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The Palestinians' Depressed Journey to the Dream-land: A Study on

Ghassan Kanafani's "Men in the Sun"

ABSTRACT

This paper portrays the cruel life and physical and psychological pain of the Palestinians after losing their homeland. I attempt to discuss Ghassan Kanafani's Men in the Sun (1962) where the ambition of the Palestinian men and their dreams are stronger than the suffering they experienced. The sense of belonging to a certain country is distorted. They can neither belong to their country they left behind nor to the country do they dream of. An important goal of Kanafani's work is to empower and inspire individuals who have been silenced by power dynamics, urging them to fight colonial practices. That they should not succumb to the pressures and tensions that arise from living in squalor. The long-term impacts of this journey include stress, anxiety, neurotic behavior, depression, and other mental health issues. The ability of each individual to survive a stressful situation varies from person to person. After being unable to cope with their trauma, they begin to think clearly and they begin to stop abusing themselves.

In Kanafani's writing, one may see these kinds of signs and symptoms of trauma. It is concluded that Palestinians have a long-depressed journey to the dream country that they could not attain in this sad story whose contradictory psychology leads them to practice death while dreaming of paradise.

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رحلة الفلسطينيين المحبطة إلى أرض الأحلام: دراسة في

رجال في الشمس لغسان كنفاني

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الخلاصة:

تتناول هذه الورقة الحياة القاسية والألم الجسدي والنفسي للفلسطينيين بعد فقدان وطنهم. أحاول أن أتحدث عن فيلم "رجال في الشمس" (1962) لغسان كنفاني حيث طموح الرجال الفلسطينيين وأحلامهم أقوى من المعاناة التي عانوا منها. إن الشعور بالانتماء إلى بلد معين مشوه. لا يمكنهم الانتماء إلى بلدهم الذي تركوه وراءهم ولا إلى البلد الذي يحلمون به. يتمثل أحد الأهداف المهمة لعمل كنفاني في تمكين وإلهام الأفراد الذين أسكتتهم ديناميكيات القوة ، وحثهم على محاربة الممارسات الاستعمارية. الرسالة التي يحاول إيصالها هو عدم الخضوع للضغوط والتوترات التي تنشأ من العيش في بؤس. تشمل الآثار طويلة المدى لهذه الرحلة الإجهاد والقلق والسلوك العصابي والاكنتاب ومشاكل الصحة العقلية الأخرى. تختلف قدرة كل فرد على النجاة من المواقف العصبية من شخص لآخر. بعد عدم قدرتهم على التعامل مع الصدمات ، يصبح أولئك الذين أصيبوا بصدمة غير قادرين على التفكير بوضوح والبدء في الإساءة وإلقاء اللوم على أنفسهم بسبب ظروفهم. في كتابات كنفاني ، قد يرى المرء هذه الأنواع من علامات وأعراض الصدمة. يستنتج أن الفلسطينيين يمرون برحلة طويلة محبطة إلى بلد الأحلام لم يتمكنوا من تحقيقها في هذه القصة المحزنة التي يقودهم علم النفس المتناقض إلى ممارسة الموت وهم يحلمون بالجنة. الكلمات المفتاحية: ؛ ذكريات، الرحلة اغتراب، معاناة

Literature Review:

This study examines the Palestinians' spiritual journey to the country of their dreams, which is no longer a place of dreams for them. This novel has received

relatively little research attention. Some of the articles in this collection deal with the suffering of the Palestinians:

The Dialectics of 'Home' in Ghassan Kanafani's Men in the Sun (2021) by Mohammed Lami S A Shamallakh. This paper discusses that people will have a better grasp of what it means to call Palestine "home." It grasps the escalating violence against the Palestinian people. One must take into account all of its inconsistencies, paradoxes, and (potential) reconciliations.

On the other hand, a paper by Fatima Muhaidat, Lana Waleed; Shadi Neimneh; Raja'a Al-Khalili , entitled : *Representing a Traumatized Nation in Ghassan Kanafani's Men in the Sun*(2017). The researchers focus on the theory of trauma and its effect on the Palestinians in

Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* depicts the tough living and emotional trauma of Palestinians after losing their country. *Imprisoned Souls in Ghassan Kanafani's Men in the Sun and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea* (2018) by Lutfi Hamadi who argues that these souls of the Palestinian never thought of departing their home. This paper provides an insight into incarceration as a physical and spiritual experience.

