

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Sawaie, Mohammed. Tbraranslator. *The Tent Generation: Palestinian Poems.*

London: Banipal Books, 2022. 160 pages.

Paperback \$17.99

Mohammed Sawaie's book *The Tent Generation*, newly translated poems by 16 Palestinian poets, is an excellent addition to the existing anthologies of Palestinian poetry for English readership. The selections of previously untranslated poems is enlightening about a few known and less known poets, who depict the Palestinian experiences of three wars: 1948, 1967, and 1973. *The Tent Generation* also includes biographies of the poets, translator, and artist of the cover page; a glossary of important names of cities, historical personalities and landmarks; and an informative introduction by Sawaie.

The introduction helps contextualize the poetry from within modern Palestinian history and culture, which have been traumatized and besieged by the settler colonial state of Israel. The title of the collection comes from Salem Jubran's 1965 poem by the same title. Jubran, who belongs to the first generation of poets of resistance, gives voice to the banished generation after 1948, one among 160,000 Palestinians who had remained inside what became Israel. Jubran's poems, the largest segment in the collection, are a pleasure to read. The poems chronicle the multi-layered history of Palestinians – the Zionist war that expelled and forced many to flee for safety; the Nakba and the loss; the burning of villages and sad life in the camps and ghettos; the blocked borders between the new state and the neighboring Arab states. Having lost their homes, renamed "Arab Israelis," and forced to live in ghettos under military rule, Jubran expresses the Palestinians' poverty, hunger, rootlessness, sadness, and exile in their own country, bemoaning the nightmare of history. But there is also singing, love of the land and its landscape, and the call for endurance of those who "still walk on thorns / to birth spring" (88). Due to the "cultural siege" under which Palestinians in Israel live, Palestinian poets became the leaders-educators who provide hope and confidence to their people as they began demanding the recognition of their national Arab identity and equal rights with Israeli Jews.

It is refreshing to read poems by the younger generation of poetry of resistance, many of whom reside in refugee camps in Jordan and Gaza. The poems embody real-life experiences of the individual and collective, under the settler state, as well as the occupied territories in the post-1967 war. They express awareness of injustice, exile, and the pain of the longest occupation in history,

in refugee camps across the Arab and wider world. For example, Youssef al-Khatib from Hebron writes about the freedom of a lark, which freely moves around borders violating “a thousand sacred prohibitions” while he is weighed down by his wounds (67). Yusef al-Deek, who was born in the refugee camp of al-Baqa al-Gharbiyya, satirizes the Palestinian Authority in “Abbas’ State” for being a tame one, with “no authority in this ‘Authority,’” after “Oslo.” The poet needs only a half tongue to “tell the whole truth” of the betrayal of the Palestine cause by its leaders (123–124).

The Tent Generation will be of interest to scholars, students, and the general reader. It illuminates the modern Palestinian cultural heritage and teaches about the historical conditions under which Palestinians live.

Kanafani, Ghassan. *The Revolution of 1936–1939 in Palestine: Background, Details, and Analysis.*

Translated by Hazem Jamjoum. Introduced by Layan Sima Fuleihan. Afterword by Maher al-Sharif.

New York: 1804 Books, 2023. 99 pages.

Paperback \$20.00

Originally published in Arabic as *Shou'n Falastiniyya (Palestinian Affairs)* issue #6 (1972)

This translation of *The Revolution of 1936–1939 in Palestine* is significant for making Ghassan Kanafani’s seminal work available to English readers. It is only recently that historians and cultural critics have uncovered the secret policies and strategies against Palestinian resistance to British colonialism [the Mandate] and the Zionist paramilitary state.¹ This is a slim work, a total of 99 pages, comprising of the historical context, an afterword, a glossary, a note about the contributors, acknowledgments, and endnotes. This brief review will focus on a few features of Kanafani’s argument.

To begin with, Kanafani goes against the grain in renaming and analyzing the two major historical events that are at the heart of the Palestine question. The “Great Revolt” is recast as “The Revolution,” and the “British Mandate” as colonialism / imperialism. Kanafani’s 71-page exposé informs us about the background, details, and analysis of the three-decades long colonial mandate that includes the three-year Revolution against the British and the Zionists. Specific minute details, critical statistics, and sharp insight are provided about the local drivers of these years: the workers, the peasants, and the intellectuals, which flesh out the Palestinian mindsets, the intricacies of each domain, the causes for the grievances, and the purpose of the revolution. Another notable feature is the rehabilitation of Shaikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, whose major role in shaking up the

