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# Kanafani in Kuwait: A Clinical Cartography

*Mai Al-Nakib*    Kuwait University

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## Abstract

The trope of Kuwait runs through numerous stories by Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, including his well-known novella, *Men in the Sun*. Using Deleuze's clinical methodology, this paper maps Kanafani's Kuwait stories symptomatically to determine what the legacy of the Kanafani effect might be for contemporary Kuwait. It considers what his textual conjunction of affects and percepts did at the time and whether they can do anything now. Kanafani's position as a seminal figure within Palestinian national and resistance literature is well-recognised; however, his specific location in Kuwait at a key period of its development is generally overlooked. His clinical diagnosis of the relationship between Kuwait and Palestinians in the 1940s and 1950s can provoke a reconsideration of that early period, especially relevant in light of post-1991 events. In addition to his writing, his actual presence in Kuwait in the second half of the 1950s expresses an early promise of Kuwait as an open and cosmopolitan place soon betrayed and today mostly forgotten.

**Keywords:** Ghassan Kanafani in Kuwait, Deleuze's literary clinic, symptomatology, health, cartography, fabulation, Kanafani effect

In Ghassan Kanfani's most well-known novella, *Rijal fi al-shams* (*Men in the Sun*), Abu Qais, one of three men who die in a water tank in the process of being smuggled across the desert from Basra to Kuwait, describes Kuwait as a destination full of 'all the things he had been deprived of' (Kanafani 1983: 13/46).<sup>1</sup> He believes that 'what only lived in his mind as a dream and a fantasy existed there' (Kanafani 1983:

*Deleuze Studies* 9.1 (2015): 88–111

DOI: 10.3366/dls.2015.0175

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13/46). It is, unlike Palestine, a place with no trees but ‘with sacks of money’ to compensate (Kanafani 1983: 13/46). The trope of Kuwait looms large in a number of Kanafani’s stories. It is more than a locale or destination; it becomes a place-holder for what has been lost. In Kanafani’s nuanced depictions, however, Kuwait never quite lives up to expectation. As it turns out, and as Kanafani’s texts demonstrate early on, Kuwait can provide no viable solution to Palestinian woes.<sup>2</sup>

The 1948 Nakba coincided with the period of Kuwait’s oil production and its efforts to establish the institutions necessary for its imminent independence as a nation-state. Kuwait opened its doors to Palestinian immigrants who were experienced, highly educated and fully equipped to help Kuwait through its passage into modernity, which they did. On the surface, this symbiotic relationship flourished for decades, and the years of Kanafani’s stay correspond with the beginning of this unique aggregate. The Palestinian community in Kuwait developed into a vibrant, self-sustaining entity. It was responsible for the financial support of Palestinian refugee communities all over the Arab world. It was culturally and socially dynamic, with organisations championing the preservation of Palestinian handicrafts, the development of Palestinian children’s education, and the advocacy of Palestinian women’s rights, among many other things. Perhaps most significant was the community’s political contributions; Fatah was founded in Kuwait by Yasser Arafat, who came in 1957 as a teacher, like Kanafani and so many other prominent Palestinian intellectuals and future activists and leaders. However, as the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion suggests, something other than mutual benefit must also have been taking place. I suggest it is this other relation between Palestinians and Kuwait that Kanafani’s texts diagnose.

Deleuze argues that writers, like doctors, are ‘astonishing diagnosticians or symptomatologists’ (Deleuze 1990: 237). He explains:

Clinicians who are able to renew a symptomatological table produce a work of art; conversely, artists are clinicians, not with respect to their own case, or even with respect to a case in general; rather they are clinicians of civilization. (Deleuze 1990: 237; Smith 1997; Lambert 2000)

One role of the literary critic can be to map symptoms organised by artists and writers in order to assess what might be done with their diagnoses; to consider, for example, whether such diagnoses might be put to work toward otherwise ignored ethical considerations (Smith

1997: lii).<sup>3</sup> Bruce Baugh calls this ‘a revolutionary pragmatics of reading’ (Baugh 2000: 34). Baugh describes the two movements involved in such a reading process: first, a consideration of ‘whether a work is in fact capable of producing certain effects, and [...] determining the nature of those effects’; and, second, considering ‘whether a given effect furthers the objectives of an individual or group (whether the effect is helpful, harmful or indifferent)’ (Baugh 2000: 34). While such clinical cartographies may produce unexpected effects, there is no guarantee such effects will be sensed (actualised) within a given milieu; they may remain untimely (Deleuze 1983: 107).

Beyond symptomatology, Aidan Tynan argues in his recent study, *Deleuze’s Literary Clinic*, that it is imperative to consider how Deleuze’s ‘critique et clinique’ project ‘relates to the later schizoanalytical work developed with Guattari’ (Tynan 2012: 4). As a schizoanalytical (and not exclusively a diagnostic or symptomatological) process, Tynan notes that Deleuze’s literary clinic is both pragmatic and experimental; it ‘has to do with the problem of political engagement as well as the status of the creative process in relation to the life process’ (Tynan 2012: 5–6). This marks ‘the literary clinic’s transition from diagnostics to therapeutics’ (Tynan 2012: 170). A schizoanalytical pragmatics of reading, thus, goes beyond assessment or evaluation (but not as far as judgement); it puts the literary machine in question to work towards change (Deleuze 1995: 7–8, 21–2; Buchanan 2000: 97).

Using Deleuze’s clinical methodology, this essay reads Kanafani’s Kuwait stories both symptomatically and pragmatically in order to determine what the legacy of the Kanafani effect might be for contemporary Kuwait (whether it can be put to work).<sup>4</sup> What exactly were Kanafani’s fabulations of Kuwait? What, if anything, did this textual conjunction of affects and percepts do at the time, and can it do anything now? If, as Deleuze states, ‘it is the task of the fabulating function to invent a people’, is it only the Palestinians as a missing people that Kanafani’s texts produce or is there some connection to Kuwait itself (to Kuwaitis as a missing people) (Deleuze 1997: 4)? Kanafani’s position as a seminal figure within Palestinian national and resistance literature is well-recognised; however, his specific location in Kuwait at a key period of its development is generally overlooked.<sup>5</sup> I believe his clinical diagnosis of the relationship between Kuwait and Palestinians in the 1940s and 1950s can provoke a critical reconsideration of that early history, especially relevant in light of the displacement of the Palestinian community in Kuwait after 1991. In addition to his writing, I suggest his

actual presence in Kuwait in the second half of the 1950s, on the cusp of Kuwait's independence from Britain, expresses an early promise of Kuwait as an open and cosmopolitan place, a promise which, since the turn of the millennium, has been mostly forgotten.

