

RESISTANCE LITERATURE

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I would have liked to tell you
the story . . .

Had they not slit my lips.

Samih al-Qassim – "Slit lips"

Cultural resistance

The term "resistance" (*muqāwamah*) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966*.¹ Kanafani's critical essay was, significantly, written in 1966, before the June War of 1967 whose culmination in the defeat of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies by the Israeli forces resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip and the opening of the border between these territories, now referred to as the "Occupied Territories," and Israel. As such, it proposes an important distinction between literature which has been written "under occupation" (*taht al-ihlāl*) and "exile" (*manfa*) literature. Such a distinction presupposes a people's collective relationship to a common land, a common identity, or a common cause on the basis of which it becomes possible to articulate the difference between the two modes of historical and political existence, between, that is, "occupation" and "exile." The distinction presupposes furthermore an "occupying power" which has either exiled or subjugated, in this case both exiled and subjugated, a given population and has in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it has dispossessed and whose land it has occupied. Literature, in other words, is presented by the critic as an arena of *struggle*.

In 1966, when Kanafani wrote his study, the literature of occupied Palestine (Israel) was, because of official repression and censorship inside Israel and studied neglect within the Arab world, largely unknown outside the borders of the then 18-year-old state of Israel. Much of Kanafani's research and work is thus concerned with documenting the existence and material conditions of production of Palestinian literature under Israeli

occupation, in the face of what he designates as a "cultural siege" (*hisār thaqāfi*). The same political conditions, furthermore, which determined Palestinian literary production under Israeli occupation played a no less significant role in defining the parameters and approach available to the Palestinian literary critic writing in exile. Kanafani problematizes these conditions by opening his literary critical study with an apparent disclaimer, stating that "this study is wanting in one of the basic elements on which an essential part of the results of research generally depends, and that is an abundance of sources." (LROP, 11)

The very conditions of research into the literature of occupied Palestine in 1966, however, like the conditions of production of that literature, provide the basis for a re-examination of literary critical methodologies and the definitions whereby a literary corpus is established. Kanafani's opening disclaimer is in fact a theoretical statement, one which summons attention not only to Palestinian resistance literature but to the critic's own ideological approach and historical disposition with regard to this literature. According to Kanafani:

The attempts at a history of the resistance literature of a given people are usually, for reasons that are self-evident, accomplished after liberation. With respect to the literature of resistance in occupied Palestine, however, it is necessary that the Arab reader in general and the Palestinian emigrant in particular study its persistent continuation, because it is fundamentally to be found in the language itself and speech of the Arabs of occupied Palestine. The resistance springs from these linguistic initiatives, working together with the rigidity of the conditions of the situation. (LROP, 11)

Furthermore, the critic goes on, "No research of this kind can be complete unless the researcher is located within the resistance movement itself inside the occupied land, taking his testimony from the place in which it is born, lives and is propagated: the lips of the people." (LROP, 12) Kanafani not only disclaims any pretense to "academic objectivity" or "scientific dispassion," he rejects too the very relevance in a study of resistance literature of such critical stances or poses. In this, the Palestinian writer

reiterates the contention of other critics of a literature of resistance such as the Puerto Rican Manuel Maldonado Denis. In an essay written in 1965 and entitled "The intellectual's role in Puerto Rico today," Denis contested the presumed detachment of some Puerto Rican intellectuals: "Isolation itself," he wrote, "is already a posture."²

Ghassan Kanafani, in referring to Palestinian literature as "resistance literature," is writing within a specific historical context, a context which may be most immediately situated within the contemporary national liberation struggles and resistance movements against Western imperialist domination of Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle and Far East. The very immediacy and specificity of the historical context reveal, however, the broader role to be played by resistance literature in particular, but more generally too by what has come to be referred to as "Third World literature." The French anthropologist of North Africa, Jacques Berque, for example, has maintained that contemporary history will of necessity unfold as the history of decolonization.³ Eric Wolf, the historian of peasant wars, has in turn claimed as the basis of his historiography that European history must be rewritten to include the "people without history." In the introduction to *Europe and the People without History*, Wolf reminds the Western student of history that "neither ancient Greece, Rome, Christian Europe, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, democracy, nor even the United States was ever a thing propelled toward its unfolding goal by some immanent driving spring, but rather a temporally and spatially changing and changeable set of relationships, or relationships among sets of relationships."⁴ Within the discipline of literature, current political movements and trends, especially in the "Third World," are likewise imposing a review of what is understood by "literature" and "literary studies."

The term "Third World," however, has become a problematic one and seems now to possess more rhetorical power than analytic precision. As Eric Wolf goes on in his introduction to point out:

It becomes easy to sort the world into differently colored [billiard] balls, to declare that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." In this way a quintessential West

is counterposed to an equally quintessential East, where life was cheap and slavish multitudes groveled under a variety of despotisms. Later, as peoples in other climes began to assert their political and economic independence from both West and East, we assigned these new applicants for historical status to a Third World of underdevelopment – a residual category of conceptual billiard balls – as contrasted with the developed West and the developing East. Inevitably, perhaps, these reified categories became intellectual instruments in the prosecution of the Cold War. (EPH, 6–7)

The history of the Third World has thus been variously defined. For some historians, that history is coincident with the history of colonialism. According to L. S. Stavrianos, in *Global Rift*, for example, it began with the emergence of commercial capitalism between 1400 and 1770. Third World historiography remains nonetheless implicated in the conditions which produce it and Peter Worsley has pointed to some of the discrepancies which these differing conditions have engendered:

The colonial relationship was a relationship between societies, each of which had its own distinctive social institutions and its own internal social differences, its own culture and subcultures. Despite the political power of the conqueror, each colony was the product of a dialectic, a synthesis, not just a simple imposition, in which the social institutions and cultural values of the conquered was one of the terms of the dialectic. Histories of colonialism written by imperialists ignore one of these terms: history is the story of what the White man did. Nationalist historiography has developed a contrary myth: a legend of "national" resistance which omits the uncomfortable fact of collaboration.⁵

The term "Third World" was itself first used in August 1952 when Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, wrote in *France Observateur*:

We speak all too willingly of two worlds and their possible wars, their co-existence, etc., often forgetting that there exists a

third, more important, world, one which, in terms of chronology, comes first . . . this Third World, ignored, scorned, exploited, as was the Third Estate, also wants to say something.

