

Viktoria Pötzl / Katharina Wiedlack (eds.)

Narrated Belonging

Exploring the Boundaries of Nationhood
and its Alternatives



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In loving memory of Sejal Sutaria (1973–2025)

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Introduction

As early as 1907, Otto Bauer wrote in *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (*The Question of Nationality and Social Democracy*) that the national community, with its diverse social manifestations, is one of the most highly complex of social phenomena. He added that to understand how belonging to a national community influences the will of the working class, one must approach the problem from different angles. He then concludes that if we wish to avoid having to abandon this challenging task entirely, we must venture beyond the boundaries of our own field of work.¹ This is precisely what our edited volume aims to do, bringing together scholars, and their contributions from various fields, to engage in critical dialogue. These fields include American, English, German-Jewish, and Spanish literary and cultural studies, European studies, and mobility studies. While all these contributions are firmly grounded in their respective core disciplines, the approaches they adopt are highly interdisciplinary, drawing on insights from postcolonial and critical race studies, feminist and gender studies, Marxist criticism, sociology, and others.

Illuminating issues of nationhood and belonging from a multidisciplinary perspective, we do not offer definitions or answers. Rather, we explore complexities by examining literary texts across time and from various parts of the world, and continuing the discourse famously addressed by Homi K. Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* (1990). Building on Benedict Anderson's² conceptualizations of the nation as an *Imagined Community*, Bhabha theorizes the narrative construction of the nation through storytelling and cultural discourse. By applying poststructuralist concepts to the analysis of literature, media, and everyday life, Bhabha emphasizes that national identity is always ambivalent, hybrid, and contested. He challenges monolithic ideas of belonging by highlighting marginalized voices and the liminal spaces between cultures. Bhabha demonstrated that national iden-

1 Otto Bauer. *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Forgotten Books, 2018 [1907]).

2 Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2016).

tity is constantly being negotiated and redefined, and that it emerges in narratives beyond simple patriotic tales.³ A substantial body of scholarship on the subject of the nation and literature has emerged, some of which is utilized and expanded upon in this book.⁴

While Bauer's discourse did not directly pertain to literature, we believe that national myths are created, utilized, subverted, reproduced, and/or dismantled in literary narratives. These are the focal point of our study. The concept of belonging is intrinsically, though uneasily, bound up with that of the nation. By focusing on postcolonial, migrant, and minoritarian narratives, as Bhabha does, we reveal complex, and often contradictory, experiences of belonging that transcend, or forgo, attachments to a single nation. Through its analysis of various literary narratives, our edited volume demonstrates that forms of belonging can emanate from a person's nation of origin, but do not necessarily have to. While citizenship is the legal form and proof of belonging, and is firmly bound to a nation and/or its state, emotional, political, and ideological forms of belonging have more nuanced relationships with the nation, often conflicting with (local) concepts of the nation and its institutions, or emerging as a shared rejection of them, enacted through anti-national, transnational, and international solidarities.

Our examinations of how belonging is represented in literature reveal that concepts such as identity politics, group conformity, assimilation, tribalism, ethnocentrism, ethnonationalism, nationalism, xenophobia, and racism all influence the discourse shaping our understanding of what it means to belong. Defining a "self," and creating an "other," has historically served as the foundation for exclusionary ideologies. This phenomenon is exemplified by the doctrine of nationalism. The contributions to this volume posit a fundamental belief in the universal principles of equal human rights, in opposition to exclusionary and hierarchical thinking, and its deployment of biopolitical strategies—to borrow a notion from Foucault (1998 [1976])⁵. The doctrine of nationalism and the forms of thinking it involves categorize citizens of a specific nation as worth protecting, while signifying non-citizens as disposable, or as a threat. As a concept, the belief in universal human rights transcends boundaries and nations, regardless of national, religious, or any other form of belonging. Theoretically, and thus also ideally and idealistically, this concept, then, is not predicated on a capitalist interpretation of a people.

3 Homi K. Bhabha. *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 1990).

4 Terry Eagleton et al. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997 [1990]). Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed. (Aunt Lute, 2012). Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. First edition (Knopf, 1993). Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated by Constance Farrington (Grove Press, 1963).

5 Michel Foucault. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*. Translated by Robert Hurley (Éditions Gallimard, 1998 [1976]).

Rather, it remains a choice that can be acted upon, and subsequently also altered, by any individual at any given moment. It may be considered a utopian thought experiment, which, while it may be idealistic, is nonetheless an objective worth striving towards. In reality (to which many of the literary and cinematographic examples analyzed in this volume attest), the world is entrenched in, and built upon, domination, repression, and the exploitation of others, while defending and protecting the primacy of the *self*.

