

THE QUEST FOR 'SHELTERING SKIES' IN GHASSAN KANAFANI'S MEN IN THE SUN (1963)

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Abstract: This paper examines Ghassan Kanafani's seminal work, *Men in the Sun*, originally published in Arabic as *Rijal fi al-shams* (1963), adapted into the film *The Dupes* in 1972, and translated into English in 1978. The study explores the narrative's close relationship with the theme of the quest, the loss of identity, and the search for belonging as displayed by the characters in the novella. Using the theoretical framework of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), particularly his concept of the "Tragic quest," this analysis re-reads Kanafani's work to investigate how the main characters embark on a perilous journey. Their quest, beginning with their departure from Basra and continuing through their suffering in the harsh desert climate, ultimately leads to their demise in the desert before reaching their intended destination, Kuwait. The study aims to illustrate how the characters' ill-fated quest symbolizes the collective sense of loss experienced by Palestinians, their hardships living in refugee camps far from their homeland, and their struggles with poverty, displacement, and identity loss.

Keywords: Death; identity; forced exile; loss; quest; tragedy.

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1. Introduction

“What is home? “It’s not a question that you can answer and continue on your way. It’s your life and your cause bound up together. And before and after all of that, it’s the essence of who you are” (Darwish,1994).

The above statement by the prominent Palestinian poet, M. Darwish illustrates the ongoing quest for a secured home, the Palestinian experience of forced exile, displacement, and cultural alienation, which takes the center stage in Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Men in the Sun*. Darwish's words explain how the loss of homeland is not limited to a physical movement; it is rather a shattering of one's essence of existence and sense of life. His statement also expresses the complexity of the Palestinian craving for sheltering skies and their search for a secured safe space to call home. The same pursuit characterizes the main characters' lives in Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, which follows three Palestinian refugees' perilous journey from Basra (Iraq) across borders into Kuwait in search of money and a better opportunity. However, instead of reaching their destination, all of them tragically die silently inside the oven-like water tank before their bodies are disposed of in a rubbish dump near Kuwait.

Yet, before analyzing the characters' quest, its main steps, and its outcomes, it is important to start with a brief explanation of the quest, a recurrent theme, which represents an important part of many literary texts. From ancient times, it has provided a compelling narrative structure, which enhances the exploration of insightful themes related to universal human experiences. For the prominent Canadian literary critic and theorist, Northrop Frye (1912-1991), the quest stands as a significant theme, with its sequential and processional form, which represents the most active period of the hero's life (Frye, 1957). Correspondingly, Frye's conceptualization of the notion of the tragic quest and how its main phases are displayed in Kanafani's novella is essential for following the trip of its main characters. The story tells Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan's fateful journey in search of livelihood in Kuwait. They risk their lives in search of a safe space and a “sheltering sky” by crossing borders amidst the harsh realities of the desert to reach the idealized Kuwait City. Their journey reflects also the collective plight of Palestinians' real experiences of displacement, irresolute conflict, identity loss, and rootlessness after the Nakba of 1948.

Significantly, Kuwait, as Mai Al-Nakib (2015) rightly observes, is a destination full of “all the things Kanafani had been deprived of” (p. 89). Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan's goals of finding money and security in Kuwait symbolize both the Palestinian condition of humans denied basic rights to live safely in their homeland and their human desire for a brighter future to end the residual trauma of their loss. Following Northrop Frye's theoretical analysis of the “tragic quest,” a central element in literature characterized by its plot structure with four stages, Kanafani's narrative opens with the characters' beginning their journey, which illustrates their flaws. It is followed by the moment of realization of errors before it ends with the principal character(s) final loss of life, representing their failure and demise. Additionally, a parallel between the characters' tragic ramifications and Frye's theoretical views on the final stage of the characters' tragic quest, which he calls “pharmakos,” is established in order to reflect, not only the character's flaws, but also those of their society as a whole.

2. The Character's Fateful Journey Across Borders

Based on his firsthand experience of forced exile, *Men in the Sun* was published three years after Kanafani was forced to leave Kuwait. It reflects, first his personal life as a refugee at the age of twelve when he and his family were displaced from Acre, a northern region of Palestine. His family was forced to find refuge in Damascus and many other Arab countries from 1948 to 1972. Kanafani, thus, describes his firsthand experience of suffering from forced exile before he was killed with his niece in a car explosion (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 9). The desire

for a safe place, free from occupation and oppression, mirrors Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan's yearning for sheltering skies as the narrative voice points out: "Scattered people, living in camps or struggling to make a living doing the most menial work; their only hope lay in the future, and in their children, for whose education they made enormous sacrifices" (p. 10). This quest for sheltering skies in the face of colonial tyranny, displacement, and political turmoil continues to define the Palestinian struggle for peace, recognition, and sovereignty, which can allow them to regain their sense of identity.