Such an appeal on the part of the French social scientist, which called attention to the distorted access to power of various geopolitical regions of the globe, was challenged two decades later by Régis Debray, the Frenchman who fought with Che Guevara in the independence struggles of Cuba and South America. For Debray, writing in *Critique des armes*, this "questionable concept of 'third world'" was a "shapeless sack into which one could simply dump peoples, classes, races, civilizations and continents so that they might more easily disappear."⁶ The term found perhaps its most vital and coherent political expression in 1955 at the Bandung Conference, under the sponsorship of India's Prime Minister Nehru, which organized into a collective political body the "non-aligned nations" of the world.

With the Bandung conference as its point of reference, the same article in *Le Monde diplomatique* which cites Sauvy and Debray goes on to articulate the history of the Third World in three major phases. The first period, which marks the beginnings of struggle, extends from the Vietnamese victory against the French in 1954 to Algerian independence in 1962 and is punctuated by such events as the 1956 "Suez Canal crisis." The different ways of referring to this incident, which is known in the Arab world as the "tripartite aggression" (of France, Great Britain, and Israel), only emphasize the different and contending versions of history which are at stake. The second period of Third World history then bears witness to the success of a number of national liberation movements, beginning with the Cuban revolution in 1959 and culminating in 1975 with the fall of Saigon. The successes also included the independence of many African nations such as Nigeria (1960), Kenya (1963), Mozambique (1975), Angola (1975), and Guinea-Bissau (1974). In the meantime, however, the Bay of Pigs invasion occurred in 1961 and the June War was fought between Israel and Egypt/Jordan in 1967, the same year that Che Guevara was captured and killed in the mountains of Bolivia. The Arab-Israeli October War of 1973 and the fall of Beirut to Israeli forces in 1982 frame the third period, which

testifies to the effects on the Third World of the international political scene. During this period, for example, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat visited the United Nations in 1974, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat made his separate peace with Israel at Camp David in 1979, and, again in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. It is within this historical context and its contemporary consequences that Samir Amin, the Egyptian economist, was led to ask: "Is the Third World a reality or is it breaking up?"

The historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism of such resistance movements as the PLO (Palestine), the FLN (Algeria), the FLN (Vietnam), Mau Mau (Kenya), FRELIMO (Mozambique), PAIGC (Guinea-Bissau), MPLA (Angola), BPLF (Baluchistan), the ANC (South Africa), FREITLIN (East Timor), the FMLN (El Salvador), or the Sandinista FSLN (Nicaragua), and whether successful in their struggle as yet or not, is waged at the same time as a struggle over the historical and cultural record. One of the first targets, for example, of the Israeli Defense Forces when they entered the Lebanese capital of Beirut in the fall of 1982 was the PLO Research Center and its archives containing the documentary and cultural history of the Palestinian people. Similarly the United States police squadron which in August 1985 arrested in San Juan, Puerto Rico, eleven Puerto Rican *independentistas* on charges of bank robbery and violation of interstate commerce laws also entered the offices of the journal *Pen-samiento crítico* where they confiscated the journal's archival resources as well as its copier and typewriter.

The struggle over the historical record is seen from all sides as no less crucial than the armed struggle. Even in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*, the cultural terrain is disputed. The reviewer Roland Oliver, for example, began his critique of the recently published seventh volume of the UNESCO-sponsored *General History of Africa*, which deals with "Africa under colonial domination," by asking, "Are they treating our memory better or worse than we treat that of the Romans?" The fault the critic finds with the work, which is edited by A. Adu Boahen and consists of thirty articles, twenty-one of which are written by African writers, is that:

The very design of this volume reveals a view of the colonial period which could hardly have emanated from anywhere

outside Africa. For example, one whole third of it is devoted to the theme of resistance to colonial occupation, and, whether intentionally or not, the impression is created that hardly anything else happened in Africa between 1880 and 1914.¹

Okonkwo too, who was allotted only a paragraph in the district commissioner's study *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, figured quite differently in Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*.

Whereas Kanafani had differentiated between literature written under occupation and exile literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer and academic who was much influenced by the Mau Mau movement and who is now in exile in London, proposed a different set of categories. Ngugi (1981) maintained, in an article entitled "Literature in schools," that "in literature there have been two opposing aesthetics: the aesthetic of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation."² Ngugi's article was written as part of a violent debate in Kenya's press which followed the publication of a report by the working committee which had been appointed in 1973 to re-examine the literature syllabus in Kenyan schools. His concern with that syllabus parallels Roland Oliver's own preoccupation with the pedagogical implications of the new *General History of Africa*. For the latter:

Much more interesting in the long run is what African historians, mostly trained in the Western tradition of historical scholarship, are telling the present generation of African schoolteachers, and, through them, the next generation of African politicians and military men, about the history of the colonial period.

It is at this point that Oliver asks, "Are they treating our memory better or worse than we treat that of the Romans?"

Ngugi's discussion in 1976 focused on the question of the "literary diet now being ladled out to our children," and addressed four main issues confronting the Kenyan educational system. Ngugi designates these issues as: 1) the relevance and adequacy

of the present educational system; 2) the decision-making personnel; 3) the teaching staff and 4) approaches to literature. Despite the article's immediate and direct relevance to the political and cultural situation in contemporary post-colonial Kenya, the position which it articulates poses important questions for literary criticism in the West, both as it has been traditionally, or canonically, practiced and in terms of current theoretical and iconoclastic trends. Ngugi's division of literature into two kinds, that of oppression and that of the struggle for liberation, contests the ascendancy of sets of analytic categories and formal conventions, whether generic, such as novel, sonnet, tragedy, etc.; national-linguistic as in French, German, or English literature; literary-historical; or even so simple a distinction as that which is still conventionally maintained between fiction and non-fiction. These conventions, which have been elaborated by Western critics of literature, have often also been adopted by literati and local pedagogues in cultures which have not themselves been part of Western literature and its idiosyncratic development. The Kenyan writer, in this essay, proposes instead a different organization of literary categories, one which is "participatory" in the historical processes of hegemony and resistance to domination, rather than formal or analytic.

