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Emergency Telephone: The June 1967 War and Its Impact on Nablus in the Correspondence Between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir**

هاتف طوارئ: حرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967 وآثارها في نابلس في مكاتبات حمدي كنعان وأكرم زعيتير

Abstract: This study examines the correspondence between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir in the immediate aftermath of the June 1967 War. Their exchange highlights how the war disrupted traditional means of communication such as visits and telephone calls but provided the occasion for an alternative form of communication based on personal relationships that helped solve newly arising issues facing the city of Nablus. Often functioning as a kind of diary, this correspondence sheds light on unknown events and documents the formation of political positions and ideas, as well as socioeconomic conditions and shifts under the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The correspondence reveals activities and events that Kanaan concealed in his memoir, such as his covert strategies to bolster the resilience of the inhabitants of Nablus and the surrounding region. The language of the letters conveys the psychological states of both men, the compound factors that shaped their opinions over time, and the impact such supportive personal bonds can have on the ability to persevere and survive.

Keywords: Hamdi Kanaan; Akram Zuaytir; June 1967 War; Correspondence; Nablus; Israeli Occupation.

الملخص: تتناول هذه الدراسة جزءاً من مكاتبات حمدي كنعان وأكرم زعيتير خلال الشهور التالية لحرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967. وتبين هذه المكاتبات أن الحرب عطلت وسائل الاتصال التقليدية، مثل الزيارات والمكالمات الهاتفية، ولكنها أتاحت ظهور شكل بديل من الاتصال يقوم على العلاقات الشخصية التي ساهمت في حل القضايا المستجدة في مدينة نابلس. تستكمل المكاتبات ما حُجِب في مصادر أخرى؛ إذ تحولت إلى ما يشبه اليوميات، فقد وثقت نشأة كثير من المواقف والأفكار السياسية، وبعض ظروف الأرض المحتلة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية، والتغييرات الحاصلة مع الزمن من جراء الاحتلال الإسرائيلي لفلسطين. وكشفت بعض ما تستر عليه كنعان في مذكراته، مثل طرائقه الخفية لتعزيز صمود أهالي نابلس خصوصاً، وسائر أهالي المنطقة عموماً. وقد حفظت لغة هذه المكاتبات الأوضاع التي عاشها كنعان وزعيتير، والعوامل المركبة التي أسهمت في تشكيل حالتهم النفسية، وأثر الدعم المؤسس في العلاقات الشخصية في الصمود والبقاء.

كلمات مفتاحية: حمدي كنعان؛ أكرم زعيتير؛ حرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967؛ مكاتبات؛ نابلس؛ الاحتلال الإسرائيلي.

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** This paper was originally published in Arabic in: Bilal Mohammed Shalash, "Hātif Ṭawāri': Ḥarb Ḥuzayrān/ Yūniū 1967 wa-Āthārahā fī Nāblis fī Mukātabāt Ḥamdī Kan 'ān wa-Akram Z 'itir," *Ostour*, vol. 9, no. 18 (February 2023), pp. 187-211.

Though place and time have distanced us, you remain in my heart and always in my thoughts and prayers. I hope to renew our connection through thoughts and prayers, for the Prophet PBUH said: “Communication between people when settled is maintained through visits, and while traveling through correspondence”.

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin al-Mahdi¹

“My grandmother would send us a card each evening which we received by first delivery the next morning. She would then receive our reply card the same evening”. It is not for nothing that the postcard became known as the “poor man’s telephone”.

Martha Hanna²

Hamdi Tahir Kanaan³ and Akram Umar Zuaytir⁴ visited one another often in the years prior to the June 1967 war. The two had been classmates at An-Najah National School in Nablus in the 1920s. After losing contact when Zuaytir came under pursuit by the British colonial authorities, they got back in touch and deepened their friendship upon Zuaytir’s return home in June 1949.⁵

However, Zuaytir, who had relocated to Jerusalem and then Amman during the subsequent years, found himself cut off from his home in Nablus after the city fell under occupation on 7 June 1967 and was unable to visit Kanaan, who remained in the occupied city. Thus, the war and the subsequent separation of Palestine from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan prompted Kanaan and Zuaytir to turn to letter-writing. Their letters, delivered by travellers, became their only means of communication. When external telephone lines and internal communication were periodically cut to punish the people of the rebellious city, correspondence through letter writing became the “emergency telephone” of the occupied land.

Beginning with the First World War, various types of postal correspondence became a prominent source of historical insight, as people sought to maintain severed connections. Some historians argue that this type of correspondence is an unreliable source of information given the external and internal censorship that prevented correspondents, particularly those on the battle lines, from providing an accurate depiction of the war and its horror. However, such letters can provide intimate and novel insights into war, particularly

¹ Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Yahya al-Suli, *Qism Ash’ar Awwal al-Khulafā’ min Kitāb al-Awrāq*, J. Heworth Dunn (ed.) (Cairo: al-Sawi Printing, 1936), p. 37.

² Martha Hanna, “War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front,” in: Ute Daniel et al. (eds.), *1914-1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), p. 3.

³ Born in Nablus, Hamdi Taher Kanaan (1910-1981) graduated from An-Najah National School before taking up work in commerce. He was appointed to the Nablus Municipal Council on 20 November 1950, with his membership later renewed by election. He was elected Mayor of Nablus in October 1963, and during the occupation of Nablus, he headed the city’s municipal council. In this capacity, he became one of the most prominent Palestinian figures in the occupied territories, maintaining his mayoral seat until his resignation in March 1969. He wrote his memoirs about the occupation of Nablus and its aftermath in June 1969. The author published a book on this topic: Bilal Mohammed Shalash (Study and Verification), *Shay’un ‘Ābir: Nāblis Taht al-Ihtilāl (Ḥuzayrān/ Yūniū 1967 – Ādhār/ Māris 1969)*, *Mudhakkirāt wa-Wathā’iq Ḥamdī Ṭāhir Kan’an*, Taher Hamdi Kanaan (intro.) (Beirut/Doha: ACRPS, 2023).