Moreover, following Frye's structure of the "unfulfilled quest and flaws," it can be noted that Kanafani's characters engage in a quest through Abu Qais, Marwan, and Assad, who are driven by desperation and the hope of finding employment to escape their dire circumstances in Palestine (p. 61). However, their quest is doomed from the outset, as they become trapped inside a water tanker truck and suffocate to death, unable to reach their objective. This tragic outcome reflects the flaws and limitations of the characters, who are traumatized by their circumstances as refugees and remain unable to overcome the obstacles they face. Their passivity and inaction do not only encompass the Palestinian experience, but also show that the two are deeply intertwined. Kanafani's story offers a compelling representation of the country's political turmoil, social trauma, and economic impasses, which come to light in the narrative through the characters' weaknesses and shortcomings.

Men in the Sun, then follows, as mentioned earlier, three Palestinian characters, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, as they embark on a perilous journey from Basra, Iraq, to Kuwait, which Abu Qais perceives as a kind of "Eldorado", and land of opportunity and prosperity. The journey also symbolizes the broader Palestinian struggle against displacement and poverty, as the characters seek to escape their ominous existence in refugee camps. The story begins with the characters' aspirations for a better life, despite their awareness of the dangers involved in their quest. They are motivated by a desperate need to escape the extreme poverty and suffering they endure in refugee camps, believing that life in Kuwait offers hope as well as financial stability, represented by the prospect of earning "sacks of money" (p. 26). Nonetheless, the character's quest becomes fraught with challenges. Their acceptance to be smuggled, across the borders, in a closed water tank, leads to their tragic demise due to asphyxiation amid the heat of the desert (p. 44). Therefore, Kanafani's characters not only reflect the personal weaknesses of individuals but also embody the collective trauma of the Palestinian people, particularly in the context of the Nakba of 1948, which forced many Palestinians to opt for living abroad. The narrative intertwines the personal experiences of the characters with the historical injustices faced by Palestinians, highlighting themes of hope, despair, and the quest for identity amidst displacement (p. 63). The tragic ending of the novella, where the characters die before reaching their destination, serves as a poignant commentary on the failure of their quest, which interplay with the broader Palestinian experience. Their failure also illustrates the deep-seated flaws and limitations faced by the characters, who, despite their courage and determination, are ultimately trapped by their circumstances as refugees (p. 61). The narrative, then, not only critiques the characters' inability to reach their aims, but implicitly denounces the socio-political conditions of the time, which contributed to the Palestinians' identity loss and their enduring hope for a better future in other countries.

3. Representation of the Characters' Flaws, "Hybris" or "Hamartia"

The most apparent of Frye's four stages in Kanafani's novella is the characters' paralysis and inaction due to their psychological trauma caused by the social transformations brought about by the colonial situation. Abu Qais, for instance, the oldest of the three Palestinian refugees, symbolizes the paralysis and hesitance of the Palestinian leadership. Following the 1948 war, with his village besieged and lands confiscated, Abu Qais becomes passive for ten

years, still holding onto the hope of returning to his olive trees one day. As previously mentioned, the Zionist movement, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and the consequent conflict led to successive waves of Palestinians' displacement. The impact of such a traumatic experience Kanafani portrays it through Abu Qais, who is described as: "hesitant and panicked," showing the instability that is going on in his mind, and his confusion. Regarding the journey to Kuwait, it is expressed through phrases such as "bitter feeling of being a stranger" and "on the point of weeping" (p. 30). These expressions reveal Abu Qais's frail and weak personality. He remains at the mercy of others, with his emotions weighed down by his previous decisions and losses. Due to poverty, the pleas of his friend, and the bitter conditions of his wife, the weakened Abu Qais is forced to attempt a dangerous illegal crossing into Kuwait despite his fear of dying during the journey. He feels that his life has become insignificant as he silently endures his misery; he "tried to say something, but he was unable to. A choking lump was tearing his throat" (p. 27). His silence and inaction symbolize the passivity of Palestinian political leaders, who wait for changes in other countries and have done little to regain their lost homeland. As noted earlier, the Zionist movement, the establishment of Israel in 1948, and the ensuing conflict forced Palestinians into exile and dispersal. Since 1948, large populations have been displaced from their homeland, becoming refugees or a diaspora community, with their daily lives in exile are shaped by complex and challenging quests and the hope of regaining their homeland.