## I. Literary Clinician

In 1948, with Acre, the town of Kanafani's birth, occupied by Zionists, he and his family fled to southern Lebanon, eventually ending up in Damascus. Kanafani was twelve years old at the time. In 1952, at the age of sixteen, Kanafani taught Palestinian refugee children at a United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) school, while simultaneously studying Arabic Literature at Damascus University. It was during this pivotal early period that Kanafani began to write stories and to become active in politics—the twin preoccupations of his life. In 1955, not yet twenty, Kanafani moved to Kuwait to join his brother and sister. Like so many Palestinians, including the narrator of his epistolary story, 'Waraqa min Gaza' ('Letter from Gaza'), Kanafani was under contract with the Kuwait Ministry of Education. In addition to teaching art at al-Ghazali public school, Kanafani started to publish short stories in earnest during his six-year stay. Among others, some of these stories include: 'Waraqa min Gaza' ('Letter from Gaza'); 'Lulu fi al-Tariq' ('Pearls in the Street'); 'Ard al-Burtuqal al-Hazin' ('The Land of Sad Oranges'); 'al-Qamis al-Mesruq' ('The Stolen Shirt'); 'Ka'k 'ala al-Rasif' ('The Cake Vendor'); 'Fi Janazeti' ('In My Funeral'); and 'Mawt Sarir 12' ('Death of Bed 12'). His story 'The Stolen Shirt' won the Kuwait Literary Prize in 1958. Kanafani was also an active journalist during his time in Kuwait. He regularly published articles in Kuwaiti magazines and in Kuwaiti newspapers, such as *al-Taleea*. Kanafani associated with members of Kuwait's liberal intelligentsia and Arab nationalist activists, including Ahmed al-Khatib (founding member of the Arab Nationalist Movement [ANM] with George Habash and other key figures in 1951). In 1960, Kanafani left Kuwait to Beirut to join the editorial staff of George Habash's new political magazine, *al-Hurriyya*.

Significantly, as Karen E. Riley mentions in her biographical preface to Kanafani's collection of stories, *Palestine's Children*, Kuwait was also where the writer was first diagnosed with severe diabetes. If at twelve Kanafani was forced to confront the fragility of a homeland, in his early twenties he was faced with the transience of life itself. In a letter sent from Kuwait to a friend, he wrote:

When I was twelve, just as I began to perceive the meaning of life and nature around me, I was hurled down and exiled from my own country. And now, now, just as I have begun to perceive my path . . . along comes ‘Mr. Diabetes’ who wants, in all simplicity and arrogance, to kill me. (Quoted in Riley 2000: 5; see also al-Naqib 1972: 196)

In his 1984 study, Muhammad Siddiq attributes Kanafani’s early pessimism over the lack of political consciousness among Palestinians to the fact that he was still at ‘such a close remove from the disaster of 1948’ (Siddiq 1984: 8). Siddiq argues that ‘greater distance in time and more positive developments of the Palestinian scene would, in due course, enable Kanafani to view the pre-1948 past within a wider, and consequently more accurate, historical perspective’ (Siddiq 1984: 8–9). However, Riley also relates Kanafani’s general pessimism about the Palestinian situation during this period to his understandable anxiety over his diagnosis (Riley 2000: 5). Although, as Riley mentions, Kanafani would soon enough learn to take his illness in stride, I bring it up here in relation to his early writing as a way to connect the clinical and the literary.

Regarding the link between a writer, illness and literature, Deleuze states:

The writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world. The world is the set of symptoms whose illness merges with man. Literature then appears as an enterprise of health: not that the writer would necessarily be in good health [. . .], [rather] he possesses an irresistible and delicate health that stems from what he has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him, while nonetheless giving him the becomings that a dominant and substantial health would render impossible. (Deleuze 1997: 3)

Certain authors – including those Deleuze writes about extensively, such as Kafka, Artaud, Fitzgerald, Proust, Nietzsche and others – suffer from weak health. Their sickness often provides a singular, not to say easy, perspective or experience of the world. As Deleuze puts it: ‘The writer returns from what he has seen and heard with bloodshot eyes and pierced eardrums’ (Deleuze 1997: 3). Through their writing, such authors are sometimes able to transmute their physical weaknesses into strengths. ‘It is’, as Deleuze explains, ‘a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the liveable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming’ (Deleuze 1997: 1). Thus understood, health is not reducible to the physical body of an individual. Health, understood as writing, as literature, is a matter of invention.

For Deleuze and Guattari, a work of art or literature preserves ‘a compound of percepts and affects’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). However, the percepts and affects preserved by an artwork or a literary text are not reducible to the personal perceptions or feelings of the one who produces them (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164; Smith 1997: xxxiii–xxxv). The work must, as they put it, ‘stand up on its own’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). The function of writing is to fabulate—that is, to create a monument, not in commemoration of the past via memory but, rather, in view of the future by forming a compound of sensations via words, syntax and sounds (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 168–9). An encounter with such compounds of sensation, such literary monuments, can transform received opinions (understood as affective and perceptive states grouped in habituated, often inadequate ways) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 174). A great writer, for Deleuze and Guattari, ‘is above all an artist who invents unknown or unrecognised affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 174). Doing so is a clinical process, a matter of diagnosing ‘the illnesses of the lived’ in order to ‘[summon] forth a people to come’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 173, 176). It involves the extraction of overlooked percepts and affects and, further, the invention of a people who are missing (Deleuze 1997: 4). By writing for these people who are missing, writers—from Kafka to Kanafani—create an otherwise invisible or inaccessible form of health; that is to say, they invent new possibilities for and becomings of life. I suggest that the proximity between Kanafani’s diabetes and the loss of Palestine itself (not just his own personal loss but a loss experienced by a collectivity that suddenly found itself missing) prepared the conditions for him to emerge not simply as a writer but as a literary clinician.