Already in the 1920s the Peruvian critic José Carlos Mariátegui had insisted on the need for a different historical periodization of the literature of Peru from that generally formulated to account for the development of the European literary tradition. In his essay "Literature on trial" in which he examines the political responsibility of the Peruvian writer, Mariátegui claims that, "because of the special character of Peruvian literature, it cannot be studied within the framework of classicism, romanticism or modernism; nor of ancient, medieval and modern; nor of popular and literary poetry, etc." That "special character" of Peruvian literature which Mariátegui points to, its development under colonial auspices, produces different literary historical criteria. The writer goes on:

A literary, not sociological, theory divides the literature of a country into three periods: colonial, cosmopolitan and national. In the first period, the country, in a literary sense, is a colony

dependent on the metropolis. In the second period, it simultaneously assimilates the elements of various foreign literatures. In the third period, it shapes and expresses its own personality and feelings.¹⁰

These various challenges, each in its own way specific to the particular needs of a given historical moment, by Kanafani, Ngugi, and Mariátegui, suggest nonetheless the general parameters of a collective opposition and concerted resistance to the programmatic cultural imperialism which accompanied western economic, military, and political domination of the Third World. An extreme, even anarchic, expression of this movement which Armand Mattelart has referred to as "national struggles of cultural liberation"¹¹ is proffered by the Nigerian writer, dramatist and cultural critic Wole Soyinka in his book *Myth, Literature and the African World*, when he writes, perhaps critically, that "the [African] writer is far more preoccupied with visionary projections of society than with speculative projections of the nature of literature or of any other medium of expression."¹² Soyinka's disavowal notwithstanding, it remains the case that the writers and critics writing within the context of organized resistance movements comprehend the role of culture and cultural resistance as part of the larger struggle for liberation.

Amilcar Cabral, the leader of the Guinea-Bissau liberation movement and a major theoretician of African resistance and liberation struggles, claimed in a speech delivered in 1970 in honor of the assassinated FRELIMO leader, Eduardo Mondlane, that "the armed struggle for liberation, in the concrete conditions of life of African peoples, confronted with the imperialist challenge, is an act of insemination upon history – the major expression of our culture and of our African essence."¹³ Ghassan Kanafani too, in his second study of the literature of occupied Palestine, which was written two years after his preliminary investigation, and which took advantage of the newly opened borders between Israel and the occupied West Bank, asserts the integral relationship between armed resistance and resistance literature. Like Cabral, who insisted that "culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humus in which it develops," (RS, 42) Kanafani too claimed that "armed

resistance is not just the husk, but the very fruit of cultivation forcing its roots deep into the land." Both thinkers of the resistance also locate the historical specificity of the resistance movement within the larger collective struggle throughout the world. Kanafani thus goes on to assert the significance of the particular forms of cultural resistance in determining the general strategies of the resistance organization: "If resistance springs from the barrel of a gun, the gun itself issues from the desire for liberation and that desire for liberation is nothing but the natural, logical and necessary product of resistance in its broadest sense: as refusal and as a firm grasp of roots and situations." For Kanafani, the "extreme importance of the cultural form of resistance is no less valuable than armed resistance itself."¹⁴

Both Kanafani and Cabral were assassinated by the representatives of the imperialism they were struggling against. Their deaths signal the importance attached even by the enemy to the efficacy of cultural resistance. Kanafani's obituary in the *Daily Star*, a Beirut English-language newspaper, described him as the "commando who never fired a gun" and went on to say that "his weapon was a ballpoint pen and his arena newspaper pages. And he hurt the enemy more than a column of commandos."¹⁵ Two years before he himself was assassinated, Cabral had concluded his speech in honor of Mondlane with the words:

One might say that Eduardo Mondlane was *savagely* assassinated because he was capable of identifying with the culture of his people, with their deepest aspirations, through and against all attempts or temptations for the alienation of his personality as an African and a Mozambican. Because he had forged a new culture in the struggle, he fell as a combatant.¹⁶

For both Cabral and Kanafani the resistance movement and the armed struggle for national liberation were to accomplish the political and economic liberation of the people from the thrall of imperialism. But they were also expected to bring about, in that process, a revolutionary transformation of existing social structures. Whether in liberating women from traditional tasks, organizing democratic processes of decision-making and counsel, building schools or training cadres of peasants and workers, the

"armed liberation struggle," as Cabral says, "is not only a product of culture, but a *determinant of culture*." (RS, 55)

Resistance literature and western criticism

Hugo Blanco was a prominent organizer among the Quechua Indians and peasants of Peru. His account of the mobilization of the peasants, *Land or Death: the Peasant Struggle in Peru*, written while he was serving a 25-year prison sentence for his activities with the Indians, describes at one point the role of the press and propaganda in political work. According to Blanco, "Much can be accomplished in press and propaganda work even in such a predominantly illiterate milieu as the peasant movement."¹⁷ The press and propaganda can themselves become a means in the hands of the resistance which will wrest back from the repressive authorities the control over cultural production. Blanco formulates this "expropriation" in terms of the Peruvian peasants' own traditional relationship to scriptural authority:

It is necessary to understand that for centuries the oppressors of the peasants made them regard paper as a god. Paper became a fetish: Arrest orders are paper. By means of papers they crush the Indian in the courts. The peasant sees papers in the offices of the governor, the parish priest, the judge, the notary – wherever there is power; the landowner, too, keeps accounts on paper. All the reckonings you have made, all your logical arguments, they refute by showing you a paper; the paper supersedes logic, it defeats it.

There is a famous saying: *Qelqan riman* (What is written is what is heard). We fight this fetishism to the death. And one of the ways to fight it is precisely to show the peasant that, just as the enemy has *his* papers, so we have *our* papers. To the paper that contradicts the reason and logic of the peasant, we counterpose the paper that bears that reason and logic.