As the story progresses, Abu Qais, after being expropriated from his land, he becomes haunted by his dream of returning to his olive trees and the desire to get more land. He, thus, considers the journey to Kuwait as a good opportunity to end his misery, disregarding the dangers involved and the cost. To achieve this, Abu Qais accepts humiliation, as the smuggler exploits his desperate situation (p. 63). He is not brave enough to retaliate and unable to negotiate a fair price for his passage into Kuwait. His only objective is to reach Kuwait, earn money, send his son to school, and buy olive shoots. Nonetheless, along with the other two men, Abu Qais suffocates to death, trapped in the water tank of the smuggler's truck, with their dreams of a better life in Kuwait remaining unfulfilled. Besides the description of the characters' individual errors, Kanafani's novel *Men in the Sun* also depicts the flaws and weaknesses of Palestinians as a result of the trauma and hardships they face. The author, for instance, portrays the character, Assad, who represents the middle generation of Palestinian refugees. Assad is an orphan whose uncle has arranged for him to travel from Amman to Baghdad to marry his daughter Nada. As he grows up, he rebels against his uncle's patriarchal authority and traditional customs, rejecting the arranged marriage and his uncle's control over his life. Moreover, Marwan, his companion, represents the total abandonment and desperation experienced by the youngest generation of Palestinians. His family situation is dire; his older brother Zakaria had immigrated to Kuwait but stopped sending money home and severed ties with the family after his marriage. This situation forced Marwan's father, disillusioned with the impoverished existence in the refugee camps, to remarry a woman who owned a house, abandoning Marwan and the rest of the family (p. 39). As the sole provider of income left for his mother and siblings, the sixteen-year-old Marwan is determined to go to Kuwait to find work and support his abandoned family. He wanted to help his family with the wealth he hopes to earn in Kuwait so that he "would live out the rest of his life in security, untroubled by anything. And more important than that, under a concrete roof" (p. 40).

Therefore, the main flaws of Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan appear in their overwhelming personal motivations and strong desires for a better life, which finally led them to their tragic deaths in the desert. Their "hamartia," in Frye's terms, is a tragic lapse of judgment that precipitates their demise. Hamartia can be explained as an internal weakness in a character, such as greed or passion, that ultimately causes their death (Frye, p. 36). Such

flaws characterize the three characters' perilous journey, full of foes, dangers, and hardships. This phase is central to understanding their blind acceptance of the hardships they face from the time they left Basra, their journey through the desert with its scorching sun, which Kanafani uses as symbolic representations of the harsh realities and obstacles the characters face as refugees as the narrator asserts: "hundred and fifty kilometers between Basra and Kuwait" that the characters must cross is compared to "the path that God in the Qur'an promised his creatures they must cross before being directed either to Paradise or to Hell" (p. 52).

Moreover, as the three characters see no future prospects, they take risks to escape their miserable existence in the refugee camp. However, their desires are flawed due to their self-centeredness and their inability to see beyond their individual interests in failing to consider the larger struggle of the Palestinian people. Kanafani uses these characters to illustrate how the trauma of displacement and colonial occupation can lead to moral failings and the neglect of the national cause. The three men's deaths in the desert, with their bodies discarded like garbage, symbolize the humiliation and dehumanization of Palestinians. Such deaths can also be interpreted as a critique of the individualism and lack of unity that the author perceives as impeding the Palestinian resistance movements.

In addition to their flaws, the three refugees are deceived by a smuggler because they agree to pay money to him, naively believing that he can lead them to destination while he is only interested in monetary gain. Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan are victims of their naiveté, misled and betrayed by the smuggler Abul Khaizuran. Assad is initially cheated by the first smuggler he contacts, who leaves him stranded near the border crossing (p. 30). When the three men meet Abul Khaizuran, he convinces them that they can travel safely in the empty water tank of his truck across the border, though he is aware that the conditions may likely be fatal. He also lies about the duration they must endure in the intense heat and lack of air inside the tank. At the first checkpoint, Abul Khaizuran opens the cover to check on the men, sees them, weak and dehydrated, and then seals the cover, leaving them trapped as he gets his papers checked. After the second checkpoint, which takes more time, he reopens the lid and finds that the men died from the burning heat and lack of oxygen. Abul Khaizuran's very bad action happens when he robs the dead, taking money from their pockets and Marwan's watch before throwing the bodies and going on his way.

