

**An Existential Reading of Kanafani's Play
*The Door***

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For all the scholarly attention critics have directed toward Kanafani's fiction, little has been said of his drama. Kanafani wrote three plays: only one, *The Door (al-Bab)*, was published during his life in 1964; the second, *The Hat and the Prophet (al-Qubba'ah wa al-Nabiyy)*, was published posthumously in 1973; and the third, *A Bridge Forever (Jisr ila al-'Abad)*, Kanafani seems to have kept in manuscript (Jabra "Obsessions" 9). Considering his untimely death, the paucity of his dramatic production might be one reason why Kanafani's plays did not receive attention from critics. Furthermore, the large body of fiction he had written and whose praises critics were already singing understandably eclipsed the few plays he wrote. For instance, *The Door* did not attract attention most probably because it was published shortly after the appearance of his widely celebrated novel *Men in the Sun*.

Though Kanafani is primarily a fiction writer, we think that a study of his plays would shed considerable light on the development of the artist's mind and show the versatility of his art. The plays represent an important phase in Kanafani's corpus of literary work in which he seems to have rid himself of the topicality that characterized much of his early fiction. In his Introduction to the plays, Jabra notes that Kanafani's plays, contrary to his fiction, evoke references to Palestine in an implicit or symbolic manner ("Obsessions" 10). In an interview given shortly before his death and published posthumously, Kanafani himself talks about this development as a prominent characteristic of his works after 1962:

In the beginning I wrote about Palestine in itself.... Then I came to see Palestine as a symbol of humanity.... When I delineate the

misery of the Palestinians, I really present the Palestinian as a symbol of misery throughout the world (137-38).

In *Returning to Haifa*, for instance, Kanafani formulates a sense of the Palestinian struggle as one of social and political justice. 'Umm Sa'd, written in 1969, also explores the issues of oppression and class struggle that lead to political action and social revolution (Riley *et al.* 24). The plays, however, approach these issues differently: while the Palestinian theme still lurks in the background, it finds ample expression through Kanafani's employment of ideas that dominated the literary and intellectual scene of the nineteen sixties, particularly existentialism, myth and symbol and the theatre of the absurd.

This paper approaches Kanafani's play *The Door* from an existential point of view. We would argue that the play can be read as an existential play which deals with the central existential motif of the confrontation with death and that its protagonist, Shaddad, is an existentialist who experiences anguish, abandonment, and despair as a consequence of his free choice and commitment. The sporadic comments the play has received subsume it under the Palestinian theme of resistance and thus relate it to the main themes of Kanafani's fiction. According to Jabra, for instance, the main theme of the play is "death or the rejection of it," and as such the Palestinian theme of resistance to the enemy becomes implied consciously or unconsciously. He concludes that the protagonist, Shaddad, represents the Palestinian in his rashness and anger; he is the Palestinian exile who, like thousands of Palestinians, is obsessed with both life and death, which eventually shapes the Palestinian identity ("Obsessions" 13-26). To al-Qasim, the play focuses on death as the only way to attain salvation, and, consequently, Shaddad's attempt to break the door down at the end is a symbol for the struggle of the Palestinian to transcend exile (death) and return to Palestine (life) (57-58). Fakhri Saleh remarks that the play highlights the loneliness and the existential anguish of the Palestinian who, in his discovery that he is lonely and with no hope, either becomes a rebel or a nihilist. Hence in his final confrontation with the forces of oppression, the existential question becomes whether it is death for life or life for death (33-34). Indeed, a symbolic reading of the play yields references to the Palestinian theme of resistance and alienation. This paper, however, attempts to present an alternative reading, which would in most places, overlap with the symbolic reading. The existentialist-- in his political and social commitment, in his anxiety and

quest for freedom and in his rebellion—is, after all, like the Palestinian hero. It is not our intention here to expand on this aspect of the play; rather we will attempt to study the impact that Existentialism (particularly Sartrean Existentialism) has on Kanafani and evaluate Kanafani's attempt at integrating existential ideas in his play. Kanafani wrote his play in the early sixties of the twentieth century when Existentialism was already exerting a tremendous influence on the Arab intellectual life. Of all the existentialists, Jean Paul Sartre was the favorite of the literary circles in Beirut and Cairo. His philosophical and dramatic writings—with ideas such as social and political commitment, freedom, protest, individual salvation and heroism—helped the Arab intellectuals to come to closer grips with issues that demanded expressions (Jabra "Arabic Literature" 87-89).