## II. Kuwait Stories

So then, what symptoms do Kanafani’s Kuwait texts in particular diagnose? And in response to this illness, what new percepts and affects do his texts create? I focus here on four texts either written in Kuwait or soon after his departure: ‘Letter from Gaza’ (1956), ‘Pearls in the Street’ (1958), ‘Death of Bed 12’ (1960), and *Men in the Sun* (1963). I suggest these texts diagnose Kuwait not as a haven for Palestinians—as was commonly perceived and felt—but, rather, as a place fraught with perils and contradictions that would inevitably make a certain version of life for Palestinians unsustainable in the long run. Kanafani’s texts construct

in advance what would prove to be the case three decades later.<sup>6</sup> Even further, as we shall see, the breadth of symptoms Kanafani's stories map suggests that his prognosis applies not only to the particular condition of Palestinians in Kuwait but to Kuwait itself and, more broadly, to all its contemporary and future citizens and residents.

Kuwait as percept in the aforementioned stories is not reducible to mere setting or backdrop. Over and over again, Kuwait is figured as the promised land that never fails to disappoint. For example, in one of his earliest stories from 1956, 'Letter from Gaza', Kuwait appears as an escape but only in the sense of a temporary layover on the way to bigger and better things: to 'green California, far from the reek of defeat' (Kanafani 1983: 87/344). The unnamed narrator portrays his experience in Kuwait as follows:

My life there had a gluey, vacuous quality as though I were a small oyster, lost in oppressive loneliness, slowly struggling with a future as dark as the beginning of the night, caught in a rotten routine, a spewed-out combat with time. Everything was hot and sticky. There was a slipperiness to my whole life, it was all a hankering for the end of the month. (Kanafani 1983: 87/343)

Kuwait promises money, but the gifts the unnamed narrator brings back to Gaza are of no use to his thirteen-year-old niece, her leg recently amputated from the thigh as a result of an Israeli bomb (Kanafani 1983: 89/349). 'Letter from Gaza' extracts Kuwait's sticky vacuity as affect in the assemblage between, on the one hand, desperate people and, on the other, a place they create in their imagination first and then, over the years, with the sweat of their labour, but to no avail. Life in Kuwait, even with a secure job, remains slippery; no roots can be set down. The future is dark and as difficult to pry open as an oyster shell. The story ends with the narrator back in Gaza – the place he has always hated for its failures, has always dreamed of fleeing – imploring his friend to come back. Gaza is described in much the same terms as Kuwait – 'closed like the introverted lining of a rusted snail-shell thrown up by the waves on the sticky, sandy shore by the slaughterhouse' (Kanafani 1983: 88/344). However, this story suggests it is nonetheless better for Palestinians than Kuwait can ever be, despite its promise of wealth and the mobility wealth brings.

In another early short story, 'Pearls in the Street', from 1958, one of the narrators, Hasan, states that people back home describe the unnamed Gulf city where he works as the 'valley of gold' (Kanafani 2004: 97/158). The unnamed country's oil fields and pearls give it

away as Kuwait. Hasan tries to divest his desperate, unemployed friend, Saad al-Din, of his misguided belief in the inevitability of success in Kuwait:

‘I told him the wheel that revolved here was legendary for its harshness and didn’t give a damn for individual human beings. Hunger, I told him, was merely an amusing spectacle for people living in luxury; people here were straining after every penny and didn’t turn back to look at the others crawling behind them.’ (Kanafani 2004: 97/158)

Hasan’s warnings fall on deaf ears, however. Saad al-Din is trapped in the unnamed country with no prospects, but, as Hasan points out, “‘Like everyone else who comes here, he wanted a miracle, a miracle to fill his pockets with gold, and take him very gently by the hand and lead him home on a red carpet!’” (Kanafani 2004: 97/159). Near destitution, Saad al-Din takes one final chance by purchasing a pile of oysters sold by a street vendor in the hopes that one of the shells will contain a pearl. Upon opening the final shell, Saad al-Din collapses of a heart attack. Hasan never discovers whether his friend “‘died from the elation of seeing a pearl in that last shell, or from disappointment because he knew it was empty’” (Kanafani 2004: 100/163). By the time Saad al-Din’s body is removed from the street and Hasan comes back to find out, “‘the man with the shells had disappeared’” (Kanafani 2004: 100/163). Once again, Kuwait as percept is disappointment and let down. Even those unlike Saad al-Din who have secure jobs are depicted as ‘suffocating’ and trapped in an unrewarding routine (Kanafani 2004: 95/155). The land of oil produces a population that is, at least in part, self-serving and without sympathy. Whereas traditional pearling necessarily creates affects of patience, attentiveness and community, oil production cultivates haste, greed and fracture. The new population lacks the capacity required to consider how the social and economic structure under construction as a result of oil would not likely be conducive to the development of a democratic polity able to consider the needs and aspirations of the less fortunate. In the new economy, pearling is reduced to a cheap trick in the street, the ‘wretched looking man’ selling the oysters, like Saad al-Din himself, is another victim of oil (Kanafani 2004: 98/160).<sup>7</sup>

In the 1960 story, ‘Death of Bed 12’, Kuwait is, once again, figured as the place of great riches (Kanafani 2004: 120/139). In a made-up story he tells himself about a recently deceased Omani man in a hospital in Kuwait, the narrator, himself a patient in the same hospital, imagines the man’s motivation to migrate as follows:



In a year or two he'd return to Oman and swagger through the alleys of Ibkhā wearing a brilliant white *aba* with a golden hem, like the one he'd seen draped across the shoulders of one of the notables of Ras el-Khaymah. (Kanafani 2004: 120/139)

The narrator goes on to picture the Omani man's disappointment upon his actual arrival in Kuwait:

And when at last they sighted the coast, and the masts of the boats lying moored in the quiet harbor [sic] of Kuwait, Muhammad Ali Akbar found himself responding ambivalently to a reality now divorced from the colorful [sic] world of his dreams. (Kanafani 2004: 121/139)