This by itself is already a marvel for the illiterate peasant. The existence of papers that speak in his behalf, that speak his truth, is already the beginning of his triumph. He views them with respect and affection. (LD, 84–5)

The peasants, Blanco goes on to report, then used these leaflets in the traditional way to paper the walls of their homes, only this time making them available for readings by children and visitors with the necessary literacy skills. Such a strategic evaluation as Blanco's of the role of press and propaganda is conditioned in his case by his commitment to the "Transitional Program" of Trotskyism, whereby the people are educated by and in the process of their actions. The vital importance of literacy and education, however, as part of the political agenda of the resistance organization is everywhere evident, from the "self-help" schools and work brigades of Serowe studied by Bessie Head in the Botswanan village where she lived¹⁸ to the massive literacy campaign undertaken by the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during the first year of its rule.

In his preface to *Crisis in the Philippines*, E. San Juan insists on the urgency of such cultural activity and its immediate relevance to the political struggle in the Third World theater when he points out "the integral, organic rootedness of Third World activists/thinkers in the political-cultural struggles in their milieu: the heterogeneous, decentered structure of Third World formations."¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, by contrast, writing for a First World audience, concluded his study, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, with a reminder to "those who work in the cultural practices [that they] are unlikely to mistake their activity as utterly central." He does, however, distinguish four areas of endeavor where such cultural practices do become "newly relevant," singling out for this relevance working-class writing, the "culture industry," the women's movement, and "those nations struggling for their independence from imperialism."²⁰

In a similar gesture, Frederic Jameson turns at the end of his recent essay on "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism" to an appeal for a new "pedagogical political culture." Jameson defines this culture as an "aesthetic of cognitive mapping . . . which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."²¹ No less than the multinational corporations which Jameson sees as the characteristic feature of what he designates as the "post-modern" period or the age of "late capitalism," however, the cultural institutions and academies of higher learning which

define and process information and cultural production participate not only in the dissemination of specific and hegemonic forms of social organization but also in determining the content of cultural commodities. As Armand Mattelart points out in his study *Transnationals and the Third World: the Struggle for Culture*, it is the university scholars and academicians who serve as market researchers, whether in matters of birth control or with regard to "advanced systems for communications and education in national development,"²² for transnational firms.

Not just anthropologists, economists, and political scientists, but students of literature too, with their theories of discourse, rhetoric, and textual criticism, provide the necessary information and tools of analysis for the propagation of cultural and even military domination. One of the appendices, for example, to the *CIA Manual on Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare* contains a program for political oratory which might well have its place in a college composition or rhetoric course. Certainly the section on figures of speech provides useful and practical definitions of such rhetorical devices as prolepsis, concession, anaphora, antithesis, amplification, commination, etc. For such reasons, "one must start," according to Mattelart, "by questioning the conceptual apparatus allowing transnational firms to reproduce the conditions of their survival and legitimacy and to judge or even criticize their actions themselves in order to put right mistakes and excesses without questioning an instant their own nature and function." (TTW, 2)

It has become again necessary to challenge the presuppositions and premises of the academic enterprise and the activities which it enjoins and which are used to sustain an internationalization of the issues of development according to western-specific models or patterns. The challenge is raised already in those areas, geographical and ideological, where there is at work what Gramsci termed a "counter-hegemonic ideological production." Literature and literary studies themselves, as part of the academic enterprise, are being contested by the cultural and ideological expressions of resistance, armed struggle, liberation, and social revolution in those geopolitical regions referred to as the "Third World."

Although prominent radical critics such as Eagleton and Jameson do gesture significantly towards the political relevance

and even urgency of new forms and strategies of cultural resistance, these forms themselves have yet to alter in any manifest way the organization and discipline of literary studies in western institutions. In a critical response to Jameson's article on "post-modernism," the labor historian Mike Davis pointed to the failure of Jameson's analysis to acknowledge the political alignments which are really at stake in the postmodern manipulation of architectural space. Davis's article, "Urban renaissance and the spirit of postmodernism," insists not on the fragmentation of the individual's relation to his or her psychic and social living space as characteristic of the postmodern experience but on the "decisive role of urban counter-insurgency in defining the essential terms of the contemporary built environment."²³ He concludes his critique with the claim that it is a "Haussmannian logic of social control" which is the "real *Zeitgeist* of postmodernism." According to Davis, "these current designs for fortified skyscrapers indicate a vogue for battlements not seen since the great armoury boom that followed the Labour Rebellion of 1877. In so doing, they also signal the coercive intent of postmodernist architecture in its ambition, not to hegemonize the city in the fashion of the great modernist buildings, but rather to polarize it into radically antagonistic spaces." (URSP, 113)

On the periphery of these fantastic architectural structures of United States capitalism, surrounding them, if not actually laying siege to them, is a "Third World city" of Hispanics, Asians, blacks, and other minority populations and it is against them that these edifices have been constructed. What is seen by Jameson as a radical transformation of cultural form is interpreted differently by Davis as a calculated retrenchment of forces in capitalist design. In much the same way, the title to the popular rock song of 1985, "We are the world," produced in order to raise famine relief funds for Ethiopia, might be reread as an emblematic statement of United States imperialism in the last decades: "We are the world."

The political function of the poet, more so even than that of the literary critic, has been much contested amongst writers. The longstanding tradition of that debate, one which is not unique to western literary schools of thought, does find there a particularly coherent historical formulation, one which is expressed in

Stendhal's statement that "Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention."²⁴ Such debates as practiced in Western academies resonate too amongst the strategists of cultural resistance in the national liberation movements. To his compatriots and colleagues, for example, who advocated aesthetic, if not objective, criteria, transcending historical circumstance, in the study of literary works, the Puerto Rican critic Maldonado Denis answers: "In my view the Puerto Rican intellectual must take as departure point for any analysis of our society the most radical and profound fact about here-and-now Puerto Rico: its character as colony of the United States." (IR, 291)