contradictions in Palestinian society that resulted in the revolution, is partly the focus of the concluding chapter. Titled, “The Revolution.” Kanafani’s analysis links the three-year revolution back to al-Qassam’s *intifada* whose “advanced organizational capacity” and “ironclad patience” (40) led the patriotic Shaikh to mobilize support for the revolution on the eve of November 12, 1935, when he was captured and martyred by British troops. Kanafani argues that al-Qassam’s movement was a “turning point” for the Palestinian struggle with his strategic organization in terms of secrecy and security; “psychological preparation” and revolutionary spirit; finance and arms purchase; military training and communication; information and propaganda; and “armed revolt.” The writer’s analysis brings al-Qassam’s movement to the forefront rather than the sidelines of Palestinian history. We are rightly told that mainstream scholarship – Arab and Western—has not afforded al-Qassam and his followers their due recognition, until recently.² There has been a failure to understand the “dialectical relationship between religion and nationalist tendencies” in non-Western societies, according to Kanafani (39). Thus his insertion of the Qassamist “explosive force” (41) in challenging traditional Palestinian leadership, who had ignored al-Qassam’s call for a revolution, is clearly noted. Kanafani’s analysis challenges traditional historiography of Palestine and anticipates the more contemporary historiography regarding this important “religio-patriotic” hero-martyr of the Palestinian Revolution (40).

Another remarkable feature is Kanafani’s experiential point of departure, which resonates with that of many contemporary intellectuals and writers from the Global South. As Fuleihan suggests, Kanafani’s awareness of class consciousness was based on his and the refugees’ concrete experience in the camps in Syria, as well as the people around him (ix). His Marxist-Leninist approach was organically shaped from the concrete to the abstract, from the Arab Nationalist Movement to which he had initially committed himself. This “organic Marxism” did not follow the Marxist strict abstractions of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; for Kanafani, politics, economics, strategy, and culture are all intertwined together (x).

In the first section, “Workers,” we learn of the exact ways Palestinian workers were affected by Jewish immigration and Jewish Labor. For example, Kanafani provides statistics of increased immigrants between 1932 and 1935 and what that entails for Arab workers’ earnings and unemployment, resulting in confrontations with Jewish workers. Additionally, he points out the effects of Jewish migration on middle-class landowners and urban bourgeoisie’s employment, investments, and income. Bearing in mind that the British were enabling Jewish economic investments in industrial infrastructure to benefit the Jews and impoverish the Palestinians. This reality, he concludes, led to the “near-total collapse” of the Palestinian economy by 1935 (7). Similarly, the dire conditions of the peasants are

fleshed out in Section 2 with specific statistics regarding Jewish acquisition of Palestinian land, actions that were also fully supported by the British mandate government militarily, administratively, and legally. Not only did these actions leave the Palestinians landless, but also impoverished them as they moved to urban centers to become unskilled laborers.

The Revolution of 1936–1939 in Palestine is a valuable text for readers not versed in Arabic. It is recommended to both scholars, undergraduate, and graduate students who are interested in the Palestine–Israel conflict, Middle East studies, Empire, and War studies.

Beck, Colin J., et.al. *On Revolutions: Unruly Politics in the Contemporary World*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. 272 pages.

Paperback \$29.99

Contemporary revolutions differ in many aspects from past “Grand Revolutions.” While the grand revolutions of America, France, Russia, and China were class-based, were schematically utopian in vision, and were revolutions that arose in rural regions, seeking the transformation of the social structure through violence and armed struggle, contemporary revolutions offer a different vision, scope, location, implementation, and schemes. Six renowned international scholars: Colin J. Beck, Mlada Bukovansky, Erica Chenoweth, George Lawson, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, and Daniel P. Ritter contest the problematic dichotomies of traditional theorization of revolutionary studies and offer new “theories, models, and methodological approaches” for the future study and research of the evolving natures of contemporary revolutions (4). The authors theorize the distinct characteristics of revolutions in the twenty-first century and provide powerful insights regarding the shift to the model of contemporary revolutions. They argue that not only do the old models fail to provide adequate theorization of the contemporary scene, but that the theoretical inadequacy of the old models seems to have escaped social scientists. Beck et. al. concede that the book is not the final answer to the evolving phenomena, but an attempt to open up the conversation regarding the theoretical framework of contemporary revolutions. Five shifts characterize contemporary revolutions vis-à-vis the grand revolutions. Twenty-first-century revolutions build on cross-class coalitions; they are for the most part unarmed, favoring civil resistance; they are urban-centered; and they have more limited visions, such as regime change or the toppling of leaders (2–3). As the writers rethink revolutionary studies, they follow two approaches. One, their approach is interdisciplinary and taps into four area studies: civil resistance studies, international relations, political

theory, and the “reflexive practice” of “feminist and qualitative research methods.” Two, they veer away from the dichotomous methods of former revolution theories and empirical studies; they insist that revolutions are not just events but are “moving processes.” Beck et. al. suggest that contemporary revolutions are messy, succeed and fail simultaneously, and are caused by the interrelationship of both local and international conditions (10–11).