⁴ Born in Nablus, Akram Umar Zuaytir (1909-1996) graduated from An-Najah National School before briefly attending the American University of Beirut. He then worked in education until resigning in December 1929 to devote himself to journalism. He became Editor-in-Chief of *Mir’āt al-Sharq* newspaper in 1930, then *al-Hayāt* in 1931. He was one of the most prominent writers to incite armed revolt between 1929 and 1936, and a founding member of the Arab Independence Party. Zuaytir played a central role in the early days of the 1936-1939 revolution in Nablus and was arrested by the British colonial authorities on multiple occasions. He left Palestine to support the revolution from abroad, heading the Arab delegation to Latin America to support the Palestinian cause in 1947. After returning to Nablus that year, he worked for the General Islamic Conference in Jerusalem, then for the Jordanian government as ambassador to Syria (June 1962-August 1963), to Iran and Afghanistan (August 1963-1964), then as Minister of Foreign Affairs (February-December 1966). He was appointed Minister of the Hashemite Royal Court from 15 June 1967-25 April 1968.

⁵ Zuaytir’s diaries attest to the depth and closeness of this relationship. For example, Zuaytir appointed Kanaan as a member of a five-member committee to advise the guardian of his brother Adel Zuaytir’s children in his will, which he wrote before undergoing surgery at the American University Hospital in Beirut in 1957. See: Akram Zuaytir, “Waṣīyyatī,” 17 November 1957, a handwritten document preserved in the ACRPS Palestine Memory Archive (PMA), referred to hereinafter as PMA.

its psychological and social dimensions.⁶ War correspondence extends beyond soldiers on the front lines and families seeking reassuring news, as Martha Hanna recalls in the above quote. Attempts to draw on networks of traditional social relations and friendships as an alternative to official ties can also be seen in the letters of historian Marc Bloch to André Mazon during the Nazi occupation of France.⁷

The radical effects of wars are all-encompassing. The correspondence of Edward Jeffries, who served as mayor of Detroit during the Second World War, with friends became a valuable source for the social and economic effects of war and offers deep insights into personal relationships during this era of transformation.⁸ Kanaan, like Jeffries, harboured ambitious dreams for his city. However, unlike Detroit, Nablus fell under occupation, and Kanaan became the mayor of one of Palestine's most prominent cities during the 1967 war. Like Marc Bloch, Kanaan sought to overcome the effects of the war through his traditional social network and friendships. This included his communication with Zuaytir, who was appointed Jordan's Royal Court Minister on 15 June of that year.



Hamdi Kanaan in his office at the Nablus Municipality. Photo by Marc Riboud, 2 June 1969. PMA.

Beginning in 1917, Zuaytir's extensive personal collection of letters documents Palestinian resistance to colonial projects.⁹ His correspondence with Kanaan, spanning from 22 June 1967 to 4 March 1969, includes 33 letters from Kanaan to Zuaytir, and 17 letters from Zuaytir to Kanaan.

The correspondence between Zuaytir and Kanaan is distinct because it was not heavily censored; letters were sent clandestinely, evading the scrutiny of the colonizer and other surveillance. Hence, they preserved

⁶ Hanna, p. 2; Martha Hanna, "A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 5 (2003), pp. 1338-1361; Shay Hazkani, *Dear Palestine: A Social History of the 1948 War* (California: Stanford University Press, 2021). Hazkani examines letters from soldiers during the 1947-1949 war sourced from official archives. Such archives have preserved letters that were looted from war fronts or captured by surveillance. Hazkani notes that war correspondence did not begin during this period, but due to the development of postal services, it became a comprehensive public service, as reflected in the volume and content of correspondence. For earlier examples of correspondence from the world wars and the Arab-Islamic tradition of war correspondence, see: Umar Ahmad al-Rubayhat, "Rasā'il al-Ḥarb fī Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā' li-Abī al-'Abbās bin 'Alī al-Qalqashandī: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyya Fanniyya," *Majallat al-Zarqā' li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Insāniyya*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2015), pp. 150-161.

⁷ Agnès Graceffa, "Academic solidarity under Occupation: The letters of Marc Bloch to André Mazon (December 1940-July 1941)," *Revue historique*, vol. 674, no. 2 (2015), pp. 383-412.

⁸ Dominic J. Capeci Jr. (ed.), *Detroit and the 'Good War': The World War II Letters of Mayor Edward Jeffries and Friends* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁹ This collection was a rich source for: Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hout (ed.), *Wathā'iq al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya al-Filasṭīniyya 1918-1939: Mīn Awrāq Akram Zu'aytir* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1979). Some of Zuaytir's correspondence has been published previously elsewhere, including: Saoud El Mawla (intro.), "Risālat Shakīb Arsalān ilā Akram Zu'aytir," *al-Fikr al-Arabi*, vol. 3, no. 23 (November 1981), pp. 240-248.

what some other primary sources written in war time, including Kanaan's own memoirs, did not. Initially, these letters served as an alternative to official correspondence between Kanaan, in his capacity as mayor, and the executive bodies in Amman. They described living conditions, developments on the ground, and the state of public morale as it oscillated between exhaustion and hope. They ranged from declarations of support to discussions of personal economic affairs, all while maintaining social and economic connections that had been severed by the war and occupation.

The value of Kanaan and Zuaytir's letters is magnified by their preservation of the colonial subject's voice, particularly given that the colonial narrative dominates most archives. Secondary sources barely question this narrative, as the aftermath of the 1967 War has been studied almost exclusively based on colonial sources, both primary and secondary. In addition to the archives, the most relevant sources to this study include the personal writings of Shlomo Gazit and the documents he had access to as head of the Unit for the Coordination of Operations in the Territories.¹⁰

The experiences of most of the colonized Palestinian population have been obscured by the absence of archives documenting their perspectives since the 1967 war and the subsequent expansion of the Zionist colonial project on their land. Based on a collection of handwritten letters from the period after the war (June-October 1967) alongside other primary sources, this study emphasizes the value of correspondence through letter writing as a means of contextualizing events in occupied Palestine after the 1967 war, unearthing details obscured by the absence of official archives and the deaths of many figures who lived through that period.