The Door is based on the Arabic myth of Shaddad, the king of al-'Ahqaf, who built 'Iram, an exceedingly beautiful city, to replace Heba's paradise. Broadly speaking, the myth describes the conflict between the divine will represented by Heba and the human will represented by 'Ad and his successors.¹ A five-act play, *The Door* in the first three acts traces the heroic attempts of three kings, 'Ad, Shaddad, and Merthid, of three successive generations to defy the will of Heba and free themselves from his clutches. The three men never reach their destinations: 'Ad and Shaddad are crushed to death, and Merthid is likely to follow. However, the seeds of rebellion which the grandfather and father plant are bequeathed to the son. In the last two acts, which delineate the final confrontation between Shaddad and Heba in hell, Shaddad emerges as the central tragic figure.²

The play opens with the conflict between 'Ad, king of al-'Ahqaf, and Heba. We are told that 'Ad defies Heba and sets himself the task of wiping away the idea of god from the minds of his people. He closes down all temples where Heba is worshipped and prevents his people from praying to him (I, 38). In retaliation, Heba stops the rain for years and afflicts the country with terrible famine. 'Ad seeks the help of the gods of Mecca to provide him with rain, and thus to demonstrate to his people that they don't need Heba as a life giver. As 'Ad's messengers to the gods of Mecca tell us:

Qil: He ['Ad] believes that a god should provide his subjects with rain. He once told me that a sin, any sin should not make a god

think of revenge by killing innocent girls, drying up milk in mother's breasts and afflicting the country with famine.

Ra'd: But why doesn't he ask Heba's forgiveness for the sake of water?

Qil: You know why. He thinks that to ask for forgiveness is a kind of humiliation (I, 34).

Later **Qil** says:

He ['Ad] believes that if he could, only once, bring water to the city of al-'Ahqaf in spite of Heba, then that would kill Heba. People would lose faith in his white statue which is erected among their houses(I,35)

In the final confrontation at Mecca, the voice of Heba orders 'Ad to choose among three colored clouds, red, yellow and black, which respectively represent blood, blind submission and death. To the dislike of his people who would choose submission in return for water, 'Ad prefers to die rather than to live on his knees. Blind submission and humiliation are big prices 'Ad would not pay for water: "In return for what? In return for what? (Shouting.) Humiliation? Submission? Fear? No, no I don't want water at this price"(I, 39).

With the destruction of 'Ad, the play concludes its first act. Though the act is not without weaknesses in terms of plot,³ it still furnishes the play with basic existential themes to be developed in later acts, and establishes 'Ad as an existential hero precursor to the central figure, Shaddad. 'Ad is confronted with a responsibility of choice which he willingly accepts. As Sartre puts it, "man is condemned to be free"("Existentialism" 295).⁴ However, this freedom of choice entails a sense of responsibility for mankind; in choosing for himself, 'Ad chooses for his entire people. As a typical existentialist, his choice has brought him to an ultimate confrontation with death. Furthermore, Nietzsche's "God is dead" is not far fetched in this context.⁵ 'Ad conceives of god as an idea created by man to help him endure life

It is in Act II, and with Shaddad as the central existential figure, that existential themes are explored at length. It is interesting to note that the act is based on argument and counter argument between Shaddad and his

mother, and Shaddad and his son Merthid. From the argument the mother emerges as representative of orthodoxy-the voice of tradition and the accepted social norms propagated by religion. For her, man's salvation or damnation is determined by his obedience to Heba. Thus, man's existence is inseparable from and contingent upon the belief that there is a god who is the source of reward and punishment; and here the meaning of life is not something to be created by man but is measured against the obedience shown to god. She tells Shaddad:

... Remember the hard past days...remember the blood shed just because your father did not accept Heba, the provider (Pointing to the window), the one who stands there among the houses of people, the receiver of sacrifices, the giver of good, the provider of victory, the giver of blessings (II,46).