This controversial insistence on the "here-and-now" of historical reality and its conditions of possibility underwrites much of the project of resistance literature and the internal debate which surrounds that literature. It likewise arouses the objections of "First World" critics generally to the literature of partisanship. Ghassan Kanafani, for example, who worked in the last years of his life as a journalist and then as editor of *al-Hadaf* (*The Aim*), the weekly newspaper of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), was criticized and taken to task by a younger writer Fadl al-Naqib for what was seen as Kanafani's excessive attention to the immediate exigencies and pressing concerns of the contemporary political situation. Like Proust's Marcel, the young writer aspired to the rewards of posterity and posthumous recognition and acclaim, a "distant future wrapped in dreams." Kanafani was rebuked by the acolyte for composing for tomorrow's editorial column.²⁵ It is to this same critical reluctance, such as that exhibited in Rene Wellek and Austin Warren's now classic *Theory of Literature*, to associate literature "with manufactures made with a narrow aim at the market" or the refusal to take it as a "document or case history, as – what for its own purposes of illusion it sometimes professes to be – a confession, a true story, a history of a life and its times,"²⁶ that the critic and novelist Ngugi objects in his essay on "Writers in politics." "Haven't we heard," he writes, "critics who demand of African writers that they stop writing about colonialism, race, colour, exploitation, and simply write about human beings? Such an attitude to society is often the

basis of some European writers' mania for man without history – solitary and free – with unexplainable despair and anguish and death as the ultimate truth about the human condition."²⁷

This demand on the part of critics and readers, against historical necessity, and through an appeal to universality, posterity and the human condition, is among those "strategies of containment" that Jameson examined in his work *The Political Unconscious*, "the 'local' ways in which [interpretive codes] construct their objects of study and . . . project the illusion that their readings are somehow complete and self-sufficient."²⁸ Such a "strategy of containment" is evident, for example, in Sartre's dehistoricizing and existentializing reading of Camus's novel about settler-colonialism. Speaking of the novel when it was first published in Paris in 1942 after the novelist had left Algeria, Sartre sees in it only "chance, death, the irreducible pluralism of life and truth, the unintelligibility of the real – all these are the extremes of the absurd."²⁹ No less "local" is the introduction to E. M. Forster's work provided by Frank Kermode and John Hollander in their anthology of modern British literature where *A Passage to India* is described: "While ostensibly about the relations of the British with the native populations of India, it is fundamentally a highly organized work of art, a limited world commenting on the tragedies and mitigations of the larger one."³⁰ Forster and Camus, no less than the Indians and the Algerians (represented by Aziz and the unnamed Arab in their novels), are thus denied by the literary critics a historical role of anything but peripheral consequence.

Masao Miyoshi, in his reading of twentieth century Japanese novels, "Against the native grain," warned against the dangers of either "domestication" or "neutralization" in the study in the West of non-western literary works. Whereas the danger of "domestication" is that it renders all too familiar, and thus subjugates through assimilation, the challenge posed by the unfamiliar, the alternative of "neutralization," which categorically rejects and isolates the unfamiliar as finally irrelevant, is no less a threat.³¹ These alternatives, promulgated by a hegemonic cultural imperative and which Cabral had earlier rendered as "assimilation" and "apartheid," (RS, 40) also function in the conflicting theoretical efforts to comprehend the political and ideological

consequences of popular, but organized, resistance movements. As John Walton indicates in *Reluctant Rebels*, his study of three such movements, the Huk rebellion in the Philippines, La Violencia in Colombia, and Kenya's Mau Mau movement, "Contemporary revolutionary activities that resonate with the popular imagination seem to escape our theoretical grasp, to become lost somewhere between scholarly treatment of great transformations such as the French Revolution and historically denatured instances of riot and coup."³²

The question of national culture

According to Frantz Fanon, in his essay "On national culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.³³

For the Arab writer in general, and for the Palestinian writer in particular, a radical disruption occurred in 1948 when the state of Israel was created. The year has been described in Arab historiography as the year of the "disaster" (*nakbah*) whose consequences for Arab cultural production are described by Edward Said in his introduction to Halim Barakat's novel of the 1967 war, *Days of Dust*:

Not only did 1948 put forth unprecedented challenges to a collectivity already undergoing the political evolution of several European centuries compressed into a few decades: this after all was mainly a difference of detail between the Arab East and all other Third World countries, since the end of colonialism meant the beginning and the travail of uncertain national selfhood. But 1948 put forward a monumental enigma, an existential mutation for which Arab history was unprepared.³⁴

The solutions of the past, of identity and tradition, no longer sufficed to provide a sense of continuous history and active agency in the unfolding of that history.

As with African experimentations with the philosophies of Negritude and political programs of pan-Africanism, even the promise contained in the efforts to evolve an effective ideology of pan-Arabism collided eventually with conflicting spheres of regional and personal interest. Certainly any attempt to participate in the "universal" culture of the colonizer and conqueror was predetermined for failure, but so too was the effort criticized by Fanon to fashion a "national culture" according to European designs:

There was therefore at the bottom of this decision the anxiety to be present at the universal trysting place fully armed, with a culture springing from the very heart of the African continent. Now, this [Universal Cultural] Society will very quickly show its inability to shoulder these different tasks, and will limit itself to exhibitionist demonstrations, while the habitual behaviour of the members of this Society will be confined to showing Europeans that such a thing as African culture exists, and opposing their ideas to those of ostentatious and narcissistic Europeans. (WE, 173)

The relationship to the inherited past and its cultural legacy has been rendered problematic by the violent interference of colonial and imperial history. Just as Fanon warns against the fetishization of traditional culture which transforms that culture into museum pieces and archaeological artefacts, (WE, 178) Cabral too admonishes against too literal an interpretation of the ideal of a "return to the source."

That the debate over the elaboration of a national culture remains urgent within the context of the continuing cultural domination by the West is evidenced, for example, in the recent creation in Egypt, following the Camp David Accords and the official policy of a "normalization of relations" between Egypt and Israel, of an oppositional "Committee in the Defense of National Culture." In the pages of its journal, *al-Muwājahah*, are included translations of Fanon, Cabral and Gramsci as well as

documentation of the current "cultural invasion" in its new form. Egyptian writers, intellectuals, artists, and university professors are opposing an institutionalized program which demands their public participation in the exchange of visits between university delegations from the two countries, joint publishing ventures, the establishment of Israeli research institutes in Egypt and similar gestures betokening the commitment of Egyptian and Israeli scholars to a "common cause." Under Anwar Sadat those intellectuals who refused to cooperate were liable to arrest, demotion, or dismissal from their positions.