It is also important to note that Kanafani's portrayal of this character's actions and choices clearly illustrates the flaws, which represent the Palestinians' complicity in their own victimization. Abul Khaizuran fails when he abandons his nationalist commitments in pursuit of money. The character's moral decline is evident in his assertion that "Money comes first and then morals" (p. 42). The author's depiction of this character's flaws is apparent not only in his inability to help his compatriots achieve their dreams but also in his unethical behavior of prioritizing monetary gain over moral considerations. Additionally, Frye's concept of the character's "flaw" (Frye, 1957, pp. 38-39) is highlighted by the dehumanizing impact of displacement, trauma, and desperation among Palestinians, who are forced to compromise their values in their struggle for survival. Kanafani uses Khaizuran's moral decline to question the inaction, failure of Palestinian leadership, and the limited options available to refugees after the Nakba. Thus, Kanafani's story can be understood as an indictment of the exploitation and inhumanity faced by Palestinian refugees, their collective experience of loss, their inability to find 'a sheltering home', and hope for a better future.

4. The Collective Experience of Loss and Disillusionment

Besides the characters' external conflicts, Kanafani describes their inner traumatic experiences and the consequences on their psyche. During their journey, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan occasionally face death under the desert heat. However, their struggle is not solely physical; it is also psychological. Their intense suffering is not only due to the harsh weather or unfamiliar dangers but also due to their feelings of alienation and loss, which are intensified by the persistence of the haunting memories of their past traumas. For instance, Abu Qais reflects on the River Shatt and Ustaz Selim, the Quran school teacher from his village who was captured by Israeli soldiers one night. These memories come back in his mind as a constant reminder of his refugee status and sufferings. Tethered to recollections of his lost village, homeland, and vanished prosperity, the character becomes depressive. The Shatt River, symbolizes his once vibrant homeland, which is lost due to Israeli occupation; the loss evokes in Abu Qais feelings of disconnection and estrangement. He seeks refuge in Iraq, only to endure more harsh living conditions and poverty. The destitution in Iraq compels Abu Qais to move to Kuwait, which he perceives as a beacon of hope for a better life for himself and other Palestinian refugees, believing that Kuwait's oil wealth would transform his aspirations into reality.

The quest and perceptions of the three characters illustrate that the dangers they face are deeply rooted in their frustration over their status as refugees. Thus, the impact of the weather is less hurtful in comparison to the inner conflicts and tensions caused by their felt exile. In other words, their suffering from the heat seems a minor problem when compared to the greater dilemma they had morally endured. The characters struggle with themselves rather than focusing on how to cope with their external hardships. Their predicament stems from the emotional and psychological turmoil that drives Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan to leave the refugee camp and embark on an unsafe journey across the border to Kuwait. Kanafani presents their quest and experiences in a manner that is deceptive, using irony to convey the dangers faced by characters and society, which places greater value on individual dreams rather than on collective ones as this excerpt illustrates: "Together with their dreams, their failures, their hopes and ambitions, their misery and despair, their strength and weakness, their past and future, as it were pushing against the immense door to a new, unknown destiny..." (p. 61). This quote highlights, then, how Palestinians struggle to overcome significant challenges impacting their sense of identity.

Furthermore, the main characters' conflicts, troubled psyches, and loss of family ties reinforce their loss of identity, stemming from their disconnection from their homeland and the struggles endured in exile. The following passage illustrates the characters' dual quest: "I heard you in the other room asking your mother: 'Mama, am I a Palestinian?' When she answers 'Yes,' a heavy silence falls on the whole house. It was as if something hanging over our heads had fallen, its noise exploding, then, silence" (p. 10). This passage describes a moment when a child asks his mother about his identity. The mother's affirmative response is followed by a profound silence, which lets him doubt. The imagery of something falling and its noise exploding, followed by silence, conveys the child's alienation and sense of uncertainty while it also illustrates the impact of lost heritage and the emotional weight of such a revelation within the family context. The main characters' alienation is rooted in historical and political conflicts, occupation and displacement. As the three characters, many Palestinians were forced into exile, leaving their homes, which created a profound sense of disconnection and disintegration of their cultural heritage. Kanafani expresses this clearly in the following quote:

“There was something bigger than my awareness being born in the other room through your bewildered sobbing. It was as if a blessed scalpel was cutting up your chest and putting there the heart that belongs to you [...] I was unable to move to see what was happening in the other room. I knew, however, that a distant homeland was being born again; hills, plains, olive groves, dead people, torn banners and folded ones, all cutting their way into a future of flesh and blood and being born in the heart of another child” (p.10).