In terms of the existential idea of existence and essence, the mother obviously adopts the orthodox religious view that essence precedes the historical existence, which is confronted in experience. Within this view, as each individual is the realization of a certain conception, which dwells in the divine understanding, he/she lives in accordance with the commandments of the divine and a set of eternal values (Sartre "Existentialism" 288-89). Existence becomes in this sense a matter of "habit," as Shaddad puts it describing his mother's life. The individual's existence is reduced to a futile toil to give meaning to an absurd life. The mother's life, as Shaddad sees it, is one with no dignity because it is founded on the absurd premise that the human life is definable if we leave "everything to Heba's wisdom."(II,51). Hence the mother's life becomes nothing more than futile attempts to act out different roles preset by "human nature" and originally conceived by the divine understanding-- the obedient wife, the good mother, etc.-- and the way out of this existential impasse is to believe that:

Heba with his long white beard would give you a pat on the shoulder and say to you: enter paradise! Sleep on your comfortable bed! Pick whatever you want of apples and cherries (II, 51).

In existential terms, the mother's choice can be best described as "bad faith." (Sartre "Self-Deception" 243). She lives in self-deception and denies her free will. In contrast, Shaddad's initial point of departure from

his orthodox view is his conviction that “man is condemned to be free”--condemned, because he has no choice in his existence:

All of us came to this life unwillingly then we started looking for justification. We created Heba and erected [for him] a shiny white shrine among the people's houses (II, 55).

And thus if Heba doesn't exist, if he is an illusion created by man to legitimize his behavior, then man is free, and from the moment he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does. That is, for Shaddad existence comes before essence, and his essence is something to be labored out by him; he has to decide his being. Unlike the mother who seeks a meaning for her existence in a final rest in Heba's paradise, Shaddad seeks to create his own paradise ('Iram) on earth only to discover for himself the fallacy of the idea of the divine reward and punishment:

You taught me how to obey Heba since my tender years. And you told me that if I submitted to his will, I would go to Heaven. Heaven is the only thing Heba has. So I decided to construct my own heaven and get rid of Heba --to be myself Heba but with no desire to obey or be obeyed (II, 74).

Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre asserts that man is the being “who wants to be God”(qtd. in Kaufmann 47). In this speech the tone of the messianic hero is very much felt. Like Heba in heaven, Shaddad wants to be a god on earth. But in his realm he neither asks nor is ready for obedience. He even believes that he is basically better than Heba who enjoys blind submission and exacts the price of full obedience in return for his paradise. However, when Shaddad constructs the city of 'Iram, he discovers for himself the pettiness of the divine reward: “... I realized,” he tells his mother, “that paradise did not deserve obedience; I realized that Heba did not deserve the rites, rituals, sacrifices and the glorification offered by you and my people”(II, 48).

In the very act of Shaddad's constructing his own paradise, we could see the anguish of the existentialist who has chosen to bear responsibility. As he commits himself, the existentialist fully realizes that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is, at the same time, deciding for the whole of mankind. This kind of anguish, however, does not lead to quietism or inaction (Sartre “Existentialism” 292-293). Like 'Ad in his attempt to

dispense with Heba by securing for his people the life-giving rain, Shaddad erects his paradise to redeem his people from the idea of divine reward and hence to abolish all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven.