The concept of national culture is being redefined continuously in the course of these political confrontations. In this debate over the definition and role of national culture, both in the liberation struggle of colonized countries and later in their participation in global politics after independence, it is necessary to transform the dichotomous alternatives of what Mattelart has referred to as either a "scorched earth politics" or a "rhetoric of nostalgia." (CCD, 48) The struggle is one which engages the traditional past as well as the present circumstances of western hegemony in order to determine future coordinates of social and political formations and strategic alliances. From British imperialism's selective educational system in India and the French colonial obliteration of Arab-language schools in North Africa, to the world-wide distribution, through the channels of multinational corporations, of *Sesame Street* and *Dallas*, the issue of cultural imperialism and resistance to it has remained an increasingly critical part of geopolitical strategy and confrontation. Ariel Dorfman reminded the reader in his study of colonizing myths entitled *The Empire's Old Clothes*, or "What the Lone Ranger, Babar, and other innocent heroes do to our minds," that "There may be no better way for a country to know itself than to examine the myths and popular symbols that it exports to its economic and military dominions."³⁵

Beyond even the myths, however, is the hegemonic control of distribution networks and chains. At the 1985 meeting in Geneva, for example, of the World Administrative Radio Conference on the Use of Geostationary Satellite Orbits, as the *New York Times* put it, "The competition for the available positions and frequencies in space . . . caused resentment on earth, mainly between the industrialized countries and the third world." The

article, "Third world seeks its place in space," went on to describe the sources of that resentment:

Although some developing countries have satellites, many in the third world fear that, by the time they have the resources to launch one, the geostationary orbit, where a satellite travels at the same rotational speed as the earth and is a fixed target for radio signals, will be crowded.³⁶

The theoretical and practical debate over national culture, its production and distribution, has not necessarily been superseded by these technological developments in the field of communications, but it has acquired a new dimension and a new urgency. For Dorfman what is called for is "the elaboration which would reject authoritarian and competitive models and provoke doubts, questions, dialogue, real participation, and, eventually, a breakthrough in popular art." (EOC, 7)

"Les Mots canins"

In his contribution, entitled "Les Mots canins," to the conference on bilingualism, held in Rabat in 1981, the Moroccan writer Abdelfattah Kilito retold a fable from the *Book of the Animals* by the ninth century Arab writer al-Jahiz. Kilito begins his fable-telling with a riddle: What did the Arab of ancient times do when he became lost at night and unable to find his way?³⁷ The answer given is that the lost Arab would begin to bark like a dog, *istanabaha*. The idea, according to the writer, is that, in barking like a dog, the wanderer in the desert would provoke the barking of any other dogs in the area, dogs which would be collected around a campsite or human settlement toward which the human animal might then orient his steps. Kilito comments, of course, on the paradox that it is only by way of a passage through bestiality that the stranger can find his way to a return to human contact, but he goes on to examine the various forms that such a return might take. In addition to the possibility of a reunion of the lost traveler with his own kind, it could also happen that the campsite dogs who respond to his imitation barking do so because they guard the fires of a tribe that is inimical to strangers and have been

trained to bark in order to ward off alien encroachments. Or, again, it might transpire that the dogs of a nearby campsite do not bark at all in response to the wanderer's canine appeal, this time because they belong to a most hospitable people who have taught their animals not to bark so as not to frighten off strangers seeking welcome and refuge at their fires.

Al-Jahiz's fable, in its retelling by Abdelfattah Kilito, raises allegorically a number of questions relevant to resistance literature: access to history for those peoples who have been historically denied an active role in the arena of world politics; the problem of contested terrain, whether cultural, geographical, or political; and the social and political transformation from a genealogy of "filiation" based on ties of kinship, ethnicity, race, or religion to an "affiliative" secular order.³⁸ Such an agenda must attempt a reconstruction of the history of the relations of power between those regions or arenas, which have been variously designated as First and Third Worlds, metropolis and periphery, etc., in such a way as to redress, on the cultural as well as on the political and economic levels, the exploitative and repressive nature of those relations.

France, for example, occupied North Africa for more than 130 years, from its first military incursions in 1830 to Algerian independence following a protracted and bloody struggle for national independence in 1962. An important consequence of French settler-colonialism in Algeria was, however, its effective suppression of an indigenous Arabic literary production through its replacement of Arab-language schools with the French educational system and its selective training of what were deemed the "most promising" young North Africans.

French was the language of command, of management, and of theoretical knowledge, and it also relegated Arabic to the language of the dominated, of those at the bottom of the ladder. . . . The law encouraged this domination, too, by declaring Arabic foreign to Algeria in 1923; educationalists also helped by claiming that the Latin alphabet was better suited to modern needs than the Arabic one.³⁹

When Algeria did finally achieve independence in 1962, a critical part of its national program was thus a process of "Arabization"

in all spheres of public and institutional activity. Nonetheless, many of North Africa's most prominent writers and intellectuals, such as Khatibi and Kilito, continue to produce their works in French, whether because French is the language in which they were educated, or because, as in the case of the Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri, their books are banned in Arabic. Choukri's autobiography, *Le Pain nu*, or *Al-Khubz al-hāfi* as it was originally entitled, appeared in Tahar Ben Jelloun's French translation in Paris before the author could find a publisher for the Arabic original.⁴⁰ For Khatibi, however, there is a certain calculated irony in the francophony of North African writers.

Irony might not only have been a kind of displaced revenge on the part of the oppressed colonized seduced by the west, but would have also allowed the francophone North African writer to take his own distance on the language by inverting it, destroying it and presenting new structures to the point where the French reader would feel a stranger in his own language.⁴¹

In the case of Mohamed Choukri, the irony is complicated still again when the French translation of his autobiography subverts the post-colonial authoritarian manipulation by the Moroccan censor of an Arabic "national culture" in North Africa. In 1984 Mohamed Choukri's books were again banned in his native Morocco.