The dream country on their voyage is explored. The Palestinians no longer care about their home. Despite their best efforts, they could not find a tranquil place to call home. Death is the ultimate outcome of a yearning for peace and tranquility.

Objectives:

This paper aims at:

1. describing the Palestinians' hopeless quest for peace.
2. discussing that no matter where they call "home," the Palestinians are content as long as they are surrounded by the things they cherish most.

Introduction:

Ghassan Kanafani (1936- 1972) is the writer of *Men in the Sun*. He moved to Damascus with his family in 1948. His father was a lawyer often pleading in national cases, especially during the Palestinian revolutions. Ghassan worked as a novelist, storyteller, and journalist, and he was a politician affiliated to the front People's Liberation of Palestine, and he was assassinated on the eighth of July 1972 in the Hazmiyeh area near Beirut. Ghassan Kanafani worked as a teacher in Kuwait in 1956, but he soon returned to Beirut 1960.

An obvious consequence of the status of Palestinian national identity that exists everywhere from the dismal refugee camps in Egypt to the relative comfort of Arab-Israeli towns to rich Chilean elites, is that Palestinian literature is frequently not written or even situated in Palestine. The literature of Palestine is written and translated into dozens of languages, including Arabic, Spanish, English, and even Hebrew. In his stories, Kanafani often returns to the predicament of the Palestinian people. In his *Men in the Sun*, he revisits the issue of national tragedy in the most unforgettable way.

Throughout its contemporary history, Palestine is subjected to several "massacres, land confiscation, dispossession, deportation and assassination" (Hamdi, 2011, p.22). Palestinians have been horrified by the harrowing accounts of carnage that tell of a tragedy of immense losses and anguish.

Kanafani wrote *Men in the Sun* early in 1962 during his obligatory stay in Beirut because he did not have his certified documents. This novel is viewed as one of the most important and most prominent novels of Kanafani. The novel discusses the idea of deflection and death. It sheds light on the Palestinian issue and what happened during 1948. Moreover, this novel describes the impact of the catastrophe on the Palestinians through four heroes who represent different generations. They tell their story in a magnificent figurative way. In other words, *Men in the Sun* deals with the problem of Palestinian migrants and the consequences and calamities of the Nakba. Al- Hudawi, (2003) points out that this novel is: "Inspired by the Palestinian tragedy and deals with the Palestinian's search for identity in a hostile world, where their very existence was being challenged."(p. 54)

Anger and other unpleasant emotions are often related with trauma. Negativity toward ourselves and the world, shame, guilt and self-blame as well as anxiety and aggression are all symptoms of shame. (Germain et al., 2016, pp.73-74). Tragedy makes it difficult or perhaps impossible for those who have experienced it to lead normal lives. Several of the characters in *Men* have been traumatized. Perhaps their suffering from internalized oppression, shown in negative emotions, is caused by the exodus and the dehumanization of the Palestinian experience. These negative emotions are: "self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness and gratefulness for being allowed to survive" (Qtd in Williams, 2012, p.32).

After losing their homes and lands, Palestinians experience a feeling of desolation and sadness as a result of living in refugee camps. They have a problem with self-injury. Following on from this, Fanon argues: "There are latent forms of psychosis which become overt as the result of a traumatic experience" (1967, p.62). Traumatic situations may have an impact on everyone, although each person's tolerance for them varies. A person who has been traumatized is unable to process their experience and begins abusing or blaming oneself, believing that everything of existence is against them.

Analysis:

The novel is presented from its beginning to its end by one narrator who understands what is going on in the characters' brains and how they fight inside themselves. But, he does not participate in the events he witnesses from the outside. Symbolic meanings are woven throughout every word in *Men in the Sun* to convey the plight of Palestinian immigrants. It summarizes the story of three men who are not satisfied with their present life in Palestine, therefore; they decide to leave their country and move on to Kuwait illegally because they want to develop their living situations. The first character of the three men is the figure of the old man named Abu Qais who decides to emigrate in order to make a living for him and his children and in order to obtain money to buy olive trees instead of what he lost. Even when dreaming of carving out a living in Kuwait, Abu Qais is still haunted by his past and his olive trees. He thinks that with money he saves in Kuwait he could "send Qais to school and buy one or two olive shoots" (Kanafani p. 46).