With this anguish goes a tragic sense of alienation, or what Sartre calls "abandonment" (*Existentialism* 294); Shaddad tells his mother: "Do you want me to live in a hell of my anguish, fear and doubts"(II, 53). Another moment in the play, which shows Shaddad's sense of separateness, is when he tells his son Merthid:

You know that the paradise which Heba promises is not worth our torment. (Pointing to the window.) I give you a paradise you could see with your own eyes. Why don't you worship me? Because you know it and you know me, and that is why you don't want to. You want to make up for your misery by looking for the unknown, the hidden, the illusion. As for me, the unknown doesn't interest me any more (II, 54).

Shaddad here recognizes that he is utterly forlorn, and for him to confront this truth is a move that requires, as he says, an act of "bravery"(II, 55). To him there is nothing to rely on to justify his existence but one's freedom of choice, and to be in confrontation with his freedom is in itself a heroic act. However, Shaddad's people choose to recline in the idea that the unknown – the intelligible heaven- provides justification for the existential impasse. This is an action that Sartre terms "cowardice": man is responsible for his cowardice because he has made himself into a coward by his action(*"Existentialism"* 301). By the same token, Shaddad's people are cowards because they don't want to confront their freedom:

The anguish and abandonment of the existentialist is accompanied by a sense of despair. This means, Sartre tells us, "that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the probabilities which render our action feasible," and, therefore, "we act without hope" since what counts is man's action rather than the fruits of his action (*"Existentialism"* 298-99). In this light, Shaddad first commits himself then acts out his commitment. His decision to encounter Heba and to go to 'Iram is an undertaking that counts in itself. The results of his action don't count as much as his commitment to act:

I want to go to him [Heba] of my own volition and choice. Moment by moment, I want to reach him or reach my paradise. It is inescapable....fear doesn't stop me, despair doesn't get in my way (II, 56).

Man's existential situation is basically absurd and tragic; but this does not rule out for the existentialist his integrity and valor. His creative freedom which finds ultimate expression in being a law unto himself can be achieved by simply facing up to death. According to Existentialism, the ultimate choice is death. Usually death is an absurd choice the existentialist recognizes, but sometimes it might be the only ethical choice. An existentialist would be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if doing so would protect the existence and freedom of many others.⁶ For Shaddad, death becomes the ultimate expression of his freedom, an act of valor and integrity:

Death! Death! It is the only real choice that is left to us all. You can't choose life because it is given to you already. The given can't be chosen. The choice of death is the only real choice that could be made at the right time before it is imposed upon you at a wrong time or before you are pushed towards it for any reason beyond your power like sickness, defeat, or poverty. It is the last and the only choice of freedom left for us (II, 55-56).

The third act opens with the report that Shaddad and his city have been destroyed. Merthid, now the new king, has inherited not only the throne but also the desire to rebel against the scheme of things. His father's death makes him skeptical about the established beliefs:

When my father stood here to tell us about his paradise, I used to say to myself that Heba's paradise must be more marvelous. And if it were, it would be natural for Heba to allow my father to discover that for himself and to see the pettiness of the paradise built by man in comparison with Heba's. But he did not allow him to discover that. He did not. Why? (III, 66).

Merthid has just embarked on a lifetime quest for questions about his existence, a quest that would lead him to a final confrontation with death.

The last two acts are set in hell where Shaddad is locked up. The resemblance that these two acts show to Sartre's *No Exit* is striking enough to invite a particular reading of the two acts in the light of Sartre's play.⁷ Sartre and Kanafani present an image of hell which is a metaphor for life; and the people of their hell are locked in a no exit, stalemate, situation so they become each other's torturer. As atheists, Sartre and Kanafani use the symbol of something they don't believe in, hell, to allow dead characters to act. They have finished their lives, and yet they must act as if they were alive. This is the very paradox both Sartre's and Kanafani's characters struggle with throughout the course of the play--action in death. Thus, this "earthly hell" is used as a metaphor for choice and action; and this is what forms the whole basis of dramatic action for both plays. A comparison of *The Door* with *No Exit* may show the impact Sartre has on Kanafani, whether in relation to the general existential theme or to the specific details of characterization.⁸