Every Age Has Its Emergency

I miss you. I wish I could meet you after this long absence. Being far away is so much worse than an ordinary absence ... I have tried to contact you over and over, but the only answer is no answer.¹¹

The first of Kanaan's letters to Zuaytir was written on 18 December 1962, coinciding with the start of Zuaytir's government service and his appointment as Jordan's ambassador to Syria. Zuaytir's departure marked the end of their visits and the beginning of their correspondence. While communication via telephone was possible, despite the difficulty of external communication from Nablus, Kanaan preferred to use hand-delivered letters. This allowed him to discuss political issues or criticize the authorities without the fear of surveillance through traditional postal systems or intercepted telephone calls. Given the expanded Israeli occupation of Palestinian land following the 1967 war, the "emergency telephone" became even more vital, though it required a different, semi-encrypted language to navigate the dangers posed by the new border guards and surveillance.

War Correspondence

The Early Days

On 7 June 1967, tanks of the 37th Armoured Brigade stormed the eastern gate of Nablus. After a short-lived tank battle, Brigade Commander Uri Aharon Romm (1926-2009) stationed himself in the home of former MP and minister Rashed Sidqi al-Nimr (1911-1974), where he waited for Kanaan to be brought

¹⁰ See Shlomo Gazit, *Military Zones—Five Years* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1972) [Hebrew]; Shlomo Gazit, *The Carrot and the Stick: Israeli Rule in Judea and Samaria* (Tel Aviv: Zamurah-Bitan, 1985) [Hebrew]; Shlomo Gazit, *The Bait in the Trap: Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (Tel Aviv: Zamurah-Bitan, 1999) [Hebrew]; Shabtai Teveth, *The Cursed Blessing: The Story of Israel's Occupation of the West Bank* (New York: Random House, 1971).

¹¹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 18/12/1962, PMA.

before him. A few hours later, Kanaan appeared, and the city's document of surrender was written, although Kanaan did not sign it.¹²

On 22 June 1967, Zuaytir was awaiting news from his hometown and commencing his work as Jordan's Royal Court Minister when a courier came to him from Nablus with a letter from Kanaan. According to Zuaytir's diaries, Kanaan wrote to him:

My brother, no doubt you are eager to hear our news. Their entry was relatively calm compared to previous experiences, as there was no noteworthy destruction. About 80 died, most of them young men who climbed the mountains to resist in vain, and others who were killed in their homes, as well as some members of the fleeing Arab Army. The people of Tulkarm, Qalqilya, and the surrounding villages were evacuated. Some came on their own, and once the schools reached capacity, others were brought by the army and abandoned in the village of al-Badhan and on the roads of Balata, Askar, Rafidiya, and Nablus. Two days later, they allowed everyone to return, except the people of Qalqilya, Artah, and Zeita. After we had taken back a fair number of people, they ordered us to stop. However, these people require attention and Red Cross intervention. The country is suffering badly from unemployment and hunger and is on the verge of famine. They could easily mitigate the impact of events and restore life to normal, but it seems that they intend to [slowly] destroy us.¹³

In this first letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan highlighted two issues that had arisen because of the war. The first was the displaced, particularly those from the Qalqilya area. The second was the looming threat of famine, compounded by a stifling economic crisis in Nablus, given the high unemployment rate and extensive loss of livelihoods. Both problems reflected the occupation's intention of forcing people to leave their homes.¹⁴

The Beginnings of Self-Rule

They [the occupation authorities] have begun shaping public opinion, encouraging the idea of self-rule using the language of the United Nations and promises of protection, but we have thwarted this effort, the consensus being that we are part of Jordan.¹⁵

This statement piqued Zuaytir's interest and occupied a major part of his subsequent correspondence with Kanaan. In his first letter on 28 June 1967, he commended Kanaan for his stance against self-rule. Zuaytir took care to mention his new position in the Royal Court, saying, "My current position is very useful, despite the difficult circumstances. If you have ideas, I can implement them, and we are actively working with the Red Cross to prevent famine".¹⁶

In his reply to Zuaytir in early July 1967, Kanaan first reassured him about the well-being of relatives, then expanded on what he had alluded to in his previous letter regarding self-rule. He wrote:

As I mentioned earlier, the authorities are promoting the establishment of an autonomous government for the West Bank and Gaza. Despite this offer coming at the height of the nightmare

¹² Zuaytir, *Yawmiyat*, 5/6/1967, PMA. For an image of the handwritten document and details of the occupation of Nablus from the occupying power's perspective, see: Meir Haruvini et al. (ed.), *Our Brigade in the Six-Day War* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 1969), pp. 34-47 [Hebrew]

¹³ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/6/1967, PMA.

¹⁴ The Minister of Defence for the occupation at that time, Moshe Dayan, spoke of this policy at a meeting of senior military figures responsible for the military government after their first battle with Nablus on 10 November 1967, saying, "On the one hand, we are interested in encouraging [Palestinians to] emigrate and leave the territories, and on the other hand we must continue to maintain a reasonable minimum standard of living". Dayan stressed the need for a selective economic policy, implying that unemployment would not necessarily encourage emigration, but, rather, become an explosive factor. See: "Determining the Guidelines for General Policy in the Territories," minutes prepared by Shlomo Gazit dated 12 November 1967, IDF Archive, File No. 1970/117/71. In a subsequent letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan wrote: "I made tremendous efforts to prevent people from leaving, and I told the authorities they could not leave without my permission. I personally checked the identities of those who wanted to leave ... Finally, things spun out of control in keeping with their [the Israelis'] policy of wanting people to leave, and [we resorted] to threatening drivers and using force [to prevent them from leaving], but people got away by paying the drivers exorbitant fares". "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1964, PMA.

¹⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/6/1967, PMA.