The unnamed narrator describes what Muhammad Ali Akbar's perceptions and feelings about Kuwait might have been; this description could just as easily belong to the narrator himself or to Kanafani or any new immigrant to Kuwait:

The packed streets, the size of the buildings, the grey sky, the incandescent heat, the hot northerly wind, the streets jammed with cars, the serious faces ... all of these things seemed to impose a barrier between himself and his dream. He wandered around aimlessly, without direction, in that ocean of people, feeling lost and vertiginous in the swim of faces, and believing with the utmost conviction that those faces which did not so much as look at him were declared enemies, that these people, and their sheer numbers, were the walls obstructing the outset of the road to his new future. Things were not as simple as he'd imagined before leaving Ibkhā. Nothing appeared to have connectives here or to be sequential. It seemed the roads he walked were without end, that they circled a wall which embraced everything [...]. (Kanafani 2004: 121/140)

The estranging quality of the unfamiliar city could well apply to any alien locale, any difficult immigrant experience. However, the affects of hopelessness and disconnection from others (described as enemies who obstruct rather than enable dreams) are extracted over and over again in Kanafani's Kuwait stories. Kuwait's lack of connectivity to itself (in the form of links to its past or future) and to those who are helping to constitute its modernity (those who come to build better lives for themselves) limits what the nation-state might become. Like the other stories mentioned, 'Death of Bed 12' suggests Kuwait's trajectory is a trap—a road that circles a wall that embraces everything.

The narrator comes to this diagnosis in a hospital by way of an encounter with another's death and his own illness. His experience opens up what he calls 'holes' or 'ulcers' in his head (Kanafani 2004: 113/127–8). It allows him to recognise the extent to which 'the problem

remains the problem of the end, whether it entails annihilation or immortality' (Kanafani 2004: 127/149).<sup>8</sup> This problem is not merely an individual, psychological affair. As Deleuze and Guattari argue in relation to Kafka, it is a collective concern, a matter of the people's future (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 17–18). The unnamed narrator perceives, 'how much we're prisoners of our minds and bodies!' (Kanafani 2004: 127/150). He goes on:

We forever ascribe our own qualities to others, and judge them through the manner of our formulated thoughts and opinions. In short, we want them to be 'us', we try to conceive of them as satellites of ourselves, we hope that they see with our eyes, feel with our skins, and in addition we attempt to saddle them with our past, and our own particular way of facing life, and place them within the framework which our current understanding of time and place dictates. (Kanafani 2004: 127/150)

This, as the narrator discovers, is a troubling, homogenising tendency that can lead to nothing socially beneficial. Kanafani's clinical assessment provides an accurate prognosis of what such dichotomising affects would likely generate. His diagnosis not only helps explain the aftermath of the 1990 invasion on Palestinians; it also remains completely relevant to the sectarian extremism currently on the rise in Kuwait.<sup>9</sup> Deleuze states:

The Palestinians are what's untimely in the Middle East, taking the question of territory to its limit. In unconstitutional states it's the nature of the necessarily nomadic processes of liberation that counts. And in constitutional states, it's not established and codified constitutional rights that count but everything that's legally problematic and constantly threatens to bring what's been established back into question that counts. (Deleuze 1995: 153)

Recent demonstrations in Kuwait, challenging the constitutionality of the Amir's modification of the voting law in October 2012, constitute such a threat. This challenge is overt. However, I would argue that the untimely virtual presence of the missing Palestinians in Kuwait today, as expressed through Kanafani's Kuwait stories and elsewhere, constitutes a different kind of potential intervention with constructive implications, though it is not, for the moment, widely perceived.

*Men in the Sun*, published in 1963, three years after Kanafani left Kuwait, intensifies the percepts and affects of the short stories discussed above through its more complex form. The novella uses repetition, multiple perspectives, and non-chronological temporality to extract the percepts of danger and betrayal from the landscape and the affects of alienation and entrapment from the characters. As part of Kanafani's

literary clinic, *Men in the Sun* challenges the undoubtedly widespread political and military disappointment of Palestinians in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It reveals the understandable urge to focus on the personal (that is, individual fortunes and family responsibilities) at the expense of the national and collective to be a flawed solution. By disrupting linear development, the novella's formal techniques call into question the viability of the contemporary perception, on the one hand, of Kuwait as promise and, on the other, of material security as a way out.

Repetition is one of the formal techniques utilised throughout *Men in the Sun*. As in the other Kuwait stories discussed, Kanafani's novella repeatedly depicts a Kuwait perceived by Palestinians to be the promised land of wealth and opportunity and, at the same time, the inadequacy and speciousness of this perception. The word Kuwait is repeated over thirty times in the story, almost always as promise or betrayal. Abu Qais sees Kuwait as 'a dream and a fantasy' where he will be able to earn 'sacks of money' (Kanafani 1983: 13/46); Assad believes "a man can collect money in the twinkling of an eye there" (Kanafani 1983: 19/61); and sixteen-year-old Marwan vows to 'send every penny he earned to his mother and overwhelm her and his brothers and sisters with gifts till he made the mud hut into a paradise on earth' (Kanafani 1983: 29/85). Abul Khaizuran—the man the three men pay to smuggle them into Kuwait—provides the counter to these idealisations, informing the naive Marwan: "I'm glad you are going to Kuwait, because you will learn many things there. The first thing you will learn is: money comes first, and then morals" (Kanafani 1983: 28/84). Abul Khaizuran—an ex-freedom fighter who lost his 'manhood' in a bomb explosion ten years earlier—embodies Kuwait as avarice (though he is not himself Kuwaiti) (Kanafani 1983: 37–8/109–10). A smuggler of human beings employed by a rich Kuwaiti smuggler "of more important things", Abul Khaizuran cares only for his own interests (Kanafani 1983: 35/100). He declares to Assad, "I want more money, more money, much more. And I find it difficult to accumulate money honestly" (Kanafani 1983: 40/114). So he smuggles desperate Palestinians across the desert in a metal tank, risking their lives for a few dinars. When he finds Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan dead in the tank, he decides to dump them in the trash heap at the edge of town so that "they would be discovered in the morning and buried under official auspices" (Kanafani 1983: 55/148). He leaves them, drives off, and then returns to pilfer the change from their pockets and, significantly, Marwan's watch (Kanafani 1983: 56/151). For the three men, Kuwait turns out to be no paradise at all.