On Revolutions comprises two parts. Part I, titled, “Challenging the Way We Think about Revolutions,” and Part II, which is heavily theorized, deals with “Challenging the Way We Theorize, Research, and Advise on Revolutions,” making up a total of eight chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. This brief review will focus on Part I.

The introduction summarizes traditional theories of revolution, informing us about the four generations of theoretical approaches and their limitations that, in the writers’ view, have been oversimplified as they restricted full understanding of the dynamics of both classical and contemporary revolutions. Taking the existing theories of revolution as their point of departure, the five chapters of Part I engage the social–political dichotomy, the agency–structure dichotomy, the violence–nonviolence dichotomy, the success–failure dichotomy, and the domestic–international dichotomy. Chapter 1 takes Ukraine’s Orange revolution of 2004 and the Euromaidan revolution of 2014 as two cases that challenge the social–political dichotomy, to demonstrate the dynamics of how the process may succeed in accomplishing political change; but social transformation may not happen due to the complications of running the state, which usually relies on former administrative infrastructure to preserve the state continuity. Chapter 2 examines the Iranian revolutions of 1979, as per Misagh Parsa’s narrative, regarding the structural conditions vis-à-vis strategic actions, which the writers find lacking in the analysis of how structural conditions can shape the choices of strategy and human agency. They also offer an alternative, holistic analysis of the Egyptian uprising of 2011 to combine strategic choices and structural conditions (44).

The violence-nonviolence dichotomy is deconstructed in Chapter 3 because strategic shifts happen in the process, from armed to unarmed struggle and vice versa. Beck et. al. argue that movements are neither static nor neat, but “have fluid and flexible strategies” (85) depending on many factors. The two cases of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement and the West Papua Liberation movement are analyzed to support their argument. The 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe are the subject of Chapter 4, demonstrating the fallacy of the success–failure dichotomy. While countries in this region succeeded in toppling the Soviet-style regimes and opted for democratic governance, citizens experienced disillusionment for the failure to achieve the revolutionary goals for which they

had risen. The post-revolution problems include social inequality, the dependency on Western states or international bodies, the corruption of leaders and competition among them, and the failure to achieve democratic goals for all. The result has been “illiberal democracy” whereby populism replaced calls for civil liberties and human rights for all citizens, especially for immigrants who were scapegoated (85–86). Chapter 5 concludes Part I by interrogating the domestic-international dichotomy. Beck et. al. argue that traditional theories are problematic for having focused solely on the domestic sphere, such as the poor economy, weak regimes, intra-conflicts among leaders, and oppositional forces (106). According to the authors, domestic problems cannot be isolated from the global sphere. Local regimes are always interconnected with international alliances, elite leaders have transnational relationships, and oppositional forces look for global support tactically, symbolically, ideologically, and methodologically, among other supporting resources. Basically, “... there are no fully domestic revolutions,” the writers affirm (106). Moreover, they caution that international factors should not be perceived as facilitators, dependent outcomes, or the “backdrop to domestic causal processes” (106). Rather, they argue for an “inter-social” approach to overcome the domestic-international dichotomy.

On Revolutions is a brilliant steppingstone in the theoretical reformulation of contemporary revolutions that should inspire future scholars of revolutionary studies and social movements. Scholars, graduate students, and policymakers would benefit greatly from this rich and thoughtful road map to understanding revolutions in the twenty-first century.

Khayyat, Munira. *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon*.

Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022. 286 pages.

Paperback \$29.95

Is it possible to envision life in the midst of the misery of war, bombardment, and occupation? If war and fear can be intimately experienced alongside an innocent childhood bursting with life, then *A Landscape of War* is one poetic work that captures the double experience of war and life. What the six-year-old Munira Khayyat had witnessed in the 1982 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon was brought back to her, now the adult scholar. in the second Israeli invasion in 2006 of the same territory. But now the adult anthropologist is empowered by scholarly theory that enables her to grasp and theorize beautifully what happened two and a half decades ago. The book offers an original expression/study of Khayyat’s love of the land and the landscape: the trees, vegetation, fruits, vegetables, tobacco, and

communities that live, resist, and survive simultaneously with the raging wars around this small territory. She states: “War is the object [of study], landscape [is] the medium and method” (5). Instead of focusing only on death and war, she sees life beyond destruction, a life that persists in the living landscape and the resilient people who stay and survive beyond the trauma of wars.