In addition to analyzing nationalism and anti-nationalism, our contributors critically discuss their connections, overlaps, and counterpoints, to forms of colonialism. We contend that it is impossible to theorize literary belonging, and everything that it entails, without taking colonialism and the struggles against it into account. As Mahmood Mamdani reminds us, when discussing the concept of “institutionalized difference,” the term “native does not designate a condition that is original and authentic.”⁶ Mamdani’s argument, which is supported by Sir Henry Maine’s work, asserts that “the native is the creation of the colonial state.”⁷

Our edited volume follows the tradition of exploring the multifaceted approaches to, and interpretations of, the concept of the nation, as well as its inter-, trans-, and anti-national manifestations in literary texts from various regions, including North America, the Caribbean Islands, Israel, Palestine, and Spain, from the 19th century to the present. The book explores the complexities and variations of the nation, and examines its transformative potential within the broad field of literary studies through various literary works, including fiction, autobiography, poetry, and theater. The authors address phenomena such as global capitalist exploitation, and its conjunction with other forms of violence, including colonialism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and white supremacy. They engage with literary texts and film that reflect on and disseminate both hegemonic and (importantly) counterhegemonic discourses across the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Each chapter engages with productions that speak from minoritarian and/or racially oppressed perspectives, including works representing Black American transnationalism, perspectives of refugees of color, immigrant and Palestinian voices, Romani positionalities, and Caribbean diasporic perspectives. Focusing on these cultural texts, our authors examine the effects of, as well as resistance to, a variety of vectors of oppression. These include U.S.- American anti-Black racism and anti-migrantism, in connection with the exploitation of the working class; European anti-Roma violence; 20th-century Zionism; the violence of European border regimes; and forced migration and the segregation of refugees into camps.

If we view nations as *Imagined Communities*, then we must ask how these communities came to exist and to be manifested. More precisely, where did these

6 Mahmood Mamdani. *Define and Rule* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

7 Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 2.

imaginations originate, and what forms did they take? As our edited volume shows, literature is an ideal medium for this kind of imagination. Literature is capable of inventing and reinventing nationalisms—producing and reproducing them, as well as subverting them. Literature also imagines the absence of boundaries, questions borders, and focuses on movement and migration. It provides counternarratives to national discourse, and creates them, as well. Zionist literature is a prime example of the latter, because it most clearly exemplifies the idea of an imagined nation: what was once imagined—or, to cite Herzl, dreamed—came to fruition in the form of the State of Israel.

Viktoria Pötzl's "Zionist Literatures: Yael Dayan, Ghassan Kanafani, and Theodor Herzl," re-reads Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature* (1967) by taking a critical look at *Altneuland* (1902) by Theodor Herzl, and *New Face in the Mirror* (1959), *Envy the Frightened* (1960), and *Dust* (1963) by Yael Dayan. The Vienna of Herzl's youth, the setting for his utopia in *Altneuland*, is vastly different from Dayan's mid-20th-century Israel. However, the intellectual and literary pursuits of both Dayan and Kanafani were shaped by the same period: 1948. For Dayan, it was Israel, and for Kanafani, it was Palestine. Pötzl examines how nationalisms and national narratives are produced and reproduced in literature, particularly Zionist literature. Following Kanafani's critical approach, Pötzl outlines the role of literature in this context.

As previously mentioned, the concept of the nation and any associated imaginations are inherently linked to notions of belonging and non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion. Racism and xenophobia are ideological vectors that designate individuals and groups as belonging or not belonging to a nation state. Historically, immigrants have been associated with the idea of non-belonging, as have other groups, such as racialized minorities like Romani communities. Yoel Castillo Botello identifies the specific exclusionary ideologies at play in 20th century Francoist Spain, and their literary and aesthetic manifestations. Castillo Botello analyzes the play *La historia de los Tarantos* (1962), by Spanish dramatist Alfredo Mañas Navascués, which reconfigures the Shakespearean tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* to reflect the context of a Romani enclave in the Spanish Levante, a community historically excluded from the Spanish national imaginary. He focuses on the play's use of flamenco and tragedy as both aesthetic and political forms that challenge dominant narratives of national identity and cultural legitimacy. In doing so, he situates Romani visibility and experience at the center of a counter-national discourse. Castillo Botello argues that the play ultimately positions Romani representation as a vital reimagining of the national stage, not a deviation. Through his reading of *La historia de los Tarantos*, Castillo Botello demonstrates how cultural productions can intervene in national cultural traditions, resisting the homogenizing logic of the nation-state by amplifying subaltern voices and peripheral geographies.