¹⁶ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 28/6/1967, PMA.

of occupation ... the proposal has been unanimously and decisively rejected ... But unfortunately, [Muhammad] Ja'bari, known for his hypocrisy and baseness,¹⁷ was the first [to support the idea], while Jerusalem was still reeling from the outcome of the war, so the rejection there was not as vehement as it was here. ... [W]hen I was unexpectedly questioned about what fate [awaited us] after the occupation... I said straight out that the natural thing was for us to be with our brothers in the East Bank.¹⁸

In his response to Kanaan on 5 July 1967, Zuaytir praised the unified stance taken by the people of Nablus, assuring his friend of the need to stand firm. He commended Kanaan's efforts and affirmed his complete solidarity with him. Responding to Kanaan's complaints in a previous letter about the poor economic conditions caused by the shock of war, Zuaytir wrote, "In any case, I hope you know, my brother, that I am prepared to share my salary with you. I would be happy to send you half of it at the end of every month, and if you need anything else from me, just say the word."¹⁹ Regarding the general political situation, Kanaan wrote:

I am pessimistic and I do not know why. People have done nothing to change their own situation, and the occupiers are taking measures that suggest they are here to stay, preparing for long-term projects. We hear on the radio about plans to transfer the Gaza refugees here.²⁰ Their officials speak of plans to transport water from Tiberias to the western Jordan Valley, and from the Baṭūf Canal to the plains of Qabatiya and Araba for irrigation, and to house the refugees. They have also begun to demand taxes and car licenses ... etc.²¹

Defiance Under the Radar

As the days passed, Kanaan continued to talk about the city's economic struggles and the danger of famine. In his letter of 3 July 1967, he noted that the occupiers appeared unconcerned about the issue, having taken no action to remedy the situation.²² In response, Zuaytir quickly read the letter to the King, who promised to instruct the Prime Minister to double his attention to the West Bank and provide the necessary supplies and financial support.²³ In addition to written correspondence, Kanaan also relied on oral messages to convey his concerns. Following his 3 July letter, he sent an oral message to Zuaytir with Abdul Rahman Abdul Hadi, suggesting solutions to some of the city's economic problem. Zuaytir was to present these suggestions to Prime Minister Saad Jum'a, who was fully prepared to help. Summarizing the matter in his letter to Kanaan, Zuaytir wrote:

The issue has two facets: operating funds for the municipality, and employee loans based on receipts. But the resulting difficulties, which I hope you can advise me on how to overcome, are delivering the money and arranging matters in a way that does not cause you complications. It would be helpful if you would write a detailed report on how things will be done. For example, can you come to Amman? ... The matter of cheques for merchants is out of the question and does not solve the problems! Might you, for example, come to Abu Shawqi's [Hassan al-Khatib's] orchard, and could something be sent to you by Abu Shawqi's son as an experiment? But then, how can you keep the matter under wraps when it requires lists and signed receipts from the

¹⁷ Kanaan's harsh words followed statements made by Muhammad Ali Ja'bari (1901-1980), the Jordan-appointed mayor of Hebron, at a press conference held on 16 June 1967, to the effect that the settlement of the Palestine question would preferably take place at a conference for representatives of Arab refugees from the west and east banks, with the participation of representatives of Arabs in Israel, to discuss their fate and future, and that he was prepared to take the initiative to hold such a conference. Among the statements attributed to Ja'bari was his assertion that the residents of Hebron hoped to become citizens of the State of Israel in one way or another.

¹⁸ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1967, PMA.

¹⁹ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 5/7/1967, PMA.

²⁰ There is documented evidence of various projects prepared by the occupation to displace the residents of the occupied territories, most notably refugees from the Gaza Strip. See: Yoav Gelber, "The Program That Missed the Train: Exit from Gaza after the Six-Day [War]," *HaOme*, no. 201 (Spring 2016), pp. 44-57. [Hebrew]

²¹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/7/1967, PMA.

²² "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1967, PMA.

²³ Zuaytir, *Yawmiyāt*, 6/7/1967, PMA; Zuaytir, *Sanawāt*, pp. 85-86.

employees? We are at a loss here, but perhaps you can find a way out for us. I hope to receive your suggestions in writing, presented clearly and thoroughly, and I promise to follow up on the matter from here. I am with you all the way, as I appreciate the suffering my city is enduring due to this unemployment that threatens people with outright famine. Perhaps you will also inform me that a relief committee has been formed of reliable people, and ask me to arrange financial aid for it. Here also it is my duty to follow up on the matter, bearing in mind that efforts are ongoing with the Red Cross to send supplies. The Red Cross says the supplies are available, but what is needed is cash. However, the subject of supplies is all that can be discussed publicly. Everything else has to be agreed upon in secret.²⁴

The letter above reveals something Kanaan had been careful to conceal in his memoirs, namely, that he had facilitated a money smuggling operation to meet the needs of Nablus residents. Kanaan sent his reply immediately with Zuaytir's unnamed messenger, then followed it up with an additional letter in which he first confirmed their ability to properly distribute salary advances and aid, and their readiness to receive them from Abu Shawqi, i.e. Hassan al-Khatib.²⁵ "The employees are in a pitiful state", Kanaan added, "We managed to collect 6,000 dinars for needy workers from charitable societies and benefactors. We distributed flour to about 2,500 families, 50 kilos each, along with a little soap collected from the soap factories, and a bit of sugar and rice that we got from the agency [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)]".²⁶

Prompted by the need to address the economic problem, Kanaan secretly requested a permit to travel to Amman from Israeli Minister of Defence, Moshe Dayan, so that he could meet Zuaytir directly and confront the officials with their obligations.²⁷ Seeing an opportunity to exploit the municipalities to ease the cost of military rule, Dayan approved the travel permit, and Kanaan arrived in Amman on 10 July 1967. Kanaan disclosed some details of this visit in his memoirs, noting that the meeting helped mitigate the economic crisis by paying employee salaries.²⁸ But Kanaan made no mention of the secret agreement revealed in the correspondence on a covert way to deliver the rest of the needed funds to the city. Upon Kanaan's return, he was prevented from spending part of the money he had brought with him publicly – an indication that the occupation authorities were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to take advantage of Palestinian communications with Jordan to get others to foot part of the bill for upholding military rule, while on the other, they were determined to present the military government administration as the sole ruling authority in occupied Palestine.