The passage expresses clearly the inner anxiety and the sense of none belonging through the child's questions about his Palestinian identity, which causes his mother's emotional feeling of discomfort. The narrative voice reveals the child's confusion, which is intensified by the image of the "blessed scalpel", which cuts the child's chest and heart. This description does not only suggest a deep internal tension, but also the child's awareness of his alienation. The author's allusion to a "distant homeland being born again" evokes a sense of longing for roots, heritage, and identity inherent in the child's mind. The pictures of hills, plains, olive groves, dead people, torn banners, and folded ones filling the child's heart stand for his desire to reconnect to a past and culture. His question reflects a lost heritage and history, which have been distorted or overlooked, leading to a profound sense of displacement and the search for a sense of belonging.

More importantly, the narrative voice, throughout the novella, captures the various emotions of cultural alienation and disorientation, heritage, and one's struggle to reconcile with one's historical realities and the sense of belonging. It reveals also the significant influence of appreciating one's origin that comes along with loss, nostalgia and search for belonging. For example, Abu Qais is haunted by his lost land and olive grove which symbolizes who he is and where he comes from. As he hides in a truck water tank, he thinks about “the smell of earth” as well as “tired heartbeats” of his lands. It makes him feel very sad and confused because it separates him from his homeland. His only wish is to reach Kuwait to bring money back home for family support. Revisiting the past reveals how the characters become ghostly figures and highlights the fragility and uncertainty of their lives. Their experience of exile has profoundly shaped them as they confront dilemmas associated with their changing life situations. Their transient identity complicates their selfhood over time, as Ami Elad-Bouskila maintains:

“Palestinian society underwent a dramatic crisis in its confrontation with the Jewish community: loss of its land in Mandatory Palestine leading to the establishment of the state of Israel and hostile confrontation with a community in competition for the land called Palestine. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, the Palestinian community underwent a process that was the direct opposite of that undergone by other Arab communities. At a time when other Arab communities were consolidating for the achievement of political independence, the Palestinian community was being split and separated. This process had additional repercussions: the Palestinian urban population shrank dramatically, while large portions of Palestinian society, especially inside Israel, became rural” (Elad-Bouskila, 2004, p. 141).

Throughout their journey, the three characters face harsh desert conditions, tribulations, and a struggle for survival to reach their destination, illustrating though their resilience as the narrative voice observes: “It was not too uncomfortable riding on the back of the huge lorry. Although the sun was pouring its inferno down on them without any respite, the breeze that they felt because of the lorry's speed lessened the intensity of the heat” (Kanafani, 1969, p. 52). Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan's resistance to the sun's heat symbolizes the enduring Palestinian struggle for self-determination, which has persisted for decades. More importantly, their illegal trip across the desert impacts them not only physically but also psychologically

and emotionally, revealing their sense of uncertainty, fragmentation, and loss of a cohesive identity. The journey also exemplifies their ongoing struggle to maintain a sense of self amid adversity, displacement, and historical trauma. Kanafani's characters, thus, stand as an example of the complex interplay between personal, cultural, and political struggles within the Palestinian context, emphasizing an awareness of their passivity in facing challenges.

5. Characters' Moment of Realization of their Errors and Inaction

The characters' understanding that their personal desire for a better life led them to make a fatal mistake occurs when they attempt to cross the last border. Although they succeed at the first checkpoint in Safwan, their luck changes at the second checkpoint in Mutlaa due to bureaucratic delays with Abu Khaizuran's papers. The delay ultimately causes the demise of the three refugees. The author uses powerful symbolism to convey this tragic recognition by presenting characters who are not only trapped under the sun's relentless heat but also linking their tragedy to that of the Palestinian people, who have lost their dignity and are forced to live far from their homeland. The characters' deaths in the desert can be interpreted as a metaphor representing the larger Palestinian experience of displacement and suffering. Therefore, the notion of "anagnorisis" stands as an essential element of the tragic plot revolving around the characters' realization of their errors (Frye, 1957, p. 41). This phase occurs in Kanafani's narrative when the characters know their wrong decisions and their inability to face the great dangers threatening their existence. The extreme violence of the three Palestinian refugees' deaths by suffocation in a water tank added to their bodies being discarded by Abul Khaizuran in a Kuwaiti garbage dump, signifies a profound defeat and the collapse of their hopes as they confront the harsh reality of their situation. The downfall is not only physical but also moral, representing the loss of their past lives, identities, and homeland due to political upheaval and displacement. The narrative voice expresses the plight and dreadful "stories of men who became like dogs as they looked for one drop of water to moisten their cracked tongues with. What do you think happened when they saw Bedouin encampments? They bought a mouthful of water in exchange for all the money or wedding rings or watches they owned" (p. 55).