A Landscape of War comprises six chapters with a prelude and coda, an introduction and a conclusion. An impressive list of 25 illustrations breathe life into and enhance the text—the landscape, olive and oak trees, crops of tobacco, several black and white pencil drawings of actual locations, the almost destroyed town of Bint Jbeil, a picture of Fatima’s stained and bleeding hands while threading tobacco leaves, and many people with names who continue to live and cultivate the land in South Lebanon. From the tobacco fields to the process of harvesting and drying tobacco leaves, to goats who roam lightly among minefields and remnants of cluster bombs, to goat herders and martyrs, elders and grandchildren, an ancient olive tree, an ancient and sacred oak tree, and the Mleeta resistance landmark – the memorial for the secretary-general of Hizbullah Abbas al-Mussawi where he prayed and was martyred, all of which testify to the resilience of the landscape and the communities and their resistance to wars and occupation (3). The narrative speaks of life and war in this land, during “years and years of war, displacement, and occupation that was lived through as they practiced ‘life-sustaining’ vital tactics that ‘thrive within.’” Khayyat calls them “resistant ecologies/survival collectives” that are more hopeful, radical, and elastic (6–7).

What is interesting for this reviewer is Khayyat’s multi-layered understanding of resistance. She concedes that resistance is a military reality, but it is also a “vital existential orientation” (8) the strands of which Khayyat explores in her book. Chapter 1, “A Brief History of War in South Lebanon,” traces the history of wars back to post-World War I when Britain and France divided the land of Greater Syria (today’s Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine). As Abu Rida told the British magistrate, the demarcations of modern borders “with a pencil on the desk,” are illegitimate and artificial (37). Abu Rida was the first shaheed shot by the Israeli soldiers after Israel announced its existence in May 1948, when Palestinian–Lebanese land and communities were severed by the Empire. Before 1948, Palestinians and Lebanese shared the Galilee and had established “networks of trade, governance, and kinship” in the area. Khayyat rightly states that South Lebanon has been trapped, impoverished, and relegated to the periphery, and this border has seen many further demarcations by color—the 1948 Green Line, the 1967 Purple Line, the 1982 Red Line, and the 2000 Blue Line, lines imposed to control the free movement of civilians, smugglers, shepherds, guerrilla fighters, and sheep, and goats. Only the “wind, butterflies, seeds, bees, and birds” could roam freely across the sky (38).

The chapter also informs us about the welcoming generosity of the south *fallaheen* toward the Palestinian *fallaheen* during the Nakba who were expelled from their homes in Northern Palestine to become refugees in Lebanon, when both groups shared their plight as the common cause of injustice by the powerful. Khayyat fleshes out the collaboration of the southerners and the Palestinian *fida'iyyin* (resistance fighters) in the 1960s whereby local guides aided them in navigating the terrain and routes to Palestine–Israel to carry on their fight against the settler state. This is an interesting period of history for the south border and the Palestinian Resistance Movement that would ultimately sour, ending with the departure of the PLO from Lebanon to Tunisia, a complex narrative beyond the scope of this brief review. Suffice it to say that initially, many Shi'a militants from the south joined Fatah training camps, feeling affinity with the Palestine/South Lebanon cause, one that reconfigured the south border as a strategic military border that recentered the south as a place in the “regional and global power games and international media attention” (42). The chapter provides a rundown on the rise of Amal and then Hizbullah. The remainder of the chapter delves into the period of the Lebanese civil war with all the factions and conflicts within, as well as conflicts with the PLO, Israel, and Syria, complex topics that need to be studied in detail.

As we have been witnessing the ongoing relentless Israeli aggression against Gaza since October 7, 2023, the geopolitical struggles of the wider Middle East are the blatant results of the founding of Israel, which has turned the region into a warzone. The settler colony's environmental warfare has targeted the agricultural communities with attacks and counterattacks, aggression and exploitation, occupation, and paranoid military rule that has not only shaped the life of the local inhabitants (39), but Israel's tactics continue to rule the lives of the Arab people, with no end in sight. Except for South Lebanon. “South Lebanon is perhaps the only place in the long Arab–Israeli conflict where the mighty Israeli war machine was militarily repudiated and repeatedly humiliated” (39). *A Landscape of War* is a rich ecological and historical study that also blends into the text the emotional imaginary of Munira Khayyat. It would be of interest to scholars and graduate students of anthropology, history, and war, sectarian, and cultural studies.

NOTES

1. The reference here is to Matthew Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, the Colonial State, and the Great Revolt, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
2. The most recent scholarly work about al-Qassam is by Mark Sanagan, *Lightning Through the Clouds: Izz al-Din al-Qassam and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2020). For a review of the book, see *Arab Studies Quarterly* 43.1 (Winter 2021): 78–79.