In his letter dated 16 July 1967, Kanaan discussed administrative details for Zuaytir to convey to the relevant ministries, hoping that Zuaytir could speed up the procedures for the covert payment of salaries due to employees working for government institutions in the Nablus District.²⁹ Kanaan concluded, saying: "I await your response so that we can help the rest of the employees, who check with us constantly, especially since learning that I secured funding for some departments".³⁰

²⁴ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 28/6/1967, PMA.

²⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 8/7/1967, PMA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dayan expressed this desire at a government meeting, saying: "It is a good idea to lead using local bodies, such as mayors, whose responsibilities can be expanded to neighbouring villages. In the area of administrative oversight, mayors who have expressed their desire to cooperate provide us with someone we can talk to. There's no need to pursue any other leadership style, since things can go on this way for a long time". Minutes of the Occupation Government Meeting of 18/6/1967, ISA, p. 16.

²⁸ Kanaan wrote in his memoirs about the Amman meetings: "My meeting with the brothers in Amman was full of generous sentiments, as if I had descended upon them from heaven; they were anxious to hear what was really happening with us. I met with His Majesty the King [Hussein bin Talal], the Prime Minister [Saad Jumaa], and some ministers, and I explained our situation to them. They responded to my request by handing me 40,000 dinars, half of which was for the Nablus Municipality, with the rest to be distributed among the municipalities of Tulkarm, Jenin, Qalqilya, and the Nablus Governorate. The Prime Minister gave me a cheque for five thousand dinars in aid for the needy, which I paid into the municipality's account. In like spirit, the officials in the Ministry of Education sent me back with the salaries of the employees in the Nablus and Jenin Governorates".

²⁹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 16/7/1967, PMA.

³⁰ Ibid.

In a subsequent letter dated 22 July 1967 that was unavailable (perhaps Kanaan had concealed the letter because it spoke of covert procedures intended to evade colonial surveillance), Kanaan responded to a letter from Zuaytir that had arrived with the messenger “Khader”,³¹ and which had been sent with worker payrolls attached. Kanaan spoke about the payments sent previously to workers and the orphanage, thanking Zuaytir for his efforts to collect the salaries, and indicated that the occupation had paid the teachers’ salaries for June. In his letter, Kanaan inquired about Jordan’s Ministry of Education stance on this duplication of salaries, asking for Zuaytir’s opinion and awaiting reassurance regarding their approval of his actions, as well as the payment of the various departments’ salaries and pensions.³² Kanaan added in a subsequent letter:

I am waiting for the department payrolls so they can be disbursed, as [the employees] are checking in daily, and let it be for the entire governorate if possible, and the pensioners too. The judges refused to accept salaries and work, so it was necessary to send their payrolls promptly. The magistrate of Jenin was placed under house arrest and treated with some disrespect. I learned that the judges wrote to officials in Amman to ask their opinion on what to do, but received no response. It is in the government’s interest to give these matters special attention by appointing a committee to study and respond to them.³³

Kanaan concluded: “I have now learned from the education inspector [Rashid Saeed Marai] that all textbooks will be changed except for religious education, and that they have set 6/8 as the deadline for teachers to sign the forms.”³⁴ These forms require teachers to refrain from engaging with the Jordanian government and entail taking away their salaries.

The previous conclusion was part of a previous and subsequent dialogue in various correspondences. It touched upon some of the actions of the people of the occupied land against the colonial authorities, their efforts to replace textbooks, and attempts to impose a new reality on the educators.

The City’s Weapon: Strikes

By August 1967, the occupied land was on the brink of upheaval, with signs of revolution looming on the horizon. The first spark ignited in the Junaid area of Nablus when a resistance force attacked the military occupation, and the first house since the war was blown up. Amid preparations to reopen schools at the end of the long summer holiday, talk about a teacher and student strike began to circulate. Meanwhile, Kanaan received a document from Jordanian Prime Minister Saad Jumaa urging teachers and judges to refuse to cooperate with the occupation authorities. Kanaan had a different opinion, which he shared with Zuaytir in early August 1967. He stated:

In my opinion, even if it were permissible to pursue a strategy of non-cooperation in all other areas, it would still be out of the question for teachers to resort to non-cooperation without a justified reason – such as changing the curricula, for example. If non-cooperation were pursued without this justification, it would be a weapon against us, rather than a weapon in our interest. Therefore, I hope

³¹ In addition to “Khader”, who was mentioned in more than one letter, and Fathi Kamal mentioned by Kanaan, Mohammed Sherbini reported that his father, Mahmoud Mohammed Sherbini, then-secretary of the labour unions in Nablus and a prominent member of the printing workers’ union before the war, succeeded in smuggling an estimated seventy thousand dinars to the municipality, which he handed over to Kanaan personally. When Kanaan offered to pay al-Sharbini for smuggling the funds across the river, he refused. Mohammed Sherbini, personal interview, Nablus, 28/9/2021. Mahmoud Sherbini was later arrested on 25 March 1969 for smuggling Rashida Abd al-Hamid Ubaido (Salwa), a fighter with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was accused of participating in the operation to put explosives in the “Supersol” store on 21 February 1969, and was sentenced to three years in prison. *Lamerhav*, 6/10/1969, p. 2 [Hebrew]; *Al HaMishmar*, 6/10/1969, p. 8. [Hebrew]

³² “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 22/7/1967, PMA.

³³ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 3/8/1967, PMA.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

that this issue will be studied and evaluated, as depriving nearly one hundred thousand students [of their education] without a valid reason is unacceptable.³⁵

He later added:

The issue of teachers is two-fold; the first relates to textbooks, and the second to the employment forms. Regarding textbooks, I spoke with a representative of the occupation's Prime Minister, who came to meet with me. I raised the issue of the textbooks and he agreed with my view, which is also shared by the city's military governor. The visitor told me that their government deals with matters logically, and therefore it is quite likely that our perspective will be accepted. Hence, I see no need to rush things until we see the outcome of these discussions. As for the matter of the forms, the city committee did not approve the teachers' point of view and said that they would be suspended as long as what is mentioned [on the form] is "Jordanian", and as long as, instead of bearing the name of the Israeli government, it refers to "the occupying army". Despite this, a group of teachers refuse. Thus, I do not think such matters should be left to them. Instead, they must abide by the decision of Amman, which will be responsible for salaries.³⁶

A statement issued later by Jordan's Minister of Education, Thouqan Hindawi following a meeting of the Jordanian Council of Ministers, advocated non-cooperation with the occupation authorities for two reasons: first, because of forms that included a written declaration that the nationality of the teachers was the same as that of the occupiers, and second, because of the imposition of new textbooks.³⁷ As Kanaan had indicated in his previous letter, the teachers' strike was not the only issue; other departments also needed to make decisions in this regard.