The portrayal of hell in Kanafani's play echoes Sartre's portrayal. Sartre's hell is an empty hotel room where a light burns continuously; and Kanafani's hell is an empty room glaringly lit. In both plays the characters are continuously conscious of the door which separates them from the other world and is only opened to usher people in. Hence to Sartre and Kanafani, hell is not a lake of brimstone, a perpetual fire; rather it is really a parable of life. The world is the room of evils and the people of the room are the citizens of hell. As Sartre put it many years later to clear misconceptions about his play, "hell is the other people": "what I wanted to say is that hell is other people... but people think it meant that our relations with other people are always poisoned, invariably hellish." He went on to say that "relations with other people, encrustation, and freedom, freedom as the other face of the coin which is barely suggested, are three themes in the play. I should like you to remember this when you hear that hell is other people" (qtd. in Contat *et. al.* 198-200). In other words, what Sartre depicts through the extreme examples of his characters in *No Exit* is what can happen when people refuse to make choices, take responsibility for those choices, and face themselves as the sum total of their action. The characters that come to inhabit Sartre's hell are Joseph Garcin, a war defector, Inez Serrano, a working class Spanish woman who is slowly revealed to be a lesbian, and Estelle Riguih, a member of the French upper class. As they are brought into the room by a valet, each begins to develop an entangled triangular relationship with the other two. Slowly they begin to realize that each is the others'

torturer. Each character wants something from the others which they will not surrender, and thus all three are locked in a state of perpetual torture. As Garcin tells his hell-mates:

So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tale! There's no need for red-hot poker. Hell is – other people! (p.45).

None of the characters will see the others as they want to be seen. The tension builds for an anti-climax when Garcin makes the choice not to exit the room upon the opening of the one locked door. The action then crescendoes again to the point when Estelle attempts to stab Inez and end the torture. After their failed efforts to change the situation, the three characters realize that the only thing they can do is to continue. The three of them decide to remain in the room and their hell becomes a chosen one.

Likewise, Kanafani situates in his hell two men and a woman who are entangled in a triangular relationship and end in accepting each other's torture. Like Sartre's characters, Kanafani's are eternally damned because they committed abominable acts while alive. Their sin is that they do not want to face who they really are; their love for each other is deceptive. The two men, sharing the room with Shaddad, were once close friends, who loved the same woman, but one of them got married to her and the other remained a lover waiting to possess her. During the husband's absence in war, the lover and the wife found their chance to consummate their illicit love. One night, the husband surprised both in bed and killed the lover. Now the three are in hell because their love for each other turns out to be fake. Their punishment is further torture for them. The husband, in order to prove that he is truly in love with his wife, has to stitch a dress for her so that it would perfectly fit her. The lover should watch him closely in order to count the number of stitches used in the dress and thus prove that he is the one who truly loves her. As for the wife, she is situated in an adjacent room in hell where she has to resist the temptation of ten attractive men and prove that her love for one of the two men is not physical. However, their task is a never-ending one. The husband would unravel at night what he has woven and start all over the next day. Like Sartre's characters, they are locked in a perpetual stalemate torture. They refused to make choices, hold responsibility for their actions and face themselves as the sum total of their choices. Their

meaningless labor, reminiscent of Sisyphus's, is what gives meaning to their existence: "I don't want to finish the task," the husband tells Shaddad, "I don't want to die once again. Can you imagine what it means to finish a task?" (IV, 76) Their hell becomes a chosen one. In this sense they become a projection of the people of al-'Ahqaf in their refrain from making choices and in clinging to a lie called Heba in order to give purpose to their existence.

However, this is where the analogy stops. Kanafani introduces two figures into his hell, which would enforce the main existential themes developed in the previous three acts: Shaddad, the existentialist who makes the final choice of encountering death, and Heba the myth created by people. As hell here is just another image of life, the figure of Heba becomes the metaphysical idea--the lie created by people—who deconstructs himself through his own confessions.

