



Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa & Other Stories

By Ghassan Kanafani, Barbara Harlow, Karen E. Riley



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Politics and the novel, Ghassan Kanafani once said, are an indivisible case. Fadl al-Naqib has reflected that Kanafani wrote the Palestinian story, then he was written by it. His narratives offer entry into the Palestinian experience of the conflict that has anguished the people of the Middle East for more than a century.

In Palestine's Children, each story involves a child a child who is victimized by political events and circumstances, but who nevertheless participates in the struggle toward a better future. As in Kanafani's other fiction, these stories explore the need to recover the past the lost homeland by action. At the same time, written by a major talent, they have a universal appeal.

This edition includes the translators' contextual introduction and a short biography of the author.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Ghassan Kanafani's meteoric literary and political career ended abruptly one morning in July 1972, when his booby-trapped car exploded, killing him and his niece. At the time, Kanafani was the spokesperson for the most militant wing of the Palestinian fedayeen. That militancy is reflected in these 14 stories. Beginning with a narrative disconcertingly entitled "The Child Borrows His Uncle's Gun and Goes East to Safad," Kanafani plunges into the 1948 conflict between the Jews and Palestinians, following a 17-year-old, Mansur, whose actions mirror the author's own experiences. In a series of stories, the reader follows Mansur as he carries his old Turkish gun into the thick of sharpshooting contests with "Zionists" (as Israelis are identified in this strongly pro-Arab text) in old Palestinian town centers. Later, Mansur's uncle, Abu Al-Hassan, uses the gun on the British forces. These stories end, inevitably, with the consequences of defeat for the Palestinians: "The Child Goes to the Camp," in which the narrator a different child than Mansur must survive the hunger sweeping through the refugee camps. He does so with a talisman, a five-pound note he finds in the street. In the novella for which Kanafani became famous, "Returning to Haifa," the year is 1967, but the events are prefigured by the Palestinian population's uprooting from Haifa in 1948. Said S. and his wife, Safiyya, return to Haifa to the apartment they were forced to abandon and the memories of their infant son, Khaldun, inadvertently left behind in the mass panic. Miraculously, the Jewish couple who took over the apartment found and adopted the child, who is now an Israeli soldier. This story, which ends with a renunciation of even blood ties in the sacred cause of revenge, foretells the terrible violence of the '70s. (Sept.)

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Review

Palestine's Children offers the concerned reader an excellent work wherein the translation maintains the powerful spirit that animates the Arabic original. --Aida A. Bamia, Journal of Third World Studies

[Kanafani] unabashedly depicts the hardship of life in the refugee camps, the agony of succumbing to numerous political or ideological shifts, and life nearly devoid of hope.... The novella Returning to Haifa speaks volumes about the enduring traumas of war.... In a moving, concise manner, this story touches upon many small issues that together contribute to the conflict between the Palestinians and Zionists including identity, language, class strife, and the deceptively difficult task of defining homeland. --Christine Dykgraaf, MESA Bulletin

About the Author

Born in Acre (northern Palestine) in 1936, Ghassan Kanafani was a prominent spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and founding editor of its weekly magazine Al-Hadaf. His novels and short stories have been published in sixteen languages. He, along with his niece, was killed in Beirut in 1972 in the explosion of his booby-trapped car.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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