The novella is told from the perspective of the four main characters. The third-person omniscient perspective used throughout is primarily subjective, but at times it pulls back into objective mode. At other times, without warning and within the same paragraph, it slides into second-person, addressing the character directly (Kanafani 1983: 9–10/37–8). Thoughts occasionally merge together. For example, riding through the desert heat, their thoughts about Kuwait are presented simultaneously, and it is not clarified who is thinking what:

They used to be told that someone wasn't coming back from Kuwait because he'd died; he'd been killed by sunstroke. [...] This desert was like a giant in hiding, flogging their heads with whips of fire and boiling pitch. But could the sun kill them and all the stench imprisoned in their breasts? The thought seemed to run from one head to another, laden with the same suspicions. (Kanafani 1983: 48/131–2; see also 46/129)

Kanafani's complex narrative style produces a polyvocal effect that calls into question the seeming autonomy of the characters and perhaps, by extension, the autonomy of any migrant Palestinian.<sup>10</sup> While the titles of the first three sections are the names of each of the three men who will die together in a tank in the desert in the middle of August, the varying, overlapping narrative perspective belies this division; it holds the characters together despite their differences. This merging of subjectivities challenges the 'every man for himself' mentality that runs through this and the other Kuwait stories, a mentality that ends in catastrophe for the characters over and over again. As such, Kanafani's literary clinic calls forth a collectivity missing at the time—a Palestinian people-to-come no longer paralysed and humiliated by defeat, able to plan beyond their immediate material exigencies.

Another technique that traverses Kanafani's novella is a temporal shifting from present to past and back again. Movements from present to past are almost imperceptible textually, as markers from the present context hark back subtly to something in the past and vice versa. To give only one example of many in the novella: as Assad negotiates with a smuggler in Basra to take him across the border to Kuwait, he recollects his experience with Abul-Abd, the smuggler who he had hired to take him across the border from Jordan to Iraq. The narrative jumps back and forth between his earlier experience and the present, held together by recurring signs. As he trekked across the blazing desert, abandoned by Abul-Abd, 'the earth turned into shining sheets of yellow paper' and then, jolted back to the present, in the office of the smuggler in Basra, 'suddenly the yellow sheets began to fly about,

and he stooped to gather them up' (Kanafani 1983: 18/59). Yellow sheets traverse past and present, challenging linearity. This technique is used extensively in the first three sections and, like the shared narrative perspectives, holds the three characters together despite their ostensible separation. Kamal Abdel-Malek describes these repeated words that run through the text as 'connective tissues between writing segments, between units of time and geography' (Abdel-Malek 1999: 183). They appear as 'liminal entities ... [that] act like a bridge, or isthmus, between blocks of past events and present ones' (Abdel-Malek 1999: 182). In *Men in the Sun* time is durational rather than chronological; that is to say, it expresses the interpenetration of past and future within any present and the impossibility of separating time out into quantifiable units (Bergson 1910: 104). This non-habituated perception of temporality not only makes it possible to consider the myriad elements of the past—often overlooked or forgotten—that compose the present but also takes seriously the ongoing potential effects such elements can have in the present and future (Deleuze 1991: 97). It is an understanding of temporality as a process of becoming and experimentation; it underscores the opportunities for transformation always available despite the harsh brutalities of the present. As Baugh puts it:

when literature fractures this order [the linear chronology of Aristotelian plot], it allows moments to be related to each other in multiple, non-linear ways; instead of a straight line from past to present to future, there are many curved lines that can pass through points on the line in an order other than linear succession. (Baugh 2000: 51)

Edward Said argues that *Men in the Sun*'s temporal instability expresses how:

impelled by exile and dislocation, the Palestinian must carve a path for himself in existence, which is by no means a 'given' or stable reality for him. Like the land he left, his past seems broken off just before it could bring forth fruit; yet the man has family, responsibilities, life itself to answer to, in the present. Not only is his future uncertain; even his present situation increases in difficulty. (Said 2000: 52–3)

Just before Abul Khaizuran seals the three men in the tank as they cross the border into Kuwait, he notes the time—half-past eleven—and promises them their ordeal will take no more than 'seven minutes at the outside' (Kanafani 1983: 49/133). In fact, because of the licentiousness of the border guards, Abul Khaizuran cannot reopen the tank until nine minutes to twelve. As he does so, he catches sight of his wrist

watch: 'The round glass had cracked into little pieces', an indication of the futility of chronological clock time – and the normative political, social and economic order it facilitates – as a panacea for Palestinian suffering (Kanafani 1983: 53/141). In contrast, Kanafani's durational depiction of time provides a potential beacon for a people-to-come. That Abul Khaizuran comes back to replace his own cracked wrist watch with Marwan's suggests that a durational conception of time does not prevail. Nonetheless, Kanafani's 'de-chronologisation' of time constructs an untimely experiment for future actualisations (Baugh 2000: 52). 'In great works, all moments of time are virtually present *at once*, and can be actualised in infinite ways, in any order; this potentially infinite becoming-actual thus constitutes a different order of time than chronology or history' (Baugh 2000: 52; see also Deleuze 1995: 152–3).

### III. The Kanafani Effect

So far, I have focused primarily on the link between Kanafani's literary clinic and the Palestinians in Kuwait. But Kanafani's literary diagnosis is equally applicable to Kuwait itself – not just in relation to Palestinians but in general. In fact, the two are inextricably bound. Kanafani's Kuwait stories provide a compelling diagnosis of the country's current political, social and economic stalemates, though there aren't many around who can hear what he had to say. Kanafani diagnoses Kuwait in the 1950s as an inadequate long-term home for the majority of immigrant Palestinians – despite its money and opportunities – for the reasons discussed above. The percepts and affects Kanafani's stories extract – disappointment, entrapment, alienation, disjointedness, avarice, suffocation, exclusion, classism and divisiveness, among many others – undergirded the formation of the soon-to-be independent nation-state, with implications for all its citizens and residents, not only the Palestinians. Hidden in the interstices of Kuwait's rising modernity, in other words, were the components of the state's potential inadequacies. The percept of Kuwait-as-money traversed and continues to traverse the country's figuration of citizenship, its organisation of political power, and its divisive social stratification.