Before death, the characters endure confinement in the water tank, the heat, and lack of air, they go through a process akin to anagnorisis, concluding that they have made a grave mistake. Their state of mind deteriorates as they are confronted with the harsh realities of their existence, trapped by a smuggler. Symbolically, their inner conflict becomes acute due to the loss of their former identities and the struggles they face during the journey, reflecting a profound transformation and a breakdown of their previous sense of self. This situation aligns with Frye's analysis of the hero's journey, emphasizing the themes of downfall, exile, and death. The characters' profound awareness of the impossibility of reaching their objective reinforces their feelings of disintegration of their earlier lives as they suffer from the complexities of exile, loss, and the quest for a better future, which resonates with Frye's concept of the hero's recognition of errors. It implicitly suggests that "Kuwait is far from being a haven for Palestinians as it was commonly perceived and felt. It is rather a place fraught with perils and contradictions that would inevitably make a certain version of life for Palestinians unsustainable in the long run" (Al-Nakib, 2020, p. 94). Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* portrays the characters with depth and complexity, using their individual stories to symbolize broader themes of Palestinian identity, displacement, and struggle. Their quest is closely connected to the broader Palestinian experience as Joseph R. Farag points out:

"Palestinians' loss of their homeland, their decimation as a cohesive and contiguous community, and the dispersal of their overwhelming majority into an exile which has now lasted nearly seven decades. Understood in such terms, the Nakba can be seen not simply as a historical moment or event, pivotal though it may be, but also as a process of denial that continues to this day: a denial of the Palestinians' land, right to self-determination, lives and livelihoods, and even their existence" (Frag, 2017, p. 18).

The quote illustrates that Abu Qais, Assad, Marwan, and Abul Khaizuran represent different facets of the Palestinian experience. Although each character grapples with personal challenges, all the three embody the collective trauma of their people. For instance, the elderly Abu Qais embarks on a journey to Kuwait to secure a better future for his family, symbolizing the struggles and sacrifices made by Palestinians seeking a future beyond their homeland. His tragic fate in the water tank reflects the harsh realities faced by refugees in their pursuit of a better life. Similarly, Assad's experience mirrors this unfulfilled dream. Despite his perceptiveness in negotiating with smugglers for passage to Kuwait, his failure to achieve his goal underscores his struggle to reconcile his personal motivations with societal expectations, as seen in his reluctance to marry his cousin. Assad's demise in the water tank exemplifies the dangers and uncertainties faced by those seeking a brighter future outside their country.

Correspondingly, Marwan's life, representing the desperation and determination of Palestinian youth seeking opportunities beyond their refugee camps, further illustrates the failure of the quest. His interactions with smugglers and willingness to take risks symbolize the unfulfilled hopes of the new generation yearning for a better life. Marwan's struggle against external obstacles and internal feelings of inaction highlights the experience of Palestinian displacement and longing for stability, which ultimately ends in failure. Through the quest of these four characters, Kanafani explores the Palestinian experience through individual stories intertwined with broader themes of identity, displacement, and the search for a better future. He employs language to convey the characters' emotions, inner struggles, determination, and hopelessness in the face of harsh realities as Palestinian refugees. The author reveals the characters' thoughts, fears, and motivations. For instance, Assad's negotiation with the smuggler in Basra, when he insists on paying after arriving in Kuwait, reflects his cautious nature and the underlying tension of the journey. His insistence on paying is illustrated by the quote, "Fifteen dinars I'll pay you. Fine! But after I arrive, not before" (Kanafani, 1969, p. 14). This excerpt provides insight into the characters' emotional responses to the risky circumstances they agree to endure. Similarly, Assad's internal struggles, loss of innocence, and trust in the smuggler highlight his psychological fragility and the impact of his prior experiences in refugee camps. The characters' unfulfilled journey and demise in the water tanker parallel the inaction and inability of Palestinians to stay and enjoy life in their homeland.