All nations are intertwined with power relations, and wield power over populations. Politics of belonging, racism, xenophobia, and anti-migrant oppression are some of the ways a nation and its institutions exercise that very power. In failing states, nationalism serves as a substitute for state control, guaranteeing the continued capitalist exploitation of the working class through imagined national belonging and practices of othering and exclusion. Migrant literature, among other forms of literature, bears witness to the cruelty of these entanglements of discourse and domination. Kevin Potter, in "Striking Kinopoetics: Proletarian Counter-Pressure in Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*," focuses on the most recent context of the U.S. He examines Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*, developing a poetics (method and theory) that he calls a *kinopoetics* for analyzing migrant literature more broadly. This *kinopoetics* is related to the migratory figure of the proletariat, and it allows him to focus Viramontes's depictions of the cruel conditions of undocumented immigrant labor among Mexican workers in the United States, and the enduring patterns of exploitation, abuse, injury, and dispossession from the perspective of Marxist criticism.

Oppressed people are not merely or exclusively subjugated by imaginations of belonging and nationhood, but contribute to these discourse formations. This is the premise and subject of Katharina Wiedlack's chapter, "African American National Belonging, Black Mobility, and Abolitionist Transnationalism in the 19th Century." In analyzing *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince*, written by Prince herself and self-published in 1853, Wiedlack focuses on the often ambivalent discourses through which a corrective, or even countervailing, idea of national belonging is imagined from the perspective of a poor, working-class Black woman in Antebellum America. Through a close reading of the book, with its richly detailed fragments and descriptions of Prince's life, covering her extensive travels in Russia and Jamaica and her activism in the first half of the nineteenth century, Wiedlack traces the author's development of concepts such as Black citizenship and national belonging. She contextualizes her findings within the racial and gendered historical national discourses of the USA, Russia, and Jamaica, to show what local and transnational discursive structures and events might have influenced Prince. Prince's inter- and transnationalism significantly influenced her ideas about American national belonging and her perspective on social change.

Translocal and international exchange and solidarities crucially contribute to locally specific ideas of national belonging or non-belonging, and the related matters of citizenship and nationhood, which many of our contributions demonstrate. This can also become the imaginary ground where discourses of resistance are formed. Transnational alliances, and resistance against anti-migrant or anti-refugee forms of violence, are the focus of Arina Rotaru's "Transnational Solidarities: Jungle Stories and the Ontology of the Camp." Rotaru examines a series of

contemporary refugee stories and films that counter biopolitical strategies of management and enclosure of life. Set primarily in and around Calais, some of these stories are written by the refugees themselves, while others feature refugees speaking in their own voices on camera. Rotaru examines how refugees transcend camp duress and hostile bureaucratic spaces to transform nature and the environment, thereby creating their own narratives. Some of these narratives project alternative geopolitical alliances. Rotaru reads the camp as the locus of production for an alternative ontology, reflecting a new form of transnational solidarity. Her consideration of multiple refugee testimonies and practices enables profoundly different literary and cinematic narratives to emerge—derived from precarious conditions, yet resistant to destruction.

In her chapter “Archipelagic Solidarities Beyond Nation: Tidalectic Mobilities in Kaie Kellough’s *Magnetic Equator*,” Barbara Gfoellner explores the role of the archipelago as a framework for problematizing and potentially thinking beyond the nation-state. She analyzes Kaie Kellough’s poetry collection, titled *Magnetic Equator* (2019), which articulates diasporic mobilities shifting back-and-forth between Guyana and Canada, the rainforest and the prairie, the Middle Passage, and recent refugee crossings. Gfoellner reads the poems’ mobilities as *tidalectic*, making legible the multiple overlapping and nonlinear forms of movement across time and space. She further reflects on how notions of belonging are renegotiated through archipelagic solidarities across (neo)colonial political and social oppression and exploitation.

This anthology brings together a variety of contributions treating the relationship between ideas about the nation and national belonging, and the mobility of people, whether as settler-colonists, migrants, refugees, or travelers. In many cases, collective national belonging is imagined through the myth of stasis, alongside notions of land ownership and cultural identity, all of which are antithetical to mobility and fluidity. Such concepts of national belonging firmly attach the nation to the idea of space, mapping it onto a geographical location or zone, and defining it through borders in permanent need of protection and defense from the imagined, mobile *Other*. Particularly in diasporic contexts, however, minoritized people propose, and insist upon, alternative concepts of belonging, space, and location.