The idea of Heba is exposed as a mere lie. He is not an all-knowing deity, as people want to believe:

Shaddad: You [two] talk about Heba as if he does not hear, see or know. You talk about him as if you can deceive him. What? Doesn't he hear you?

The First Man [The Husband]: No! He doesn't hear us. He himself told us so (IV,76).

As Heba himself later tells Shaddad, he could at best be viewed as man's conscience which man through the ages turned into god--an idea that Kanafani seems to have borrowed from Nietzsche.⁹

Heba: There is something that remains after the death of the body: This thing, which you call conscience, does not die with the body. Rather it flies and settles on the celestial vault. This thing has a magnetic quality that attracts everything similar to it, and since this thing started when the first man was born, it has proliferated and got bigger... (Pointing to himself) that is I.

Shaddad: Have things changed for you [since then]?

Heba: Yes, they have. When I am in the living body, I am his will and choice. If you could just know [what I mean]: I am inside,

do you understand? I have never been something that comes from outside. I used to grow inside him [man] and that is why I wasn't frightening as he – you may say so if you will- used to know me very well (IV, 84-85).

However, Heba goes on to explain, as mankind came to recognize him as something outside of them, they enslaved themselves to the idea and erected for it the stone idol (IV, 91). Heba denies to himself any authority over man; it is man who willingly gives power to him to avoid making choices. At another moment of this philosophical debate, Heba also equates himself with chance out of which people also created a god to comfort their lives:

Heba: I did not fight against you. It is chance that killed you. This seems tragic and comic, but didn't you know that chance is my army which defeats and humiliates my enemies and forces people to believe in me?(V, 103)

As such the idea of god is deconstructed to the extent that Heba is reduced to something created by people to explain away their own failure in taking responsibility for their own actions and choices: "You gave me the power to judge you as liars and to have the final word. Yet, let me tell you something very important. There would be no power and no final word in the whole thing if you chose not to give them up to me (IV, 89).

While Sartre in *No Exit* presents existential ideas by stating what is not existential, Kanafani tends to convey the existential ideas in terms of polar images. In the first three acts, we see Shaddad as a true existentialist in contrast to his people. Similarly, in hell Shaddad again stands out as the true existentialist in contrast to the characters who are unwilling to act and, therefore, their existence becomes absurd, meaningless and hopeless. Shaddad tells them:

He [Heba] perfectly knows that between boredom and absurdity we cannot but choose the absurd. Then what? (He moves closer to them and holds the piece of cloth violently.) You keep on sewing with no dignity and no purpose but to run away from boredom. (He throws the piece of cloth away and one of the men goes after it.) Have you ever seen a sight more ridiculous than this? (V, 97-98)

Their task, like Sisyphus's, is an endless exercise in futility. In other words, the play seems to say that if Sisyphus's punishment makes the afterlife a hell for him, we are already living in that hell. However, as Camus writes in his "The Myth of Sisyphus," an existentialist would make life endurable by an act of will: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart"(111). By the same token, Shaddad exercises an act of will in the face of the absurd. The one locked door might not be opened; however, for Shaddad what counts is the attempt to break it open. It is in this act, in this final choice, that Shaddad can exalt and restore meaning to his existence:

(Pointing to the door.) I will keep striking at it until I break it open or it breaks me... They will also do so from the outside, they, the living-
- Merthid, his son and his grandson. And we will make it grow thinner against our shoulders until it melts. Do you understand? Until it melts, even if it takes me to stand before it till the end of time (V, 102).

As such the play ends with a note of hope. The absurd is inherent in our existence; however, our actions and choices are what matters because they are the true affirmation of faith.