In his essay "Democracy and modern despotism," written in 1978, the Lebanese critic and novelist Elias Khouri criticizes the tendency of the Arab bourgeoisie and bureaucratic elite to "transform the people into folklore and tourism."⁴² That critique finds a further development in Khouri's later article, "'Arabization' and intimidation," which appeared as part of the writer's series published over almost two years, from January 1983 to November 1984, in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Safir*. The series, entitled *Time of Occupation (Zaman al-ihlāl)*⁴³ was begun in response to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon following their invasion in June 1982 and the departure of the PLO fedayeen from Beirut in September of that year. "'Arabization' and intimidation" appeared in May 1983, at a moment when the Phalange government's censorship of literary and intellectual production in Lebanon was

especially intense in the wake of the controversial agreement negotiated by US Secretary of State George Shultz between Israel and the Christian Lebanese government. Because of this highly contested treaty arrangement (which eventually collapsed), the Lebanese regime of Amin Gemayel was particularly interested in maintaining the political and, more importantly perhaps, financial support of its "sister Arab states."

Although the Christian population in Lebanon had historically insisted on their genealogy as "Phoenician" rather than "Arab," "Arabization" in the cultural sphere now became part of the government program. This "Arabization" was, however, according to Khouri, construed in such a way as to satisfy the more conservative Arab oil-regimes. Whereas Beirut had once served as the center for the dissemination of radical Arab thought, what was now to be exported was the traditional Arab cultural heritage, the classical *turāth*, "leather-bound books with their titles embossed in gilt." (TO, 69) In the name of "Arabization," furthermore, there began what Khouri describes as a "purification of the Lebanese University of those professors who had imported ideas. Although 'we,' as the critic writes with a certain irony, "are capable of economic openness and readiness to import commodities even from New Zealand in order to re-export them to our sister states, we are not yet ready to receive western-imported ideas. Ideas must be 100% local manufacture." (TO, 68) Khouri ends his article of 27 May 1983 by indicating that, in the face of such pressures from within and without, only two choices are available: the first, "isolationism," he rejects despite its apparent historical ascendancy of the moment. The second option, he insists, is the only lasting one, even given the difficulties it entails, the option of resistance. The word for resistance used here, *mu'aradah*, translates the term *muqāwamah* conventionally used in Arabic to suggest popular, organized resistance to colonial occupation or imperialist oppression and gives a literary-critical implication to the idea of resistance. *Mu'aradah*, while it does have the literal meaning of confrontation, opposition, or resistance, is also the designation given to a classical Arabic literary form, according to which one person will write a poem and another will retaliate by writing along the same lines, but reversing the meaning. This translation into Arabic of the Arabic word

for resistance also suggests a larger and collective political agenda to the linguistic task of the literary translator.

Le Thé au harem d'Archib Ahmed might be considered as an example of such a contestatory practice, of *mu'aradah*, a literary, historical, and political challenge to the cultural ascendancy of western letters and the persistent economic and cultural hegemony of France over her former North African colonies. When *Le Thé au harem d'Archib Ahmed* by the young Algerian novelist Mehdi Charef appeared in Paris in 1983 it provoked significant critical attention. A year later it was made into a film, with the slightly altered title *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède*, directed by the writer and produced by Costa Gavras. Charef's novel represents an important intervention into the urgent political debate, often erupting in violence, which is taking place in contemporary French society. Identified variously as the Le Pen phenomenon, the neo-conservative politics of the National Front party or simply as "Français/immigrés,"⁴⁵ the controversial question of France's relationship to its immigrant population is manifest in political discussion, personal vendettas, and public graffiti.

Le Thé au harem tells the story of the friendship between Pat, a young Frenchman, and Madjid, an Algerian of the "nouvelle génération," both members of an informal gang of youths living in one of the HLMs (*habitations loyer modéré*) of the Parisian *banlieues*. The novel sees the two adolescents through various escapades of petty theft, vandalism, sex, drugs, and family problems, until finally Madjid is apprehended by the police while his cohorts escape. It concludes with Pat voluntarily joining his friend in the police van, telling the officers, "J'étais avec lui." (TH, 183) Pat's statement is a variation on still another description of the racial issue in France today. "Ne touche pas à mon pôte" (Hands off my pal) is the rallying slogan of a group of young people who have organized themselves against the current virulent antagonism directed against France's immigrant, and especially Arab, population.

Critics of contemporary French politics have suggested that the aggressive tension between France and the North African immigrants living and working in that country is in many ways a historical continuation of France's Algerian war and point to such evidence as the fact that it is North African Arabs who have been

singled out amongst the immigrant population in France for this negative attention as well as to the coincidence of electoral support for the National Front in those areas with a large concentration of *pieds noirs*.⁴⁶ *Le Thé au harem*, whose title comes from the miscomprehension by one of the young Algerians of the school teacher's reference to "le théorème d'Archimède," can likewise be located in the literary history of the French colonization of North Africa, a history in which Camus's *L'Étranger* occupies a crucial position.

Camus wrote *L'Étranger* in Algeria in 1939 but published it only in 1942 in Paris. Unlike Meursault, the novel's protagonist, who refused a position in the metropolis, Camus left Algeria in 1940 to settle in Paris. He returned to Algeria only once, during the Algerian war, for a visit. Camus and *L'Étranger*, however, were well received in France. Sartre, for example, applauded the novel as a masterpiece of the absurd and *L'Étranger* continues to be cited as a classic of existentialism, as if the very limpidity and clarity of its language had spellbound its readers into a blindness to its political context, the Frenchman Raymond's violation of the Arab woman and his friend Meursault's murder of the woman's brother, the unnamed Arab of the novel. Like Mohamed Choukri's autobiography, *L'Étranger* was written in North Africa and published in Paris. But, whereas *Le Pain nu*'s linguistic trajectory opened up a political space of cultural resistance, Camus's novel, dispossessed of its historical background with the "real" rendered "unintelligible," was assimilated into a dehistoricizing project of silence and the absurd.