On Zionist Literatures: Yael Dayan, Ghassan Kanafani, and Theodor Herzl

In 1967, Ghassan Kanafani¹ published *On Zionist Literature*, which has recently been translated into English (2022). While Kanafani refers to many of the celebrated and canonized Zionist literary texts of his time, texts authored by Leon Uris, Samuel Agnon, or Benjamin Disraeli, for example, my article will focus more narrowly on *Altneuland* (1902) by Theodor Herzl²; and *New Face in the Mirror* (1959), *Envy the Frightened* (1960), and *Dust* (1963) by Yael Dayan.³ Herzl's Vienna at the turn of the century, the background and starting point for his utopia in *Altneuland*, differs in almost every respect from Yael Dayan's Israel in the middle of the 20th century. A common point of departure for Dayan and Kanafani, however, is the period 1948–1967: Israel in the case of Dayan, Palestine in Kanafani's work. In my article, I will examine the production and reproduction of national narratives in literature, by enriching our understanding of Zionist literature and its political, cultural, and historical functions. Ultimately, I intend to expand the discourse on Zionist literature by addressing its colonial undertones and problematic chauvinism. At the same time, I acknowledge that the artistic nature of literature and previously marginalized texts can raise broader questions than their presumed ideological aims suggest. Building on my study of Kanafani's work on Herzl and Dayan, I have developed a seven-point classification system of

1 For more information about Kanafani's biography, see: Adey Almohsen's forthcoming book on the intellectual history of Palestine and the Palestinians after 1948; or Ghassan Kanafani, *Ghassan Kanafani: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Louis Brehony and Tahrir Hamdi (Pluto Press, 2024); Brehony Louis and Hamdi Tahir, "Introduction: The Revolutionary Journey of Ghassan Kanafani," in *Ghassan Kanafani: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Louis Brehony and Tahrir Hamdi (Pluto Press, 2024), 4–16. See, in his own words: Ghassan Kanafani, "Interview: With the Martyr Ghassan Kanafani," in *Ghassan Kanafani: Selected Political Writings*, ed. Louis Brehony and Tahrir Hamdi (Pluto Press, 2024), 23–36.

2 For more information about Herzl's life, see: Derek Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: The Charismatic Leader, Jewish Lives* (Yale University Press, 2020); Shlomo Avineri, *Herzl: Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014).

3 Viktoria Poetzl, *Nation, Narration Und Geschlecht: Eine Feministische Literaturanalyse Der Werke Yael Dayans*, Jüdische Kulturgeschichte in der Moderne 15 (Neofelis, 2018).

Zionist literature, highlighting its limitations and strengths. Inspired by Kanafani's commitment to complexity, critique, and curiosity, I have used a similar approach to analyze his theory. The aim of this study is to engage with Kanafani's writing, while acknowledging that it has been translated, and is therefore already an interpretation. My overarching objective, however, is to facilitate a dialogue between the disciplines of Jewish Studies and Palestine Studies in a manner similar to Kanafani's approach in his writing, although this may not have been his main goal. In this way, my work can be seen as an adaptation of his methodology, but also as an extension.

Literary Zionism – A Critique

"The Zionist movement used the weapon of Literature in a manner only matched by its use of politics."⁴ This is the opening sentence of Kanafani's book *On Zionist Literature*. When reading Kanafani, I do not intend to distinguish between literary and political Zionism. Instead, I will outline the continuities, entanglements, and interferences between the two, since they both exist in the world and are inextricably linked. Although Kanafani sometimes draws a distinction between the pair—for instance, by stating that literary Zionism predated political Zionism⁵—he conflates them throughout his analysis, which, I would argue, was intentional. Faisal Darraj, for example, critiqued Kanafani precisely for this conflation, noting that Kanafani "until the very last moment, mixed Zionist thought and Zionist literature, cancelling the differences between political theory and literary theory—as well as the latter's ideological effects. He consolidated, moreover, Zionist literature into an imagined history, which equated Zionist thought, in its germinal phase, to the literature simultaneous to Israel's founding."⁶ My examination of the evidence corroborates Darraj's argument. However, I would argue that we can learn something from Kanafani when he equates the "literary politicization of Judaism"⁷ with literary Zionism. The former is a response to oppression, while the latter is an expression of colonial power. By oversimplifying their continuities, Kanafani takes a page out of the Zionist literature textbook, removing complexities to serve one simple political goal: to legitimize Jewish settlement in Israel, as in Zionist literature, and to delegitimize the Jewish occupation of Palestine, as in resistance literature.