He is an unfortunate, poor and depressed man. He dreams to have a good place that helps him in his wretched life and offers him money to be "able to build a shack somewhere". (Kanafani, p.46) He begins to think that in Kuwait he could make his life ten times better, and he could get whatever he was deprived of in his homeland. For him: "It was certainly something real, of stones, earth, water, and sky, not as it slumbered in his troubled mind. There must be lanes and streets, men and women, and children running about between the trees." (Kanafani, p 13) Succumbing to life's necessities, he reluctantly decides to follow other Palestinians who have previously headed to Kuwait to start a new life. He starts the promising journey while thinking: "In the last ten years you did nothing but wait. You needed ten big hungry years to be convinced that you lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your whole village. People made their own way during these long years, while you were squatting like an old dog in a miserable hut." (Kanafani, p. 13) Asa'ad encouraged him to travel to Kuwait. He tells him: "Do you like this life here? Ten years have passed and you live like a beggar. It's disgraceful. Your son, Qais, when will he go back to school? Soon the other one will grow up. How will you be able to look at him when you haven't?" (Kanafani, p .14) Abu Qais cannot persuade the smuggler to accept only ten dinars out of the fifteen dinars he has got. Therefore, he departs the smuggler's place feeling "his whole head had filled with tears, welling up from inside." (Kanafani, p .15) Abu Qais continually thinks of his family he left behind, his wife, his son and his baby daughter who was

too feeble to survive such harsh conditions. He cannot forget his past and his memories in his homeland. But he does not want to live dreaming of his lost paradise.

The second figure is Assad who is an activist and a militant who escapes from the country in order to obtain his freedom. For Assad the only place that helps him to improve his life is Kuwait which could offer him healthy possibilities of living. He says: "I will be able to return the amount to my uncle in less than a month. A man can collect money in the twinkling of an eye there in Kuwait." (Kanafani, p .19) Travelling to Kuwait is the dream he has had for a long time therefore he feels he has to accept whatever conditions others make to travel there. He accepts to take money from his uncle on condition he returns them back when he finds a job in Kuwait. In the smuggler's office, Assad is more cautious than Abu Qais because he is cheated by a smuggler before who left him on the road penniless. A western tourist gave him a lift to Baghdad. He was a detainee in Jordan when the police officer spat in his face after participating in a student demonstration against Arab regimes. Now he wants to reach Kuwait, the country of wealth, to obtain money.

Marwan, on the other hand, is the only breadwinner for his family. He decides to move abroad to escape the responsibility that falls on him. He is even more desperate than his friend in that he is forced to give up his ambition of becoming a doctor. He left school to support his family because he is the only breadwinner in the family. His father gets married to another woman who offers him a decent living in a house instead of living in a refugee -camp under a tin roof.

His brother, Zakaria, gets married and stops sending the family any more money. He also asks his brother to find himself a job to support his living instead of wasting his time in school or to use his terms, "plunge into the frying pan with everyone else." (Kanafani, p .28) Marwan leaves school and he starts searching for a better job. His brother tells him: "In Kuwait [he'll] find and learn everything [...] school teaches nothing. It only teaches laziness." (Kanafani, p .47) Marwan will be able to "send every penny he earns[s] to his mother, and overwhelm her and his brothers and sisters with gifts till he [makes] the mud hut into a paradise on earth and his father bite his nails with regret." (Kanafani, p .29) Marwan does not want to be exploited anymore therefore he speaks bravely with the smuggler threatening him to complain him to the police if he does not accept the amount of money he offers for the trip which makes the smuggler angry and tries to hurt him. Totally shocked, Marwan realizes "that any attempt to restore his honor

was futile."(Kanafani, p. 23) Thus, he is humiliated but he has to break his pride and accept everything the smuggler says.

The sense of alienation chains the three men. Asaad, for example, was totally alone and isolated in this hostile world. Marwan also feels alone when he negotiates with the smuggler about the way of leaving their country: "Perhaps it is the first time in his life that he finds himself alone and a stranger in a throng of people like this."(Kanafani, p .23)

The driver, Abul Khayzurán, is as depressed as his clients. Probably, he suffers more than them. After the 1948 war in Palestine, he was badly injured and doctors must castrate him to survive. His emasculation left him broken physically and psychologically. Whenever he asked why not married, he deeply embarrassed, and he feels the "pain plunging between his thighs" (Kanafani, p .38) and remembers that he is no longer could call himself a man. For ten years, he "had lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour." (Kanafani, p. 38.) He regards this hurting experience as a disgrace that he "had swallowed it with his pride... and still he hadn't yet got used to it, he hadn't accepted it." (Kanafani, p.38).

