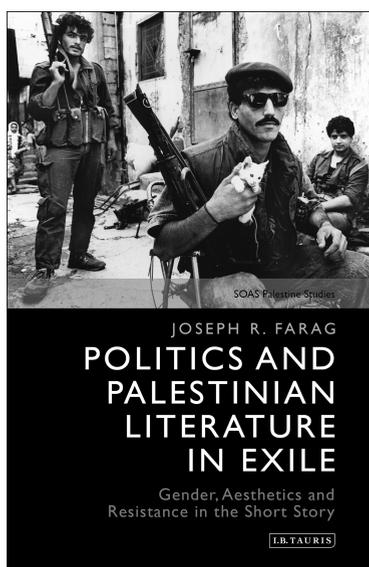


The book also raises, but does not sufficiently answer, questions about other family relations in light of the incarceration of close kin in Palestine. For example, what happens to the children and the male kin of prisoners?

On the other hand, it invites us to think about other understudied Palestinian families who share similar experiences of continuous suffering due to forced separation. Such cases include families who are denied the right of unification, such as when one spouse lives in the West Bank and the other inside Israel or Jerusalem, or families who are unable to complete the process of mourning for a martyr whose corpse Israeli authorities withhold.

No Place for Grief is a unique, informative, and highly readable ethnography. Through the very specific case of political prisoners' wives, it may relate to everyday life in the besieged Gaza Strip, where the temporality of repeated suffering and endurance is relived in a prolonged present of indescribable pain. Moreover, it also captures the current political moment of the larger Palestinian population, in which the endless endurance of pain leads to a "loss of politics" and a silent skepticism toward the national project's future.

Nadeem Karkabi recently completed his PhD in anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Martin Buber Society of Fellows in the Humanities at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.



Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story, by Joseph R. Farag. London: I.B.Tauris, 2016. 304 pages. \$110.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ATEF ALSHAER

Joseph R. Farag's book, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story*, offers an insightful and skillful analysis of the Palestinian short story. It is one of the first books published under the auspices of the SOAS Palestine Studies series by I.B.Tauris, and the editors are to be commended for producing such a high-quality book. Not only does the book explain the importance of the short story to the Palestinian literary tradition, it also demonstrates originality in its methodological engagement with the historical and sociopolitical underpinnings of Palestinian literary production. Farag interrogates the short story through informative literary works produced in the context of key historical events. These include the Nakba era culminating in the dispossession of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948; the Arab defeat in 1967; and the eruption of the Palestinian intifada (uprising) against the Israeli occupation in 1987. Farag successfully demonstrates the diversity of styles and visions that underline literary production within specific historical

conditions, emphasizing the interplay between the literary and the political in the formation of an adaptive and innovative literary tradition.

The book is divided into three chapters echoing the three interrelated periods in question. In the introduction, Farag, an assistant professor of literature at the University of Minnesota, reflects on the dearth of studies considering the importance of the short story to Arabic literature, even though the form was more widespread and practiced than the novel. Yet, it is poetry and the novel that have received scholarly attention, rendering the short story and its accounts of the literary and political conditions of the Arab world less visible. The short story does not simply react to Israeli colonialism and Palestinian losses, it also addresses sociopolitical ills and setbacks that pertain to the Palestinians, and indeed Arab societies at large. Therefore, in each chapter, Farag competently combines varied themes that relate to the evolution of the short story while focusing on three “overlapping and inseparable” themes: “Politics and/of Aesthetics”; “Gender and Sexuality”; and “Literature and/of Resistance” (p. 11).

In the first chapter, Farag highlights the centrality of memory to Palestinian modes of narration. Palestinian literature has helped to elucidate and reveal the hidden aspects and the underlying effects of the Nakba, exceeding the limits of formal and archival documents. Farag also explores the role of the Nakba in Arabic literature, particularly within the context of what is known as committed literature, *adab al-iltizam*. Popularized by French writer Jean-Paul Sartre, this realist form gained much significance in modern Arabic literature as it emphasized engagement with sociopolitical issues as a means of improving social conditions. As a point of critique, Farag’s analysis of realist literature lacks nuance, arguing that its engagement with the conditions of people was a departure from the allegedly linearly individualistic romanticism afflicting Arabic literature beforehand. What is missing from his critique is that romantic literature was not strictly escapist as it is often depicted; it included individual responses to sociopolitical degradations, with political messages of renewal and justice at its heart. However, Farag’s engagement with important Palestinian authors in this chapter, namely Samira Azzam and Ghassan Kanafani, overrides this minor point.