4 Ghassan Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, trans. Mahmoud Najib, Liberated Texts Series (Ebb Books, 2022), 1.

5 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 16.

6 Faisal Darraj, *Dhākirat al-Maghlūbīn*, trans. Adey Almohsen (Wizārat ath-Thaqāfah al-Filastīniyyah, 2017 [2002]), 114.

7 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 1.

Adey Almohsen reminds us that Kanafani, often overlooked as a literary theorist, wrote “two towering texts of Palestinian literary theory: *Adab al-muqāwamah fī al-ard al-muḥtalah* (Resistance Literature in the Occupied Land, 1966) and *Fī al-adab aṣ-ṣaḥyūnī* (On Zionist Literature, 1967).”⁸ As a theorist whose approach is rooted in anti-colonialism and humanism, Kanafani states that Zionist literature “includes that which was written in non-Hebrew languages by non-Jews and so includes any text that operated under the banner of political Zionism and served its ends”.⁹ This allows Kanafani to distinguish a text’s ideological content from the author’s identity and ethnicity. It also allows him to demonstrate the intersection of literature and politics. As he demonstrated again later in *Returning to Haifa* (1972), this approach is fundamental to his anti-racist, non-essentialist belief system. For Kanafani, Zionist literature or literary Zionism encompasses all written works that support “the Jewish colonization of Palestine.”¹⁰ This perspective underscores the text itself, rather than the identity of the author; it highlights the irrelevance of ethnic, national, or other identity markers, underscoring Kanafani’s unwavering commitment to an anti-racist, non-essentialist stance. As a staunch opponent of ethno-nationalism, he believed that no homogeneous group of people should become a nation, since, in his view, a nation is nevertheless made up of people of all kinds, with all kinds of belief systems.

In his introduction, Kanafani expresses his desire to “know your enemy;”¹¹ but my focus is on analyzing the structures and thematic tools that shape and reinforce the notion of the supposed enemy on a literary level. Theoretical inconsistencies emerge when theories are implemented in practice. To be effective, theories must be simplified, which inevitably results in the loss of some complexities. Consequently, a single form of Zionism, in this case, was developed to serve a very specific political purpose, regardless of the extent of the resulting inconsistencies. Kanafani’s argument, which I can substantiate through my analysis of Zionist literary texts, is that Zionist literature did precisely that. The literature in question does not represent debates and struggles, nor does it question the debates and uncertainties that people actually engaged with, and still do. Consequently, we are left with a simplified version of complex debates and ideas. We are faced with the need to provide an explanation as to why Kanafani’s analysis focuses primarily on the most popular works of Zionist literature, while ignoring the discourses within the various Zionist groups and currents, as well as the dis-

8 Adey Almohsen, “Laābi, Kanafani, and the Ends of Theory: The Struggle Over National Literature in 1960s Morocco and Palestine,” *Souffles Monde*, no. 3 (2024), accessed March 26, 2025, <https://www.soufflesmonde.com/posts/laabi-kanafani-and-the-ends-of-the-ory-the-struggle-over-national-literature-in-1960s-morocco-and-palestine>.

9 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 1–2.

10 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 1.

11 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 6.

courses of intellectuals who held a critical stance towards Zionism—such authors as Bertha Pappenheim, Moshe Ya'akov Ben Gavriel, and Karl Kraus, who had already formulated their criticisms of political Zionism in a rhetorically impressive manner at the turn of the 20th century. Further, we must consider the debates of the cultural Zionists with the representatives of what we would today call political Zionism—for example, Herzl, Nordau, or Birnbaum.

