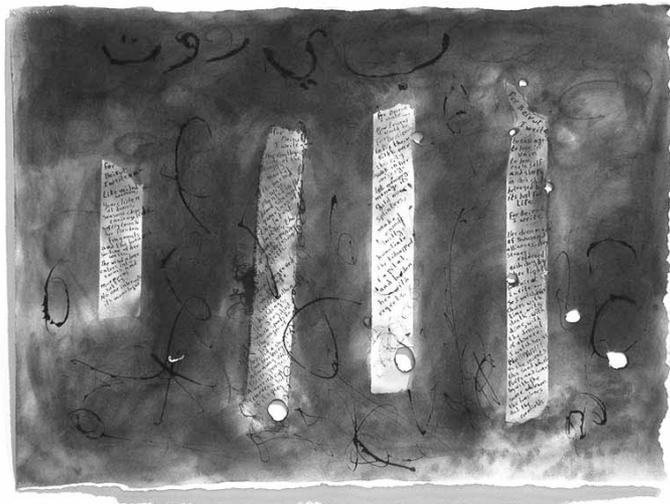


◆ **5TH CRUSADE**, mixed media about the American invasion of Iraq (clay/pins/nails).



◆ *PINE TREES DONT MAKE PINE NUTS ANYMORE*, water color and ink on paper, 2006.

◆ *FOR BEIRUT I WRITE*, water color and ink on paper featuring a poem by Claire Gebayle about Beirut during the war, 2006.



◆ *ISRAEL/PALESTINE FENCE*, mono prints, mixed media, symbolic war in protest to its building, 2006.

# The Visibility of Palestinian Refugees: Women in Revolutionary Narratives A Gender Discourse

**Ibrahim A. El-Hussari**

In the following critique El-Hussari discusses three of Ghassan Kanafani's books: *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, *Ma tabaqqā la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, and *Umm Sa'ad*. Kanafani. As a Palestinian refugee himself, Kanafani has fathered a genre of literature known as 'Resistance Literature'. His literary works have continued to have a reverberating influence on the political and social discourse of Palestinian refugees throughout the Arab world. Though he does not focus specifically on gender issues, his analysis of Palestinian nationalism highlights the complex social and political context in which refugee women exist. El-Hussari's critique of Kanafani's novels focuses on the transformation of the female characters in their shift from passivity to political and social awareness and engagement. In so doing, El-Hussari suggests that Kanafani's female characters represent the Palestinian refugee population in their political and social struggle to regain a voice and an ownership of destiny. Though the Palestinian refugee situation is unique, Kanafani's focus on the Palestinian refugees struggle with engagement and activism resonates with other refugee communities in the Arab world. El-Hussari draws attention to the issue of refugee women who not only face discrimination as refugees but who also struggle with the gendered tension between voicelessness and engagement within the home and in the broader Arab society.

## Introduction

In contemporary Palestinian fiction, gender differences, specifically focused on sexual politics and home economics, are submerged by national issues which loom over the life of Palestinian refugees, irrespective of gender. The majority of Ghassan Kanafani's literary works perpetuate this trend; excluding the female protagonist in *Umm Sa'ad*, women are rarely central to the plotline, or shaping the narrative's claim. Despite the marginality of these female characters, Kanafani does not sacrifice the tensions determining and defining the role of these characters. He also does not fall prey to classical feminist definitions of sexual politics. For example, Kate Millet (1971) notes the significance of power and domination in contemporary literary descriptions of sexual politics. These concepts do not seem to be the decisive factors shaping

women's destinies in Kanafani's revolutionary writing. Whether they are silent, absorbed in an internal monologue, or speak their minds candidly, Kanafani's female characters seem to be moved by intuition and natural gifts in their definition of existence. Choosing not to ignore the gender issue in favor of the national cause, Kanafani unravels several generations of women as he explores their narratives in a changing world, without dismissing the cultural thread that binds them together. Thus, the female characters' efforts to move towards self-awareness are framed by their response to the historical conditions traumatizing or elevating the lives of Palestinian refugees. In his three respective novels, namely *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, *Ma tabaqqā la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, and *Umm Sa'ad*, Kanafani portrays his female characters as dynamic, developing in the context of a specific time and space; there is a considerable shift in his