In a letter that reached Kanaan on 3 August 1967, Zuaytir indicated that judges also should refuse to cooperate with the occupation. Kanaan replied:

Although you have said they should not cooperate, judges were convinced a few days ago that they should come to work. The governor's view is that their work serves the public interest, because society cannot function without courts to secure people's rights and relationships, and because the authorities could appoint military governors. But these people do not apply the law the way judges do, and injustice will befall the people because of their rulings. In fact, a military judge was appointed in Jenin, and he began to issue extreme rulings, sentencing people to imprisonment without fines. Moreover, the situation for the judges in Nablus differs from that in Jerusalem, as the latter represents a special case. Thus, I have not informed them of your opinion expressed in your letter on 3/8, pending your reconsideration of this matter.³⁸

In addition to the strike, which became a major landmark in the early days of military rule and in the course of popular Palestinian resistance to the occupation, another issue emerged. The war had interrupted preparations for new municipal elections, which had commenced in May 1967. Kanaan wrote to Zuaytir: "As I have mentioned to you before, the municipal council's term expires at the end of this month, and the military governor of the West Bank has issued an order extending all councils indefinitely. Therefore, I think a similar order should be issued by our government",³⁹ which is exactly what happened.

³⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," August 1968, PMA. In this letter, and within the context of leveraging Zuaytir's network to reach the media, Kanaan wrote: "A memorandum signed by the villages, Nablus, Hebron, and all other cities must be broadcast on the radio with the signatures, because it has been signed by a number of prominent Christians who took offense when they were not invited to sign Sheikh Abdul al-Hamid's memorandum. They thought your neglect was intentional, and they were criticized by the people of Lebanon. Hence, the memorandum needs to be broadcast along with the names [of its signatories]. A letter is attached with the signatures, and although this version doesn't contain all of them, we have another copy that was sent to the people of Jerusalem to be delivered to other official bodies".

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Bayān Wazīr al-Tarbiyya ilā Usrat al-Ta'līm fī al-Ḍaffa al-Gharbiyya," *Ad-Dustour*, 8/6/1967, pp. 1, 2; in: Munthir Faiq Anabtawi (ed.), *al-Wathā'iq al-Filasṭīniyya al-'Arabiyya li-'Ām 1967* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), pp. 546-547.

³⁸ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/8/1967, PMA.

³⁹ Ibid.

Talk of the strike and the emergence of some forms of armed resistance in August 1967 marked the beginning of another form of resistance, which Kanaan referred to as passivity (*al-salbiyya*), which began with a call for a strike. In early August 1967, Kanaan wrote:

The winds of passivity began blowing here when, without consulting anyone, a number of girls began going around urging shops to close on Saturday [29 July]. The question was: Given that visitors fill the markets every day, why Saturday, and not another day of the week? We were forced to address an invitation to officials following a warning from the governor [that such a tactic would yield] negative consequences. And in fact, everyone denounced this approach, and a call was issued to form a committee of ten people to assume responsibility for the action.⁴⁰

In a letter dated 3 August 1967, Kanaan clarified his position on “passivity”, a position that may help explain his attitudes, expressed in earlier letters, toward the teachers’ strike. He stated, “My view is that in order for ‘passivity’ to be adopted as a form of resistance, three conditions must be met: (1) The appropriate time should be chosen based on a signal from you. (2) The community’s readiness to bear the consequences must be considered. (3) It should be undertaken collectively, across all fronts. And it goes without saying that the community is still in such a state of shock that it would not yet be ready to endure the consequences”.⁴¹

In a letter to Zuaytir in early September 1967, Kanaan wrote, “It has finally been agreed to close [the schools] entirely”. The potential strike was one of numerous bones of contention between the occupation’s Ministry of Security and other government ministries, most notably the Ministry of Education. A similar conflict had emerged between the Ministry of Security and the Prime Minister’s office, a dispute that had halted the talks regarding initial self-rule. In the same letter, Kanaan added, “popular circles have decided to boycott the schools over the change in curriculum in Jerusalem and other West Bank schools”.⁴²

As reflected in the correspondence between Kanaan and Zuaytir and their long-distance cooperation, Kanaan relied heavily on Zuaytir’s network of relationships in Amman, owing to his position as a minister in the Royal Court, as well as his other social contacts, in resolving issues that had arisen under the occupation, most notably the issues of employees’ salaries, and assistance for labourers and parties who had been harmed by measures taken in nonviolent, “passive” resistance to the occupation, such as lawyers, judges, and others. Their correspondence also served to strengthen Kanaan’s position locally.

The major school strike continued, as did the correspondence, highlighting some aspects of the conflict taking place within the Zionist government over how to manage the situation. On 5 September 1967, Kanaan wrote:

As of yesterday, all the schools in Nablus have closed their doors entirely. There is some inconsistency in Qalqiliya, while the situation in Jenin is unknown. Despite a statement by officials according to which only a few textbooks have been changed, the Department of Education and the schools in Nablus have turned their keys over to the municipality. I was given a list of 78 books whose editions would be changed, and this was enough to compel people to insist on the closure.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kamal Nasser, “‘Alā Ṣudūrikom Bāqūn,” *Filasṭīn al-Thawra*, no. 11, 6/9/1972.