In his second chapter, “The Birth of Zionist Literature”, Kanafani rightfully claims that literary Zionism existed before political Zionism. He emphasizes the crucial role of literature in politics and history, citing “Moses Hess, Leon Pinsker, Nahum Sokilow, Ahad Ha'am, Theodor Herzl and others.”¹² Kanafani situates the “official birth of political Zionism” at “the end of the nineteenth century”, “at a time when Jews attained citizenship rights in their countries of residence.”¹³ He then proceeds to argue that this is evidence that Zionism was not primarily a response to anti-Jewish oppression. He proposes that, on the contrary, the period saw the production of the most original and accomplished Jewish literature, suggesting that the conditions could not have been as dire as is often assumed.¹⁴ Here I feel that a detailed examination of the presuppositions of this argument is called for. First, the acquisition of citizenship in certain regions of Europe did not result in the cessation of antisemitic practices. In most cases, Jews continued to be treated as second-class citizens, and in many instances, were still subjected to persecution.¹⁵ Second, the argument that literary production is proof of the absence of oppression is flawed. Literature emerges from a multitude of contexts and individuals, not solely from those who are privileged and free from discrimination. If this were the case, we would not have any literature by Jews, nor would we have literature by women, queer people, the poor, people of color, or those with disabilities. Indeed, we would not have Palestinian literature.

Kanafani then jumps back in time, claiming that from 175–1038, “Jews enjoyed an almost complete sense of freedom” and “experienced their ‘golden age’ under Arab rule in al-Andalus”.¹⁶ I would suggest that the designation of a protected people, accompanied by the conferral of certain rights, does not inherently guarantee equality or immunity from persecution and discrimination. The fact that

12 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 16.

13 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 16.

14 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 16–22. For this, he is citing Trude Weiss-Rosmarin's *Jewish Survival*, (Philosophical Library, 1949).

15 For more information on the history of Antisemitism in Europe: Werner Bergmann, *Geschichte des Antisemitismus* (C.H.Beck, 2011); Jacob Katz and Ya'aqov Kaş, *Vom Vorurteil bis zur Vernichtung: Der Antisemitismus 1700–1933* (C. H. Beck, 1989); Shulamit Volkov, *Antisemitismus als kultureller Code: Zehn Essays*, 2nd ed. (C.H. Beck, 2000); David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939*, Oxford History of Modern Europe (Clarendon Press, 1999).

16 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 17.

there were more challenging periods in history does not necessarily imply that the circumstances at that time were optimal. One might inquire as to why Kanafani employs al-Andalus and the rights bestowed by the Islamic state in the 7th century, Poland in the 15th century, or settlements in Palestine during that same period, as exemplified by European Jews “thanks to the tolerance of the rulers of Constantinople,” or the Netherlands, with Baruch Spinoza serving as a case study, to illustrate his arguments.¹⁷ While some progress was made during these periods in these locations, we must contextualize them within a historical framework. The mere absence of genocide, in the context of multiple layers of discrimination, hatred, and murder, does not, and should not, be considered an example of a positive Jewish experience. This line of reasoning is highly problematic, prompting us to inquire why Kanafani, a highly intelligent and nuanced thinker, employs these examples in such an exaggerated and simplified manner. He seems to be making an argument against the necessity of a Jewish state, suggesting that without persecution, a state is unnecessary. Kanafani appears to lack in-depth familiarity with the historical context of the Jewish people, citing examples that he believes will substantiate his argument. He also erroneously attributes the play *Nathan der Weise*, written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, a seminal text of the Enlightenment, to Jaques Bastani,¹⁸ claiming that the existence of this play is evidence that the Enlightenment was a respite for the Jewish population in Germany. This could not have been further from the truth.

The study of literary Zionism is beset by the political nature of its various forms. Kanafani exemplifies this in his own writing, in which literature and art are considered to be forms of political expression.¹⁹ This also explains his choice of texts; he focuses on what proves his point. Another significant motive for him was simply that of access. Since publications from Israel were banned in Beirut, Kanafani relied on friends to smuggle or ship books from Europe or the West Bank.²⁰ He also traveled to Europe to purchase Zionist literature in English and French, languages in which he was fluent. This literature came from an already well-established canon. Since he was interested in the real-world impact of Zionist literature, focusing on the most popular widely-read works made sense as a criterion. By the most popular Zionist writings, I am referring to texts of his time, particularly of the 1950s and 1960s. For this reason, Yael Dayan, a writer and politician who is now largely forgotten, was included in a list of famous figures that Kanafani examined. With the exception of George Eliot and Maria Edgeworth, Dayan represents one of a limited number of women authors who are

17 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 18.

18 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 19.

19 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 6.

20 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 6.

featured in Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature*. Kanafani too, in his methodology, acknowledges the limitations of his study by focusing on the "most prominent works of literary Zionism." He recognizes that Zionist literature, as he understands it, "spans an untold number of writings in an uncountable number of languages across long and indeterminate periods of time."²¹ As I have already noted, Kanafani only had access to an established canon. His interest in the real-world impact of Zionist literature, in light of its Orientalism and Colonialism, naturally led him to focus on the most widely read works. By focusing exclusively on the most prominent and mainstream discourse, however, we fail to consider the numerous debates that have shaped this dominant discourse, and neglect to acknowledge the marginalization of certain thinkers, voices, and ideas—mainly women. This, I would argue, was intentional. Kanafani aimed to reveal the blatant racism in Zionist literature, which is most evident in its canon.