The dichotomies around which Kuwaiti society is organised – Kuwaiti/non-Kuwaiti, Arab/non-Arab, Muslim/non-Muslim – have produced a politics of exclusion practised since at least the 1970s (Longva 1997: 43–4). Anh Nga Longva argues that such processes of exclusion were considered necessary by the state in order to protect the 'character of Kuwaiti society' from the massive number

of labour migrants in the country (Longva 1997: 44). I would add that because Kuwaiti citizenship is primarily considered in terms of benefits proffered to citizens, the distinction between those who have a right to such privileges and those who do not becomes essential. It was precisely at the time Kanafani was writing that Kuwaiti citizenship was being constructed as a means through which to distribute oil wealth and, simultaneously, if somewhat paradoxically, to restrict this distribution. According to the 1959 Nationality Law, Kuwaitis included only those men and their descendants established in Kuwait since 1920. The children of Arab or Muslim fathers born in Kuwait could no longer obtain citizenship, nor could Arabic speakers who had worked and resided in the country for ten years, as both groups had been able to do based on the 1948 law. Amendments to the Nationality Law over the next few decades restricted citizenship opportunities for most groups (though the government continued to nationalise Bedouin in large numbers from the 1960s through the 1980s and beyond in order to counterbalance perceived threats to their authority from the liberal opposition). Today, the common assumption among many, though certainly not all, Kuwaitis is that citizenship entails a string of entitlements: free healthcare, education, housing, a job for life, no taxes, financial and social benefits of various kinds, and so on. Kuwaiti citizenship is generally not figured in terms of civic responsibilities, productive contributions or innovative potential. This inadequate understanding of citizenship constitutes non-Kuwaitis as a threat to Kuwaiti bounty; therefore, as was the case with the Palestinian community, they are not welcome to stay permanently. However, this understanding does not consider how, without the labour of these non-Kuwaitis, the production of Kuwaiti bounty would likely diminish. Kanafani's Kuwait stories excavate the roots of this ongoing contradictory, circuitous logic through their creation of affects of entrapment and exclusion, avarice and self-centeredness. Limiting citizenship has done nothing to reduce the demographic imbalance between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis by discouraging migration, as may have been hoped (Kuwait Central 2011: 43). Instead it has intensified the oppositional logic structuring the category 'Kuwaiti' itself, a logic responsible for many of the country's ongoing crises.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Kanafani's pessimistic diagnosis of Kuwait then and now, his actual presence in Kuwait in the 1950s signified the possibility of a better future than the one that has actualised. As a new and wealthy nation-state, Kuwait could have positioned itself differently in relation to those helping to bring about its modernisation (Palestinians among so

many other nationals), as well as in relation to the global economy (by diversifying its productive capacities, for example). That Kanafani – an outsider, a Palestinian – was widely published and respected in Kuwait (even as he wrote stories critical of certain aspects of the country) suggests a residual openness to diversity soon to disappear. This openness would have been in keeping with Kuwait's historical and geographical position as a port town. It would also have been aligned with ardent efforts in the 1950s and early 1960s to form Kuwait's state and civic institutions on democratic, humanist secular, and pan-Arabist grounds. As Rosemarie Said Zahlan recounts:

The quest for political reform in Kuwait during the 1950s marked a new departure. Its protagonists were no longer restricted to the merchant notables who had been central to the Majlis movements of 1921 and 1938. They now included some of the young educated men who had been abroad and had remained abreast of events in the rest of the Arab world; they were also stimulated by the presence in Kuwait of young, politically sophisticated Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Iraqis, who were working there. [...] Political participation also became attractive to the newly formed labour force, which included workers in the Kuwait Oil Company as well as those engaged in construction and development projects. (Zahlan 1998: 41)

The political aspirations of these groups together with the strong support of the Amir, Sheikh Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, would culminate in the formation of the National Assembly in 1962. The tremendous economic boom brought on by the export of oil beginning in 1946 made it possible for the government to establish an extensive welfare state (redistributing oil wealth to the population); to finance major construction and infrastructural development projects; and to introduce a public education system which would enable Kuwait to 'transition from a largely illiterate to a literate society [...] within a couple of decades' (Zahlan 1998: 40). As Zahlan notes, this period in the 1950s was also when Kuwaitis were first exposed to events and ideologies in the rest of the Arab world, including Nasserist pan-Arabism, the Suez war in 1956, the revolution in Iraq in 1958 (and the establishment of a republic there), among others (Zahlan 1998: 46–7).

A quick perusal of popular Kuwaiti magazines and newspapers from the period provides a unique glimpse at the dynamic and progressive sensibility of the time. The most well-respected Kuwaiti magazine, *al-'Arabi*, is a case in point. Founded by the Kuwait Ministry of Information in 1958, *al-'Arabi* appointed Egyptian scholar Ahmad Zaki as its editor. One of its aims was to promote pan-Arabism through



culture. *Al-'Arabi* rightfully prided itself on its high intellectual standing throughout the Arab region. Many of the magazine's covers from the 1950s into the 1960s (including its first volume) featured photographs of Arab women from various countries. A sample of article titles from *al-'Arabi* magazine in the late 1950s and early 1960s include (author's translations): 'Cultural Exchanges between East and West'; 'A Day with the Algerian Liberation Army' (featuring photographs of Algerian women soldiers); 'We Want One Arab Nation Unaffected by Political Changes' (on pan-Arabism); 'Islam Does Not Necessitate the Hijab and Women are Permitted to Work' (written by a Kuwaiti mufti); 'Policewomen' (about Arab women in the police force); 'On Arab Nationalism' (on the relevance of Arab nationalism and why Arabs should free themselves of parochialism); 'Machines Take the Place of Man' (about city planning and the role of machinery in a rapidly developing Kuwait); 'Borrowing Ideas in Arab Thought: All Cultures Overlap' (on the benefits of being open to unfamiliar ideas); 'Jesus Christ as Depicted by Artists from Various Times' (an illustrated article that mentions how Muslim Arabs celebrate Christmas alongside Christian Arabs); 'Syrian Women Writers'; 'Birth Control' (an illustrated medical explanation of how it works); 'Kuwaiti High School Students' (an article with photographs of young Kuwaiti girls at school conducting experiments in science labs, playing music, throwing a basketball, and posing happily for the camera). Other magazines from the same period and earlier (late 1940s and early 1950s), including *al-Ra'id*, published by the Kuwait Teacher's Club, and *al-Eman*, published by the Arab Nationalist Culture Club, cover similar topics. The more politically left weekly newspaper, *al-Taleea*, established in 1962 by Kuwaiti political activist and ANM founding member Ahmad al-Khatib, focused on pan-Arabism, leftism, the Palestine issue, local politics and women's rights, among other topical concerns. Ghassan Kanafani, al-Khatib's friend, sometimes published in *al-Taleea*, where Palestinian political cartoonist Nagi al-Ali worked for a time (al-Ali also published his political cartoons in the Kuwaiti newspapers *al-Siyasa* and *al-Qabas*).