Azzam (1927–1967) was a prolific writer in the post-Nakba period. Seeing the class divisions and hardships of the working class as one of the main reasons for the Palestinian defeat, she used masculinist tropes to highlight the weakness of society in the face of a well-organized Zionist movement. Yet later, the shift from social-realist literary methods and attitudes to modernist ones underlying her writing set the stage for mature feminist writers like Liana Badr who uses distinct modernist styles, affected with stream of consciousness, that assault the constraints and claustrophobic societal norms that subdue women and render them invisible.

Meanwhile, Kanafani (1936–1972) undergoes the converse journey to Azzam’s. He was a pioneer of modernist writing, beginning his career by projecting the shattered state of the Palestinians after the Nakba through fragmented narratives. Yet, with the defeat of 1967, Kanafani resorted to realist writing, engaging and popularizing the themes of organized resistance to occupation. Farag includes a significant point: “As a pioneer in the introduction of modernist aesthetics, temporal and special instability, and multiple narrators in Arabic literature, systematic examination of Kanafani’s hitherto largely neglected short stories reveals a breadth of literary expression, ranging from realism to surrealism, a versatility that is elided by too narrow a focus on Kanafani’s novels”

(p. 58). As life in the refugee camps became more insecure and uncertain for the Palestinian inhabitants, Kanafani resorted to narrative techniques that rendered these squalid conditions in similar fashion through obliquities and omissions. His narration is wrought with obscurity and abstraction. However, after 1967 and with the emergence of hopeful Palestinian resistance groups, Kanafani's voice became more direct and involved, empowering his characters with agency and authority to lead the struggle for liberation.

The 1967 defeat and the literary responses to it form another illuminating chapter by Farag. In this era, Kanafani's characters are animated with foresight regarding the struggle, unlike the Nakba generation's fatalism and torpor, and Kanafani captures a renewed Palestinian hope motivated by third world liberation movements, which proved more inspirational than Gamal Abdel Nasser's doomed pan-Arabism. But if Kanafani deploys hopeful symbols (for example, the gun) beckoning liberation and showing the fruits of a struggle built on national agency and persistence, other authors maintain skepticism. Yahya Yakhlif, who wrote on the Palestinian revolution and its setbacks, is incredulous at the prospects of liberation through dogged armed struggle. As Farag writes, "a thread of scepticism and cynicism toward the conflict and the Palestinians' involvement in it is clear, expressed variously as flippancy and dismissal on the one hand, and an attempt to confront its most nightmarish qualities on the other" (p. 128).

In the third and final chapter, Farag highlights the political background of the First Intifada before focusing on the remarkable short story collection by Ibrahim Nasrallah, *Terrestrial Waves* (in Arabic; Arab Scientific Publishers, 1988). In it, Nasrallah anticipates the forthcoming Palestinian uprising and acts of heroism, and the book reads simultaneously as a novel, drama, and cinematic collage. It documents various points and situations of Palestinian resistance. Here, political prisoners defeat their captivity by studying and empowering themselves, children defy Israeli soldiers and subvert their controlling tricks, weddings become points of nationalist gathering and celebration; solidarity deepens among the Palestinians. The Palestinians emerge as an undefeated nation, no matter what merciless tactics the Israelis use against them.

However, at this point in time, the deep sense of solidarity that underpins the Palestinian struggle has been undermined by internal and external challenges, which are viscerally depicted in the writings of Sahar Khalifeh and Badr, respectively. The Palestinians are beset by exile, patriarchal norms, nationalist fragmentation, and constant Israeli targeting that render their writing wrought with layers of oppression and hope in the face of overwhelming odds.

Farag's book demonstrates a competent interpretation of literary tropes that reveal the creative forces that have animated Palestinian writings amid extremely testing political and social conditions. The book reveals the admirably undefeated Palestinian will to creativity, which the author assesses with characteristic eloquence and, indeed, grace: "It is truly remarkable, when one pauses to consider it, that a beleaguered, stateless, diasporic nation, so heavily dependent upon cultural production to maintain its identity and cohesion should be so willing, through that self-same cultural production, to engage in such sustained, and oftentimes harsh, introspection and self-critique" (p. 13).

Atef Alshaer is a lecturer in Arabic studies at the University of Westminster. Among other publications, he is the author of *Poetry and Politics in the Modern Arab World* (London: Hurst, 2016).