My close reading of Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature* is similar to his own approach in analyzing Zionist literature; both are rooted in critique. Mine is a critique that, I am quite certain, Kanafani would have appreciated—especially given his status as a true critic, defined by his willingness to receive and consider all forms of criticism. Notably, as an editor, he published numerous pieces that were critical of him and his thinking, further exemplifying his commitment to intellectual discourse. It should be noted that my critique of Kanafani's *On Zionist Literature* relates mainly to the initial chapters of the analysis, wherein the author makes sweeping historical assertions and formulates arguments based on these. I would be remiss, however, not to acknowledge that when Kanafani engages in literary analysis in the ensuing chapters, he demonstrates a striking level of reflection and brilliance. The merits of his analysis are even more apparent when one considers the author's personal situation: he is a displaced, self-taught Palestinian intellectual, with limited access to sources and literature. One of the most striking features of his writing is his stylistic approach, exemplified by the following excerpt: "We will observe Zionist literature's disciplined march to the rhythm of the political movement as it crescendos from novel to novel, and from story to story, until a clear and uniform position finally renders this literature more of a propagandistic symphony than a creative artistic endeavor."²²

21 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 2.

22 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 2.

Zionist Literature as Genre: Defining its Characteristics with Kanafani

There is no doubt, that Zionist literature's contradictory mission was primed for fatal pitfalls in terms of form and content.²³

The German Romantics prompted a re-evaluation of the concept of genre, challenging the established boundaries between literary forms and prompting a re-examination of the criteria used to define a particular genre of literature. My objective is to read Kanafani with what Vladimir Propp has called "the grammar of a genre."²⁴ Propp developed a set of functions operative exclusively in folktales, and never applied his approach to any other genre besides folktales. He was criticized for this. Central to this critique was the charge that Propp's method is inapplicable to more intricate literary works. This was indeed the case, which is why the method is effective when applied to Zionist literature, as Kanafani demonstrated. Zionist literature, too, is not particularly complex in terms of language, style, or plot. In a manner similar to Propp's, Kanafani sought to identify the distinctive characteristics of Zionist literature. I taxonomize these as follows: *The Absence of Palestinians*, *Jewish Infallibility*, *Manipulating History*, *Bringing Modernity*, *The Hijacking of Religion*, *Invoking the Shoah*, and *Racism and Race*.²⁵

Additionally, Kanafani delineated a series of events frequently depicted in Zionist literature, with *Dust*, by Yael Dayan, serving as a prime example. To summarize Kanafani's findings, the Jewish hero is a European who immigrates to Palestine and falls in love with a non-Jewish individual. This non-Jewish character cannot be Arab, as they are positioned as the "direct adversary," and are depicted "as individuals without a cause."²⁶ The sole exception is an Arab character, who is liked by the main character, and who believes that Jewish settlement will bring prosperity to Palestine—as exemplified in Herzl's *Altneuland* (which I will come to momentarily). Subsequently, the protagonist is compelled to justify his decision to settle in Palestine. This is often achieved by invoking the Shoah or other pogroms. Thus, "the hero attains an absolute sense of competence and becomes mentally, physically and historically infallible,"²⁷ as can be seen in Dayan's *Dust*, *Envy the Frightened*, and *Death has Two Sons* (to varying degrees). The idea that Jewish settlement will bring prosperity to Palestine echoes the familiar colonial

23 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 57.

24 Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale: Second Edition*, ed. Louis A. Wagner, trans. Laurence Scott, American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series (University of Texas Press, 1968).

25 Kanafani did not explicitly articulate these seven characteristics in the manner presented here; rather, this is an interpretation derived from my analysis of his text.

26 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 69.

27 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 70.

trope of the “grateful native.” This figure of the “grateful native” then lends legitimacy to colonization, suggesting the consent of the colonized, and portraying settlement as benevolent. This serves to mask its violence. Claims that the settlers are bringing progress often function as ideological tools that justify imperial domination, reinforce the settlers’ moral authority, and marginalize Palestinian agency.