⁴¹ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 3/8/1967, PMA. Kanaan also affirmed this position of his to the envoy sent by the occupation’s Prime Minister. In a subsequent letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan wrote, “I received a visit from the Prime Minister’s delegate, whose purpose was to explain the statement he had made to the effect that he hoped the residents of the West Bank would not force the army to intervene again. This was following news of the strike and the memoranda that had been submitted by [figures in] Jerusalem, lawyers, and others. He said, ‘We are still a long way from a political solution. Such a solution lies first with Israel, secondly with Jordan, thirdly with the Arab states, and lastly with the major powers. Therefore, engaging in ‘passive’ actions at this time would not be in the citizens’ interests.’ I replied that no decision had been taken to engage in ‘passive’ actions against the occupation authorities, and that when we did decide to take this path, it would be done collectively, and under my leadership. To this he replied that he was pleased with my candor, and I asked him to convey what I had said to the Prime Minister”.

⁴² “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 1/9/1967, PMA.

⁴³ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 5/9/1967, PMA. Military Order no. 107 issued on 29 August 1967 prohibited the teaching of 55 textbooks. For a list of the prohibited books, see *Manāshīr: Awāmīr wa Ta’yīnāt Ṣādīra ‘an Qiyādat Quwwāt Jaysh al-Difā’ al-Isrā’īlī fī Mantīqat al-Daffa al-Gharbiyya*, no. 6 (November 1967), pp. 235-238.

On 10 August 1967, Zvi Ofer became Military Governor of Nablus. This coincided with the commencement of Kanaan's covert activities aimed at supporting and bolstering the city's resilience in the face of its economic crisis. As revealed in Kanaan's memoir, the early signs of the clash between the municipality and the occupation's military rule emerged from their first encounter. The confrontation began when Kanaan was interrogated over paying partial salaries to members of the police force and was investigated over received cash from Amman. Kanaan denied these things to Ofer, a denial he later reaffirmed in his memoir. As indicated earlier, Kanaan had imposed a degree of self-censorship in his writing to safeguard certain secrets. After Kanaan's denial, Ofer informed him of his decision to halt the payment of the remaining salaries. Nevertheless, on orders from Kanaan, the municipality continued paying them, and therefore, measures were taken against the municipality.

Exhaustion Sets in, and Hope is Renewed

On 17 August 1967, Kanaan sent a letter to the Israeli Minister of Defence stating his wish not to renew his chairmanship of the Nablus city council once its legal term expired. In response, the military government imposed immediate sanctions against Kanaan's private economic interests. The city council, however, quickly rallied in solidarity with Kanaan, prompting the Israeli Minister of Defence to nullify the sanctions. Nevertheless, Kanaan remained determined to resign, and his sense of exhaustion was evident in his correspondence.

Kanaan's weariness was not solely due to his dealings with the colonial authorities. Around the same time, Zuaytir left the country to escort King Hussein on a series of tours from 15 August to 11 September 1967, which included attending the Arab League Summit Conference in Khartoum on 29 August. As a result of this interruption in his correspondence with Zuaytir, Kanaan began communicating regularly with Ahmad Tuqan, then serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. However, Tuqan's responses were less than optimal, as indicated by the subsequent exchanges between Zuaytir and Kanaan. The temporary break in communication with Zuaytir took a toll on Kanaan's morale.

The first letter Kanaan wrote to Zuaytir during the latter's absence was dated 1 September 1967; however, it never reached him, as Zuaytir was accompanying King Hussein in Khartoum. Kanaan sent a second letter on 5 September 1967, which likewise failed to reach him due to similar circumstances. In this second letter, Kanaan began by inquiring about the political situation and developments regarding self-rule, or what came to be known as the Palestinian government, saying, "God strengthen you for these lengthy journeys. Given the decrees we have been hearing about, we do not know what is actually happening, and we would like to know if there is reason to be reassured concerning the future, since things here are getting steadily worse".⁴⁴

Kanaan followed this inquiry with an expression of support for the unification of the [east and west] banks of the Jordan River, while also criticizing those who opposed it. He described the latter's stance as "a product of sheer ignorance and a failure to see past one's nose. The bitter truth is that the intensity of patriotic sentiment that you see on the [TV] screen during demonstrations and rallies is nothing but hypocrisy and an attempt to capitalize on patriotism".⁴⁵

This last reference signals the beginning of a shift in Kanaan's attitude toward what he had previously referred to as "passivity", laying the groundwork for the major strike that Nablus would launch on 19 September 1967. In this letter, Kanaan also criticized the attitude of the people of Nablus, engaging in what might be viewed as a personal reassessment in light of recent developments, including the confrontations

⁴⁴ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 5/9/1967, PMA.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

with military rule in the city. It appears that Kanaan was preparing for the city's next battle, saying, "True patriotism is what you see among the Gazans, who insist on boycotting, going on the offensive, and refusing to welcome [the occupier] ... etc. even though three months have passed since the catastrophe. The news coming out of Gaza suggests that the majority of the population there supports unification with the Kingdom of Jordan, and they have opened the way for the people in the Strip to facilitate mass displacement, while they forbid people living on the [West] Bank to visit the Strip without permission [from the Israeli authorities]"⁴⁶.

In this letter, Kanaan openly expresses his sense of disappointment and the negative impact of the treatment he had received from the military authorities and official bodies in his friend's absence. He writes, "I have reached a point of such exhaustion that I no longer have the strength to endure, particularly on a psychological level. So I have told people here to arrange for someone to take over my position, and I have given them until the end of this month. I have written repeatedly requesting assistance for the unemployed, and I am still waiting for a reply. The negligence in this area is taking its toll. So I ask you please to read the letters I sent while you were away"⁴⁷.

In his response to Kanaan's letter, circa 12 September 1967, Zuaytir conveyed an optimistic picture of the overall political situation following the Arab summit conference, assuring him of his sympathy with his plight, and providing him with a summary of developments that occurred there. He urged patience and perseverance, reminding him, "We here are vulnerable to repeated attacks and insults, but we remain steadfast and bear our responsibilities until the end"⁴⁸. He also affirmed Kanaan's opposition to Palestinian self-rule, adding, "As for the Gazans' stance, it makes us proud, and we pray we won't let them down"⁴⁹.