characters as they react to the compelling situations in which they find themselves. During this process of change, the female characters shift from a state of total passivity and nominal self-recognition to one of partial participation in their surrounding context, and eventually to a state of full awareness in which they begin to play an active role, not only in shaping their fate, but also the fate of their people.

### *Men in the Sun*

In the first novel *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, the voice of the woman is barely heard, as wife, mother or daughter: as a wife and mother, she is but a part of the memory of her husband who is facing his bleak fate, venturing into the unknown desert to secure a decent living for his family; as a daughter, she is the subject of an arranged marriage explored through the memories of her betrothed cousin who is smuggled across the desert borders to seek a job; and as divorced wife and mother, she is a part of a family story, related by her teen-age son to his traveling companions on the eve of their desert journey. Within the historical context conditioning the lives of the Palestinian refugees and in the absence of a national project to challenge their behavior, it seems that the woman is unable to directly engage in her context and to improve her status. Hence, it is the man who takes heed of that historical condition. As the three men, representing three Palestinian generations by virtue of their age-groups, accept to be smuggled inside a water-tank across the Iraqi-Kuwaiti desert borders, they accept the consequences of the illegal border crossing. Ironically, the three men noiselessly suffocate to death inside the symbolic moving coffin, leaving behind bereaved women silently struggling in a bigger tank, the refugee camp. The story highlights the national drama, in which both genders are engulfed. *Men in the Sun* is a tragedy without tragic heroes or heroines. The historical context is depicted as joining the genders in victimization, highlighted by both their silent suffering and voicelessness.

### *All That's Left to You*

In *Ma Tabaqqa la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, the woman assumes more significant visibility, both

physically and morally. She imposes herself on the texture of the narrative when her sexual disgrace triggers the subsequent events that structure the plotline. Her presence, as female, is constantly felt as part of a universal human condition that frames the mundane lives of refugee women, irrespective of time and space. Maryam, though not the principal character, is one of the clearest expressions of the Palestinian plight after 1948, during which most of the Palestinian people lost their land and became refugees. After sixteen years in exile, she is portrayed as a spinster approaching middle-age. She allows a married man and a collaborator with the Israelis (during the Israeli occupation of Gaza Strip in 1956) to tarnish and impregnate her. However, the disgrace Maryam has brought to the family honor, protected by her younger brother Hamid in the absence of her parents (the father was killed in action before the mass exodus and the mother was assumed to have been displaced somewhere in Jordan), is treated with sympathy. In this book, Maryam is more developed than the female characters in Kanafani's earlier book; she is not voiceless and inactive as they are. Her successive internal monologues coupled with her conversations with Hamid and Zakaria, her de facto husband, exhibit her potential to understand herself, both as a woman and as the mother she would become. This struggle with self-realization culminates in her heroic action of killing Zakaria with a kitchen knife in self-defense and, more significantly, in defense of motherhood. She refuses to abort her unborn child, as demanded by Zakaria, protecting motherhood at all costs. Symbolically, her act coincides with Hamid's readiness to slit the throat of his captive, an Israeli border-guard soldier, in the heart of the Naqab Desert which Hamid is crossing to reunite with his mother. These two acts of violence and protectionism symbolically usher in a new historical context which allows the dispossessed Palestinians, male and female alike, to re-enter history: their heroic acts invariably foreshadow the birth of the Palestine Liberation Movement a few years later.

The importance of a Palestinian national project and an active Palestinian identity, mobilizing both men and women, is central to both *Men in the Sun* and *All That's Left to You*. In *Men in the Sun*,