Abu Khaizuran appeared as an opportunistic leader who confessed that he cared only for money: "Shall I tell you the truth? I want more money, more money, much more. And I find it difficult to accumulate money honestly. Do you see this miserable being which is me? I have some money. In two years I'll leave everything and settle down. I want to relax, to stretch out, to rest in the shade."(Kanafani, p .40)

Abu Khaizuran shows the other three young men his plan to help them move abroad. He acts as a leader to the young men but his leadership is ineffective and it plays a vicious role based on slyness and insincerity. He was very big and his external appearance showed power and control. For some reason he "looked as though he could bend down and put his head between his legs without upsetting his spine or his other bones at all." (Kanafani, p .24) His being impotent made him even more wretched and desperate than other men.

His consolation that makes him forget about his manhood is making more money. His body becomes like a desert without a soul. His life is terrible therefore he works as a smuggler to forget about his lost manhood. His life is like a prison to him. This thirst for a woman and family could not be compensated. He not only lost his manhood but his security as well. The men are deeply worried and hesitant about his plan – crossing the borders inside the closed metal tank in

the inferno of August. Abul Khayzuran takes advantage of their desperate need to save a little money and convinces them to be his passengers. Asa'ad decides that his goal is more important than his fear of Abu Khaizuran. He says: "[p]ersonally, I'm interested in reaching Kuwait. I'm not concerned with anything else. That is why I shall travel with Abu Khaizuran." (Kanafani, p .36) He assures them that the mission will be easy because of his strong relations with the Iraqi and the Kuwaiti frontier guards and that the tank itself is as much well-known and untouchable as its owner. Abul Khaizuran asks them to take off their clothes because, "The heat's stifling, terrifying" and that they will "sweat as though [they] were in an oven." (Kanafani, p .57) He tells them not to be shocked if they see many rugged corpses on their way to Kuwait.

At last, they agree to follow the smuggler because they realize they have no other choice. They travel in an iron tank in August when, "The sky now could rain nothing but scorching heat and dust." (Kanafani, p. 9) During the journey with Abul Khaizuran, the sun is very heating and blazing. It is portrayed like God who triumphs over the men: "The sun in the middle of the sky traced a broad dome of white flame over the desert, and the trail of dust reflected an almost blinding glare." (Kanafani , pp .64-65) The men entered the unfilled tank of water waiting for the smuggler to finish stamping his papers, and , then ,they moved to sit next to him to continue dreaming of their paradise-like destination. But the atmosphere is still sad and not certain. The three men are traumatized and the symptoms of trauma appear in every aspect of their lives. They are desperate, confused, powerless, worried, unable to forget their past, and estrangement appears in their behavior, feelings, and thoughts. They are under the pressure of their unbearable misery, therefore; they become victims of a smuggler who is also traumatized and became pathetic by war. The journey which is supposed to bring happiness to the travelers in fact brings depression, disgrace, and death. Ben White (2005) confirms that "the land is significant because of its integral role in Palestinian society, The Palestinians lend their understanding of the land a more domesticated and quotidian tone. Where, the economic life of the community is intertwined with a husbandry of the land." (p. 2)

The men have to kept inside the tank which is supposed to be filled with water. But this tank becomes their grave. The three men suffocate inside it. It takes him more than the expected six or seven minutes to get them out. The sad irony is that he is delayed by the Kuwaiti frontier guards who insist that he tells them about his relationship with Kawkab, an Iraqi belly-dancer. When Abul Khaizuran tries to save the men from the heated tank:"A drop of sweat from his

forehead fell onto the metal roof of the tank and immediately dried."(Kanafani, p.71) Unfortunately, he finds them all dead. One is "cold and still with damp gray hair."(Kanafani, p .71) Another man is still holding "onto the metal support inside the tank with a mouth wide open."(Kanafani, p.72) Abul Khaizuran sweats and shakes, but "he couldn't tell whether he was trembling because of this oil covering his chest and back or whether it was caused by fear" because the "merciless sun" kills them. (Kanafani, p .71) Ghassan portrayed their deaths in a tragic way.

Abul Khaizuran couldn't understand why the travelers did not ask for help through knocking walls of the tank. He wondered what make the three men die from suffocation in the tank without any of them daring to knock the walls of the tank for help. The symbolism of not knocking the walls shows the lawful cry of the Palestinians who suffered from dislocation. They suffered from the occupation which stripped them of their dignity and forces them to follow their uncertain dreams.

The three young men symbolize all depressed Palestinians, while the driver symbolizes failed leadership. The desert, on the other hand, represents the borders between life and death. Kanafani uses the water tank in a clear paradox, as water stands for the essential aspect of life, but he deliberately makes this tank unfilled as if he means it is empty from life, and he explains in his account that the tank did not carry water for a long time.