The three characters' trip across the borders amid the August sun's heat inside the tanker reflects the suffocating conditions and relentless pursuit of a brighter future amidst conflict. Descriptions of the burning sun, the scorching heat melting the truck's tinplate, and the refugees' endurance in the desert vividly reflect the harsh conditions and the characters' limited prospects of reaching Kuwait. Their quest, with its tragic twist, raises significant apprehensions about the attainability and worth of their pursuit. Their journey mirrors their dreams and aspirations for a better life, which turn into a destructive and illusory nightmare as their traumatic trajectory transforms their hopes into a bitter deception. Thus, the final stage in Kanafani's narrative, as described in Frye's terms, represents the characters as "pharmakos", where Kuwait, instead of being a paradise, becomes a graveyard, a place of false promises where death awaits.

6. Representation of Characters as “Pharmakos” or “Sacrificial Figures”

In Ghassan Kanafani's novel, the main characters are portrayed, according to Frye, as "pharmakos" or sacrificial figures because they bear the psychological burden of the social transformations brought about by colonial occupation. Consequently, all of them remain unable to directly confront or understand the underlying causes of their dissatisfaction and despair. Their deaths happen in complete silence, reflecting their deprivation of a legitimate political voice. As colonial subjects, the three characters' deaths exemplify their state of "permanent tension" under the colonial order. They become "pharmakos" and scapegoats bearing the consequences of the psychological distress caused by colonial oppression. Kanafani uses their demise to highlight that true liberation for the Palestinian people can only be achieved through collective, nationalist resistance, not through individual attempts to escape their circumstances. In other words, their failure and tragic end illustrate the futility of seeking personal prosperity over the national struggle to liberate their country. Thus, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan resemble the fallen hero described by Frye, whose “fall is involved both with a sense of his relation to society” (Frye, 1957, p. 38). The pharmakos, according to Frye, is “neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes” (Frye, p. 41). In this regard, the three characters neither succeed in crossing the borders nor achieving their goal. They die by suffocation in the water tank, and their quest fails because it is based on personal and self-interests rather than the moral values of their society. Consequently, their downfall and the failure of their quest represent the inherent issues within their society. They are, in Frye's words, guilty in the sense that they are members of a mortified society; they live in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence.

Correspondingly, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan meet their deaths due to their impotence and silence. Their quest for wealth leads to their demise, through which Kanafani critiques Palestinians for abandoning their homeland, Palestine, in pursuit of material wealth or comfort in other oil-rich countries. The author reflects on the wrongs of his society through the characters' journey, which can be linked to the broader Palestinian experience of disillusionment, loss, and desperation. Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan undergo a harrowing desert journey that mirrors the relentless struggle of the Palestinian people, representing a quest for a better life, which aligns with Frye's pattern of characters remaining unable to confront their conflicts and recognizing their errors only when death approaches. They become pharmakos because they epitomize the failings and shortcomings of their society. As they face the challenges of displacement, climatic hardship, and the pursuit of a brighter future in Kuwait; they do not experience personal growth but remain passive and silent. In the novella, the characters' journey through the desert becomes a metaphorical canvas where Kanafani illustrates the complexities of Palestinian identity and the enduring nature of their struggle for liberation. The characters' experiences throughout the narrative reflect a tragic quest, where they remain static and unable to complete their personal quests within the broader context of the Palestinian narrative as Farag (2017) explains clearly the situation, writing:

“Kanafani depicts Palestinian refugees as wandering aimlessly, perhaps having a vague notion of their desired destination, but unable to orient themselves in its direction. Palestinian refugees are thus left with no option but to set forth in whatever direction they can, even if it may in fact take them further from their desired destination. The multiple references to sand are important here. The imagery of scorching, endless deserts and laborious treks through sand are central leitmotifs in Kanafani's depictions of exile” (Farag, 2017, p. 66).

The passage reinforces the idea of the characters as "pharmakos" or sacrificial figures who bear the psychological burden of social transformations under colonial occupation. Their unachieved hope results from their inability to take responsibility for changing their bleak situation. Their demise highlights Kanafani's view that true liberation requires collective and nationalist resistance rather than individual attempts to escape hard circumstances. Their failure represents the futility of seeking personal prosperity over national struggle. As "pharmakos," they are neither innocent nor guilty, with their fate being greater than their actions provoke.