The Absence of Palestinians

When it comes to the representation (or lack thereof) of Palestinians, Kanafani makes an important distinction between Zionist writers who wrote from afar, and those who wrote from within:

[...] when Jewish writers are indeed mentally and physically close to the events of the novel, they tend not to lack objectivity as such as the Zionist writer who writes from a distance. For this reason, we will notice a correlation between the lack of objectivity and the practice of writing from a distance [...] Yael Dayan [...] is relatively more objective because she is closer to the events.²⁸

As I have written elsewhere,²⁹ Zionist ideologues and ideologies were not impervious to the realities of life in Palestine, and did indeed have contact with the indigenous Arab population. Herzl did not live in Palestine, but traveled there; Dayan was born in Israel, and lived there until her death in 2024. Thus, neither author theorizes from a position of detachment, although Herzl had the least connection to the Middle East, which is clearly reflected in his writings.

What Kanafani so accurately highlights is the absence of Palestinians in Zionist literature. He credits Herzl with inventing “a formula that would be followed thereafter in which Palestine was said to be forlorn – simply waiting for the Jews to return to populate and develop it, without any mention of the people who already lived there.”³⁰ And in the rare cases when an Arab is present, “[t]he Zionist writer is required to justify the uprooting of a people by deciding that Arabs do not deserve a country.”³¹

Reshid Bey is the only Palestinian in Herzl’s *Altneuland*; Fatma, Reshid Bey’s wife, represents Palestinian women, but is portrayed as passive and silent, her voice only audible when she sings. While Jewish women speak for her, Fatma’s personal agency is ignored, and she is described as obedient and “behind bars.”

28 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 72.

29 Viktoria Pötzl, “From Pan-Asianism to Safari-Zionism: Gendered Orientalism in Jewish-Austrian Literature,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (2020): 209.

30 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 59.

31 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 83.

Her life is depicted as peaceful, and it is her own decision to live like this.³² Thus, the narrative only superficially acknowledges equal rights by stating that they exist, and labeling women's seclusion as their own choice. This labeling primarily contrasts Altneuland's supposed progressiveness regarding Palestine. *Altneuland* also employs the common colonial trope of praising Jewish settlement as a means of bringing progress, which I will discuss later in more detail.

As outlined in *Nation, Narration und Geschlecht*, Yael Dayan makes only minimal references to Arabs, and does not showcase any significant characters who are identified as Palestinian or Arab. This omission reflects a Zionist narrative wherein Israeli identity is defined, not through a violent separation from Arabs, but rather through their absence. The absence of Palestinians is so obvious as to become almost intrusive. The two novels of Dayan discussed by Kanafani serve to illustrate her initial, more Zionist phase. In *Envy the Frightened*, the character of Nimrod, a stereotypical 'New Jew,' is raised by his father, Ivri, with the ideal of "the Rock," a distinct construction of masculinity that serves as a model. As he matures, Nimrod increasingly aligns with the Israeli ideal of a militarized society, and becomes the "new Rock," growing ever more distant from his childhood mentor, Lamech, a former rabbi, who represents a kind, caring, emotional form of masculinity. Following the 1948 War and the Suez Crisis, an emotionally detached Nimrod experiences a moment of vulnerability when he rescues his son from drowning. For the first time, he feels fear, and finds emotional release. In *Envy the Frightened*, the term "Arabs" is first referenced when Nimrod, taken aback by the prospect of war with "the Arabs," struggles to comprehend why there would be discord with the old and humble vendor Naifa, the only Arab he knows.³³

The novel *Dust* is centered around the protagonist Yardena, who narrates her story until her demise. She develops an affection for David, a Shoah survivor, whose family members, killed during the Shoah, manifest as ghosts. Yardena dies, and David, unable to love, departs. By the conclusion of the novel, Rita, who is pregnant with Leni's child, finds love with Leni. One of the most striking of Kanafani's suggestions is that "Leni should have been cast as one of the Arabs that new Israeli settlements had forced to leave. This would be closer to the logic of the narrative, but Dayan did not seem to dare to go that far and chose, rather, to cast a Polish character, or whomever else in that desert who was not truly Jewish [...]."³⁴ I concur that the inclusion of Palestinian characters would have enhanced the novel's overall appeal. This is a recurring theme in Dayan's literary works. While she employs non-Jewish characters to elucidate the nuances of Jewish iden-

32 Theodor Herzl, *AltNeuLand* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 86.

33 Yael Dayan, *Envy the Frightened* (Dell, 1960), 46.

34 Kanafani, *On Zionist Literature*, 104.