Algerians, however, for whom Camus had once played an exemplary role, reread his early novel in a more critical light when the writer visited Algeria in the 1950s, only to speak out there against the Algerian struggle for independence and in favor of federation with France. In an open letter to Camus in 1959, Ahmed Taleb, imprisoned at the time in France for activities connected with events in Algeria, wrote:

Ten years ago we were a handful of young Algerians, seated at our school desks and imbued with your work. And, even if you were not our spiritual inspiration, you at least provided for us a model of writing. . . . Ten years have now elapsed and our

disillusion with you is as great as our hopes once were. Much water has flowed under the bridges. Let us say rather much blood. And how many tears have fallen on the Algerian land that once inspired pages of such beauty from you.⁴⁷

The "model for writing" which Camus had offered has been seriously challenged in the ensuing years by francophone writers of the Maghreb. This linguistic struggle on the cultural terrain is part of the larger history of France's relations with her former North African colonies. Since Algerian independence in 1962, North African immigration to France has followed various cycles, alternately increasing and decreasing according to the pressures of demand as well as to government restrictions or encouragement. In the last several decades, however, many of those workers who had arrived alone and who lived in comparative isolation from French society have been joined by their relatives and have established families of their own in France. Whereas Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs*, published in 1955, describes the largely male community of North African workers, or Rachid Boudjedra's *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée* (1975) depicts the alienation of a lone Arab toting his worldly belongings through the corridors of the Paris metro, *Le Thé au harem*, whose author is himself a member of the "nouvelle génération," focuses on both the community of adolescents and their familial situations within the French social order.⁴⁸

Le Thé au harem is dedicated to the author's mother: "Pour Mebarka, même si elle ne sait pas lire," and indeed it is Malika, Madjid's mother in the novel, who sustains her own family in addition to providing support and recourse for her neighbors. Whether in intervening to prevent Levesque from brutalizing his wife, or by taking Stéphane, the young son of Josette, while his divorced mother looks for work, Malika contributes to the establishment of communal ties among the inhabitants of the *HLM*, ties which then bind family to family, nationality to nationality. Camus's Meursault was condemned by the French judicial system as much for failing to cry at his mother's funeral as for killing an Arab. Malika, by contrast, augurs, even in her role as mother, the eventual transition to a social order beyond alliances of genealogy, religion, or ethnicity. Madjid, her son, stands

ambiguously within that transition. Although contemptuous of his parents' failure to succeed in French life, he loyally if begrudgingly escorts his father to and from the bistro where he spends his days. The old man, injured in a work-related accident and no longer able to take care of himself, much less his family, symbolizes the impotence of the traditional Arab culture.

The "nouvelle génération," dismissed in popular French rhetoric as "delinquent," has been described by Tahar Ben Jelloun as a "generation destined for cultural orphanhood and ontological fragility." (HF, 116) *Le Thé au harem* dramatizes this precarious "orphanhood" of the young North African in France in its narrative exposé of Madjid's tortured relationship to his Arab family and to the French state. Meursault's murder of the Arab resonates in the violent attacks on North African Arabs in France today. The cultural strategy of *Le Thé au harem d'Archimède* is to respond by deploying stereotypes in such a way as to undermine their power and by manipulating language, Arabic, argot, and accent, to challenge the sway of classical conventions. Meursault's failure to realize any social or intimate relationships is reworked in the space of Charef's novel where Madjid and Pat speak the language of "Touche pas à mon pôte," the language not of folk culture, nor even of national culture, but a popular language of collective resistance.

The politics of theory

According to Armand Mattelart "The very notion of theory does not escape the contingency of the criteria of relevance which each culture elaborates for it, nor the blind spots which it cultivates." What is crucial, he goes on, is the need to "restore to the cultural interplay of international relations their sociological and historical weight." (CCD, 10-12) Not only for Mattelart, but for the writers of resistance literature and the theorists of the resistance struggle, cultural production plays a decisive and critical role in the activation of what Edward Said has referred to as a "repressed or resistant history."⁴⁰ Resistance literature calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity. The literature of resistance sees itself furthermore as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against

ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production.

One danger, however, no less threatening than the external oppression resulting from policies of imperialism, colonialism and underdevelopment with which the resistance movements contend, is that of a failure to acknowledge the limitations of their own historical role. As Maxime Rodinson warned in his introduction to *People without a Country: the Kurds and Kurdistan*:

Ideology always goes for the simplest solutions. It does not argue that an oppressed people is to be defended because it is oppressed and to the exact extent to which it is oppressed. On the contrary, the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions, their culture, their past, present and future behaviour is presented as admirable. Direct or indirect narcissism takes over and the fact that the oppressed are oppressed becomes less important than the admirable way they are themselves. The slightest criticism is seen as criminal sacrilege. In particular, it becomes quite inconceivable that the oppressed might themselves be oppressing others. In an ideological conception, such an admission would imply that the object of admiration was flawed and hence in some sense deserving of past or present oppression.⁴¹

Resistance organizations and national liberation movements represent a collective and concerted struggle against hegemonic domination and oppression. They are not, however, without their own internal contradictions and debates, as Rodinson points out in signalling the dangers of too monolithic or uncritical an image of such movements and struggles. But it is precisely these self-critical controversies that sustain the movements' active agency in the historical arena of world politics and the struggle for culture which need to be theoretically elaborated and given their full "historical and sociological weight."

While it is urgent that the contemporary resistance movements and national liberation organizations assume their full role in the historical arena of decolonization, it is likewise important that they not be confined by the First World imagination to what Gayatri Spivak has criticized as mere representative allegories of

"correct political practice."⁵¹ The dynamics of debate in which the cultural politics of resistance are engaged challenge both the monolithic historiographical practices of domination and the unidimensional responses of dogma to them.

Amilcar Cabral, wielding the "weapon of theory," wrote that "The national liberation of a people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, it is their return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which they have been subjected." (US, 130) Whereas the social and the personal have tended to displace the political in western literary and cultural studies, the emphasis in the literature of resistance is on the political as the power to change the world. The theory of resistance literature is in its politics.