The Results:

The three men in the novel have reached a great deal of despair which makes their life unbearable. They cannot stand their present life any longer. Their depression blinds them and made them unable to find the right path. They made many mistakes through this journey. They chose to escape their country thinking they could find a better life elsewhere. They could not even choose the right man who would direct them to the right path through this journey. Their leader is an incapacitated man. The pain they feel and the difficult life they lead makes them victims of the others.

Despite their financial problems, they are forced to face for the first time a ravenous, abusive world—a hideous, filthy world full of big rats which eat "[r]ats smaller than them." The fat smuggler metaphorical words are significant: "[b]UT take care the rats don't eat you before

you set out."(Kanafani, p .22) The writer symbolizes the big rats feeding on the small rats to the humans feeding on one another.

Ashure argues that these men are aware of the sun's heat but they have no choice but bear it. They are not aware of "their right to a normal human life."(p.34) To a great extent, the sun they experience is a blazing, torturing sun: "The sun was pouring its inferno down on them without any respite They had drawn lots, and it was Assad's turn to sit beside the driver for the first part of the journey" (p. 36). The heating desert becomes a symbol of the political void and the never-ending journey of suffering without the possibility of reaching the desired goal. The desert stands for the tragedy of the Palestinian people, which is scattering everywhere, throughout its dispersal and homelessness. The dehumanization of the Palestinian experience is reflected through many negative emotions like "self- hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness and gratefulness for being allowed to survive."(Qtd in Williams, 2012, p.32)

Nadeen Shaker (2015) sees that "Within Kanafani's novella, geography and memory become elemental to the experience of trauma and struggle" (p. 2)

The author chooses this sad and depressed end which is not quite convincing because the men did not choose to knock the walls of the tank which probably could be followed by either death or survival. What makes the scene even more horrifying is the moment of stealing and throwing the dead men in the desert. The writer intends to conclude his novel with the death of the heroes which is justified because they choose the wrong path to make their dreams come true. They easily surrender to the unknown in an attempt to escape their present unacceptable life.

According to Siddiq (1984), the novel "dramatizes the futility of the effort by the uprooted Palestinian refugees to look for a new home, a new future, and ultimately, a new identity." (p.10) Magrath (1979) sees that they "never see the sun that kills them. They remain literally in darkness while trusting in an inept leadership."(p. 100)

Similarly, Audebert (1984) believes that Abul Khayzuran fails to seize the opportunity and makes a final "heroic effort to save their lives." (p. 79) His "personal despair and moral weakness have corrupted him" (Harlow, 1985, p. 104) to the extent that instead of burying the corpses, he throws them on garbage dump and takes their scanty property. Clearly, his disgusting

condition has drastically changed him from an excited freedom fighter to a playful thief, just like his name, "a weak hollow structure that is impressive on the outside but lacking a central strong core." (Magrath, p. 100) The maximum he could do to spare himself the pangs of remorse is blaming the victims for their death, wondering at the very end of the novel, "Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why" (Kanafani p.56) When he asks, "why didn't you knock?", Abu Khaizuran, in fact, tries to put the blame on the shoulders of the dead men.

Roger Allan argues that the central theme of this novel is the depression of the Palestinians who cannot belong to their homeland and they lose their identity and dignity because of "their exploitation by Arabs of other nationalities." (p.147) The end of the novel reflects the "dehumanization and worthlessness" of the refugees. (Gomaa & Raymond, 2014, p. 35) Palestinians lose their houses and lands and they are forced to live in camps. This inhuman experience creates a sense of hopelessness and despair among them. Fanon claims that, "there are latent forms of psychosis which become overt as the result of a traumatic experience." (1967, p.62) These three men who represent all the Palestinians see land as an integral part of identity, therefore; losing their lands means losing their identity.

Conclusion:

This paper emphasizes that money is not the only thing that could make people happy. Independence and self-respect are more important than money. Without their dignity their life would not be much different from the humiliation of death. Their tragic death in the desert forces readers to sympathize with these helpless men.

The absurdity of life is represented by the death of these men. They would have experienced a similar death if they had lived as refugees in camps. The journey is doomed to fail because their direction is wrong. They think that money could save them from their misery. But after many tragic losses they realize that they could not recover from the pain they experienced in their homeland. Furthermore, the men die with no graves indicates that they are still homeless.

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