In contrast to the 1950s, Kanafani is hardly remembered today as a part of Kuwait's (not just Palestine's) literary and cultural heritage. His work is not taught in high schools and his books are difficult to find. Forgetting Kanafani and his legacy is, I would argue, symptomatic of a wider cultural, political, economic and social 'amnesia' responsible for the tendency toward monoculturalism in Kuwait today (Huyssen 1995: 1). Many in Kuwait have forgotten the early potential of their nation-state as a genuinely cosmopolitan and progressive

place, decipherable in the 1950s and early 1960s not only in its magazines and newspapers but through its multicultural population, its canny modernising strategies, its infrastructural projects, its potentially egalitarian political institutions, its emphasis on and socialisation of healthcare and education, and so on. This amnesia confirms the percepts of Kuwait extracted by Kanafani's stories discussed above and reveals that, unfortunately, Kanafani's diagnosis went unheeded. As Baugh points out, 'a work may work for a reader at some times and not others, and whether and how a work works depends on the forces and resources the reader brings to the encounter' (Baugh 2000: 53). Kanafani's early fabulations of Kuwait invented a people missing at the time: on the one hand, a community of Kuwaitis able to perceive those residing within their borders – Palestinians among others – as potential Kuwaitis and, on the other, a community of Palestinians able to perceive Kuwait – despite its wealth and promise – as problematic in the future precisely because of these missing Kuwaitis. Kanafani's fabulations diagnose the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion on the Palestinian community in Kuwait. The aftermath of the invasion, in turn, helps diagnose the ostensibly unrelated sectarianism and political divisions currently on the rise within the country. The adverse effects of both are related, I would argue, to the dichotomising theorisation and exclusionary practice of citizenship in Kuwait.<sup>12</sup>

Remembering Kanafani and his legacy – what Barbara Harlow calls a revolutionary writer's 'after life' – can provide a more critically astute sense of the present than currently prevails (Harlow 1996: 7). While this understanding will not likely transform the present or, for that matter, redeem the past, the act of 'cultural recall' itself may help prepare the conditions for a more ethical and flexible future (Bal 1999: vii). There are small signs that such a process may, in fact, be underway.<sup>13</sup> A recent art show sponsored by a governmental organisation, the Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, and produced by the privately owned MinRASY Projects engaged the question of memory and forgetting in relation to the missing Palestinian community in Kuwait. The compelling two-part show (comprised of *Museum of Manufactured Response to Absence*, featuring artworks by over twenty different artists, and *Unplified* by Lebanese sound artist Tarek Atoui) was installed at Kuwait's Museum of Modern Art in May 2012. As mentioned in the exhibition notes, *Unplified*, a sound installation piece, was inspired by Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*. The work was installed in two connected, unairconditioned, blindingly white portable cabins on the museum grounds. The first room contained an audio and visual

recording of desert sounds amplified by Atoui's feedback system. He recorded these sounds and images on a trip he took in a water tank through the desert from Basra to Kuwait, following the journey of Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan. The second room contained another feedback system amplifying the listener's presence in the space. The suffocating heat of the cabins, the disturbingly bright light and the eeriness of the ambient sound, force visitors into an uncomfortable zone and they are suddenly made to confront what many may never have had to experience before. *Unplified* constructs the desert as percept, making it stand up on its own as sensation. It constructs paralysis and futility as affects – both through the overwhelming heat and brightness of the piece and its inescapable, impenetrable sound. It responds to Abul Khaizuran's famous lament at the end of *Men in the Sun*:

'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you say anything? Why?'

The desert suddenly began to send back the echo:

'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?' (Kanafani 1983: 56/152)

The men may have knocked on the sides of the tank, but their knocking would have been swallowed up by the desert, in much the same way that Kanafani's own diagnosis of Kuwait has been swallowed up and forgotten. By forcing especially Kuwaiti visitors to listen to the experience of the men in the sun – that is to say, the missing Palestinians and their forgotten legacy – *Unplified* echoes back across the desert the long overlooked potential of Kanafani's early diagnosis of Kuwait. It is too late for the vibrant community of Palestinians that existed in Kuwait before 1991. But it may yet be possible for the Kanafani effect to make a difference to Kuwait.

## Notes

1. In all references from Kanafani's texts, the first page refers to the English translations, the second to the original Arabic texts. All Arabic references from *Men in the Sun* are from Kanafani (1999), while all Arabic references from the short stories are from Kanafani (1987).
2. I would like to acknowledge that this work was supported by Kuwait University Research Grant No. AE03/12.
3. According to Deleuze, 'Maps should not be understood only in extension, in relation to a space constituted by trajectories. There are also maps of intensity, of density, that are concerned with what fills space, what subtends the trajectory' (Deleuze 1997: 64). The clinical cartography I chart here in relation to Kanafani is, thus, a 'list or constellation of affects, an intensive map'; in other words, a becoming (Deleuze 1997: 64). But, as Deleuze explains, art's intensive map