To conclude, the analysis of the play has shown that the influence of Existentialism (particularly Sartrean Existentialism) is evident in Kanafani's handling of his main themes and details of characterization. Shaddad, in his quest for freedom, comes to confrontation with death as the ultimate choice of the existentialist; he emerges as an existential hero who is ready to make this sacrifice to protect the existence and the freedom of others. Such commitment, according to Sartre, puts man in a state of anguish, alienation and despair. Shaddad commits himself realizing that he is not only choosing for himself but also for his people. He is condemned to be free, yet is nevertheless at liberty to decide his own being—an existential impasse which can be coped with only through actions and choices symbolized at the end by Shaddad's resolution to break down the door.

Notes

¹ In his introduction to the play, Kanafani remarks that his sources for the myth are mainly two books--Yaqut's *Mu'jam al-Buldan* and al-Tabari's *History*--in addition to few Surats in the Holy Quran, in which 'Ad is portrayed, with Thamud and the Pharaoh, as godless and arrogant tyrants, (pp. 29-30).

²The structure of the play as described is loose and lacks in coherence. The audience is probably taken by surprise when the second half of the play becomes exclusively about Shaddad while 'Ad, though dead, is never heard of in hell. Certainly Kanafani's failure in the structuring of the action could have been avoided had he compressed the plot by making use of the myth-based story. The play could have started proper from the second act and the audience would have been introduced to the events of the first act through retrospective narration. Further, the third act, which takes up Merthid's story, could have been compressed in few scenes and attached to the end of the second act proper. This way we end up in a structurally coherent three act play which takes up Shaddad as the central existential figure and narrates 'Ad's and Merthid's stories as subplots related in theme to the main plot. However, to do justice to Kanafani, we might conjecture as to why he chose this kind of structure. Perhaps we could trace the reason in Kanafani's interest in what Collins calls "generational dynamics" which Kanafani explores in his fiction. As Collins argues, Kanafani's fiction demonstrates that " 'generation' is a multifaceted process which is central to struggle for national liberation, and to the efforts of individuals attempting to construct lives and identities within the context of those struggles." As such Kanafani displays understanding of the need to establish generational continuity across the many physical and psychological chasms (p.73). To some extent the idea of generational dynamics is applicable to the play. Kanafani is eager to highlight the idea that the defiance of Heba is handed down from fathers to sons. This is probably why he sacrifices the coherence of the plot for the theme of generational continuity.

³ One major flaw in the plot is the idea that 'Ad in his attempt to get rid of the idea of god, resorts to the gods of Mecca—a contradiction difficult to be explained.

⁴ For existential ideas and themes discussed in the paper, the study in most places draws on Sartre's widely celebrated lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, in which Sartre, in defense of Existentialism against the criticism leveled at it, announces this treatise on man and morals. See James Collins, *The Existentialists: A Critical Study*, p. 41.

⁵ This is the opening statement in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (pp.124-25), in which Zarathustra preaches the death of God and the coming of overman. Nietzsche is, generally speaking, grouped with the existentialists. See Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevesky to Sartre*, pp. 19-22.

⁶ In his short story "The Wall," Sartre dwells on this central existential motif. A member of the French resistance, when interrogated, chooses death as the most ethical choice, because his death would protect the existence and freedom of the other members in the resistance movement.

⁷ Interestingly, Kanafani's title of his play echoes the French title of Sartre's, *Huis Clos*, literally meaning "close doors" or "behind close doors." The affinity probably indicates that Kanafani had in mind Sartre's play when he wrote his.

⁸ The play projects Sartre's complex thoughts and philosophical ideas into concrete situations and images. It is seen by critics as the embodiment of his philosophical tenets, in which he uses his characters as mouthpieces to convey his thoughts. See, for instance, Dorothy McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 111. Likewise, in *The Door*, Kanafani presents philosophical debate among his characters, in which Shaddad is used as a mouthpiece to communicate his existential ideas.

⁹ See *The Genealogy of Morals* (pp. 200-01, pp. 207-08 and pp. 217-19), where Nietzsche forcefully argues that God is created by man to replace his guilty conscience.

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