With the arrival of the letter just quoted, the return of Zuaytir and his network, and the beginning of shifts in the overall situation in Nablus, Kanaan began to regain hope. His renewed optimism – which would continue to ebb and flow in response to events from day to day until his resignation – became evident in a letter Kanaan sent to Zuaytir around 14 September 1967, where he wrote, "I have discussed the matter of my leaving the municipality with advisors here, and the idea has met with strong opposition from almost everyone, including people who have been eager for me to step down. So it seems we will have to persevere until God intervenes in some way, though I assure you have reached the end of my rope"⁵⁰.

Taking advantage of his friend's return, Kanaan seized the opportunity to propose a way in which Zuaytir's network could help convey his proposals to higher levels of officialdom. He wrote:

Before your return, I wrote to Abu al-Abed [Ahmad Tuqan] suggesting that press interviews be conducted with Professor Izzat Darwaza and other scholars and thinkers in Syria and Lebanon, and in particular, with members of the academic research committee, such as Walid al-Khalidi, [Yousef] Sayegh, and their colleagues, and that their views on the Palestinian government be broadcast on Syrian and Lebanese radio and television, since their perspectives hold weight with people who do not think for themselves. People are known to have a lot of trust in Professor Darwaza, and they take his words to heart. The same is true for the others as well, especially those who make pretensions of being knowledgeable about things and in a position to instruct others. So I ask you to give priority to this matter.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 12/9/1967, PMA. Supporting his point, Zuaytir adds, "Abd al-Majid Shuman and Wasif Kamal also urge you to give up thinking about stepping down".

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 14/9/1967, PMA.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Regarding developments in people's positions on self-rule, Kanaan wrote, "As for those who favour the notion of a Palestinian government, they are al-Ja'bari's allies in Hebron and a few Jerusalemites, as well as Aziz Shehada, Izzat Qurman, and colleagues of theirs in Ramallah, and Isa Aql. The idea is being promoted rather forcefully in Ramallah. In Nablus, by contrast, it has no proponents. Even so, there has been an uproar over it in the [city] councils, and some people are open to discussing it".⁵²

In an undated letter that appears to have been enclosed with the previous missive, Kanaan conveys the general Palestinian disdain towards the Islamic countries' stance on the Judaization of Jerusalem and the successive Zionist measures being taken in this regard, which has contributed to the escalating conflict in the occupied territories.⁵³ He also encloses a printed text that describes a decision by UNRWA to split its operations between the east and west banks of the Jordan River and maintain them as separate entities on a permanent basis, including the division of associated jobs. In Kanaan's view, this measure would pave the way for the next economic crisis to be caused by the occupation and trigger successive waves of mass exodus. He concludes with, "It goes without saying that when a decision of this nature is issued by an organization created by the United Nations, it raises serious questions about its association with schemes that are not in the interests of this country".⁵⁴

In his reply to Kanaan dated 7 October 1967, Zuaytir stresses that King [Hussein] will read Kanaan's letter as soon as he finishes forming the new government, led by Bahjat al-Talhouni, and that he will urge the King to act on the letter's contents. He states, "I was astounded by what it said about UNRWA, and I will tell Abu Abdullah [King Hussein] about it. I have also informed Abu Al-Abed [Ahmad Tuqan] of it, and he has promised to give it his serious attention". He then adds, "I will bring it to the attention of Abu Adnan [Prime Minister Bahjat al-Talhouni] tomorrow morning, and will personally follow up on the matter".⁵⁵

Zuaytir gave Kanaan the freedom to act as he saw fit in relation to the matter of paying the striking teachers' salaries. He also informs him of the Jordanian Government's "intention ... to form a special commission on the West Bank in the Royal Court, with me as its chair. Once that occurs, no transactions will be delayed anymore, and the West Bank's concerns will receive far more attention. The addition of West Bank residents such as [Abd al-Hamid] al-Sa'ih and Abu al-Ala' [Hashim al-Jayyusi] to the commission will also ensure that these concerns are afforded the proper attention".⁵⁶

Although Zuaytir left the Royal Court in April 1968, his correspondence with Kanaan continued, not only in response to issues that arose in the wake of the 1967 war, but as an extension and affirmation of the two men's life-long friendship, and the recurrence of circumstances that made visitation impossible. This ongoing exchange documents numerous significant aspects and phases of the Palestinians' experience of occupation after 1969. The final letter in their series of written communications was penned by Kanaan on 5 February 1981, just one month before his death.

Conclusion

The Zuaytir-Kanaan correspondence serves as a dual memoir, documenting the evolution of political positions and ideas, as well as the economic and social conditions in the Palestinian territories following the 1967 occupation and the subsequent transformations. This early firsthand documentation provides a rare

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Kanaan to Zuaytir, Appendix" 14/9/1967, PMA.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 7/10/1967, PMA.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

glimpse into the actions taken by the people of the occupied land, their positions on issues that emerged in the months after the 1967 war, and the Zionist colonial expansion on their land, including various dimensions of the colonizers' perspective for which no archival evidence is available.

Moreover, this correspondence represents a qualitative addition to primary sources preserved by the colonizers, as well as Zuaytir's own memoir, written two years later in 1969, in which he either passed over or deliberately concealed certain details and events, possibly for security reasons. Similarly, the correspondence sheds light on certain aspects of Kanaan and Zuaytir's thinking on the management of affairs in the occupied territories, relations with the military government administration, "passive" (nonviolent) resistance, and Jordan's role in the Occupied Territories. As such, the correspondence presents a local narrative that reflects the perspective of the colonized and their interaction with the colonizers' actions, and the impact these actions had on the development of colonial policies as they related to military rule.

Lastly, the language of the correspondence conveys Kanaan and Zuaytir's complex psychological states and ways in which the support provided by personal relationships enabled the colonized to maintain steadfastness and resilience. Like the Bloch-Muzan correspondence, the exchanges between Kanaan and Zuaytir bypassed the obligations and strictures of official correspondence, marked instead by an intimacy that speaks a deep-rooted comradeship. As such, the correspondence serves as a testament to a mutual trust grounded in traditional social bonds that were not shattered by war and occupation, but were, in fact, reconstituted and brought to maturity.

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