- (a map of virtualities) 'is superimposed onto the real map, whose distances [*parcours*] it transforms' (Deleuze 1997: 67). This is the actualisation of virtual literary effects, the clinical practice of literature.
4. Reading literature for effects rather than for meaning shifts the critical process from the exegetical to the practical. The Kanafani effect (Kanafani's literary construction of singular affects and percepts) is not reducible to any single feature or outcome, or to Kanafani as author or subject. The Kanafani effect (as non-personal extraction) can combine with various bodies (organic, social, political and philosophical, among others) as a machine, producing a range of unpredictable new modes of life (even more effects) (Deleuze 2000: 153). Deleuze states, 'All these things have proper names, but the proper name does not designate a person or a subject. It designates an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between two as though under a potential difference: the "Compton effect", the "Kelvin effect"' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 6; see also, Deleuze 2000: 164–5). For a discussion of the link between the singular author and the people to come, see Tynan 2012: 153–72.
  5. As Barbara Harlow points out, Kanafani was the first to apply the term 'resistance' (*muqawama*) to Palestinian Literature in 1966 in his study *Adab al-Muqawama fi Filastin al-Mubtela: 1948–1966* (Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966) (Kanafani 1982; Harlow 1987: 2). His own literary output is most often considered as national or resistance literature and in terms of its political implications (Abbas 1972; al-Mansur 1972: 205, 217–21; Siddiq 1984; Harlow 1987: 2–4, 86–92, 196–76; Coffin 1996; Harlow 1996: 45–75; al-Naqib 1999; Hamdi 2011; among many others). While Kanafani acknowledged that his writing dealt specifically with Palestinian issues, he regarded his work as expressing wider human concerns, ultimately not reducible to Palestine or to Palestinians alone (Kanafani 1974: 138; Meyer 2001: 26–7).
  6. Kanafani's friend Fadl al-Naqib argues that artists and intellectuals of resistance (including Kanafani, Nagi al-Ali, and others) have the special capacity to detect future danger before the majority do (al-Naqib 1999: 208). He states, 'Ghassan Kanafani's greatness was his ability to predict early on the major setbacks to nationalism by observing the faults of ordinary individuals in everyday life' (author's translation) (al-Naqib 1999: 210). Al-Naqib goes on to illustrate how Kanafani's textual 'after life' (to use Barbara Harlow's term) continues to produce effects on the lives of Palestinians (Harlow 1996: 7; al-Naqib 1999: 214–16). My study considers whether the Kanafani effect can be actualised in Kuwait.
  7. For an analysis of the figure of oil in Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, see McLarney (2009: 177–89).
  8. Deleuze similarly describes the holes or gaps in people's lives as the places where 'movement takes place'; that is, places where some kind of realisation or transformation occurs (Deleuze 1995: 138). The narrator's time in hospital constitutes such a hole and through it he transmutes conventional, hierarchising understandings of identity.
  9. Sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in Kuwait are based less on religious differences than on political affiliations. The Shi'a minority (about 30 per cent of the Kuwaiti population) generally supports the government, while a substantial portion of the tribal Sunni majority (between 50 to 60 per cent of the Kuwaiti population) has more recently constituted itself as part of the opposition to government policies. It should be kept in mind that historically the latter group was more aligned with government causes; however, the recent boycott of the December 2012 election by the opposition demonstrates this support can

- no longer be counted on by the government. For a succinct discussion of the December 2012 election in Kuwait, see al-Sumait (2012). The ongoing uprising in Bahrain has intensified mistrust between Sunni and Shi'a groups in Kuwait. These tensions are further exacerbated by the regional polarity between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For more on sectarian divisions in the Gulf, including Kuwait, see Chatham House (2012). Additional political and identic divisions include: Islamist (itself a highly segmented category including Salafi extremists, members of *Hadas* or the Kuwaiti Muslim Brothers, and Shi'i Islamists); liberals (including secularists, old-school Arab nationalists, and women's rights activists, among others); elite merchant families (mainly Sunni); Bedouin; *bidoun* (those without citizenship); and non-Kuwaitis (another highly segmented group ranging from wealthy bankers to low-wage Bangladeshi street cleaners and female domestic labour).
10. For a brief analysis of Kanfani's use of multiple narration in his novella *Ma Tabaqqa Lakum* (All That's Left to You), see Meyer 2001: 29–34; also see Azouqa 2000: 169–70.
  11. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to detail these varied and shifting crises at length. They range from vocal political opposition to the status quo; to economic concerns about the country's long-term ability to pay out the salaries and benefits of government employees (comprising 75 per cent of employed Kuwaitis) (Kanfani 2012); to intensifying sectarian and social divisions mentioned above. Suffice it to say, an exclusive and exclusionary notion of citizenship (based on access to cradle-to-grave welfare state benefits) does little to develop the kind of civic responsibility and acceptance of heterogeneity needed to ensure lasting economic, political and social stability.
  12. Kanfani describes the rigid images of thought that prevent genuinely democratic practices from unfolding as 'blind language' or 'incantatory thought' (*al-fikr al-ghina'i*) (Kanfani 1990: 145–6). One way out of the trap of blind language is to embrace or encourage what he calls the 'blood circulation system' (*al-dawra al-damawiyya*), a concept Harlow links to Said's notion of 'affiliation' (Harlow 1990: 134). Affiliation, unlike genealogical and hereditary filiation, requires critical attention, effort and assessment. It is a worldly practice, not a transcendent or biological given. According to Said, worldly critical practice within affiliative cultural communities is 'life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom' (Said 1983: 29). Kanfani similarly describes democracy as 'that circulation of blood, healthy and reinvigorating, that must reach every part and member of the social body' (Kanfani 1990: 151). Both Said's and Kanfani's understandings of health (as affiliative cultural and critical practice) correspond to Deleuze's Nietzschean notion of literature as an enterprise of health discussed above (Deleuze 1997: 3); on Deleuze and Guattari's similar understanding of 'alliance' (as opposed to filiation) and what it can do socially and politically, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 241, 246–8.
  13. Officially, at the state level, relations between the governments of Palestine and Kuwait are on track once again, culminating in the recent opening of the Embassy of Palestine in Kuwait in 2013. My focus, however, is more on unofficial memory than on official government action (commendable though it is). The two are no doubt linked, and as the government continues its support of Palestine, this may affect the attitudes, sensibilities and memories of the general public with regard to the history of Palestinians in Kuwait (although there are no guarantees).

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