Moreover, the characters' silence and quest for wealth lead to their deaths because they did not stay to fight for regaining their homeland, Palestine, opting instead for material comfort elsewhere. Their passivity reflects the Palestinian experience of disillusionment, loss, and desperation, shaped by displacement and the pursuit of a better life in Kuwait. Their fragmented identity has evolved through historical events, political upheavals, conflicts, and the experience of displacement and statelessness. Their experience of the Nakba and ongoing struggles has reinforced their sense of loss of Palestinian identity, rooted in collective memory and historical trauma. The author contrasts their death with that of Ustaz Salim, the schoolteacher who played an important ethical role in the story. Salim is portrayed as a heroic figure who demonstrates that even in seemingly hopeless situations, one must continue to uphold dignity and values. He died in his homeland before the village was attacked by the Israelis, and his death is seen as a blessing, as he was spared the humiliation and wretchedness faced by the other Palestinian characters who became refugees. The narrator, Abu Qais, fondly remembers Ustaz Salim considering his death in the homeland preferable to the fate of the other Palestinians who fled and sought work as migrant laborers in Kuwait.

In addition, the narrative voice contrasts Ustaz Salim's death with the moral weakness and inaction of the traditional Palestinian leadership, which fails to provide hope for their people. Kanafani's selection and treatment of events emphasize the moral and revolutionary values of this character. The author uses Ustaz Salim as to suggest that traditional leadership must yield to a new, more revolutionary generation capable of effectively resisting occupation and reclaiming Palestinian identity and dignity. Ustaz Salim embodies, as Farag (2017) points out, the memory of "previous episodes in Palestinian history, seeking to connect the present historical moment with a legacy of Palestinian resistance" (p. 83). Salim represents the ideal of self-sacrifice and resistance that Kanafani deemed necessary for the Palestinian liberation movement. In this way, Salim serves as an ethical exemplar in the novel, embodying the values of resistance, dignity, and attachment to the homeland that Kanafani saw as crucial for Palestinian liberation from Zionist occupation. Salim thus becomes an inspiring figure for subsequent periods of Palestinian resistance. He represents a tradition of resistance, contrasting with the tragic deaths of the sacrificed victims; his words break the silence of those who died in suffocation inside a water tank. Salim's voice, contributes to strengthening the struggle of others: "It is true that the men were too busy to bury you and honor you in your death. But all the same you stayed there. You stayed there. You saved yourself from humiliation and wretchedness, and you preserved your old age from shame" (Kanafani, 1963, p. 23). Through the narrator's comment on Salim's death, Kanafani 'rehabilitates' the Palestinian history of armed struggle. Invoking Salim's memory aligns with the author's revolutionary ideals and political commitment, as evidenced by his reply to a journalist's question about the meaning of death shortly after his assassination:

"Of course, death means a lot. The important thing is to know why? Self-sacrifices within the framework of a just cause are not death, but life. They are the highest form of life, the most sublime expression of humanity. A righteous cause does not lead to death; rather, it is a source of life, imbuing life with purpose and worth. It represents the

struggles of the oppressed, exploited, and marginalized individuals. It is the pursuit of those who seek their rights, dignity, and freedom. And it is in this cause that we find our true selves, our true humanity, our true life" (Cited in Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 15).

For Kanafani, the characters' long and arduous search to reach their goals fails because it is driven by personal ambitions and prosperity; they flee across the desert to Kuwait seeking only to find a crust of bread (Kanafani, 1963, p. 24) rather than fighting to reclaim their land. The author contrasts the three characters' dead bodies, discarded by a smuggler in the desert garbage, with that of Ustaz Salim. Their unnoticed and futile deaths, resulting from self-centered ambitions of personal security, are portrayed as the antithesis of Salim's heroic legacy. Kanafani uses this contrast to articulate his vision of the Palestinian struggle, suggesting it should focus solely on the direction of Palestine's liberation through sacrifice. As Masalha (2012) notes, "It situates memory and commemoration within the context of cultural resistance to the Zionist character of the Israeli State and the struggle for collective rights and Palestinians' reunification with their lands" (p. 227).

Throughout the story, Ustaz Salim remains an epic hero and a heroic figure in the minds of the people: "But all the same you stayed there. You stayed there," maintains the narrative voice. It reveals clearly that Kanafani believes in the youth's potential to effect change, contrasting the traditional Palestinian leadership with a new generation willing to sacrifice for a cause, not futile dreams as Farag (2017) rightly notices that Kanafani's critique of the old generation reflects the resentment of the "Generation of Catastrophe" towards the older generation for their failure to fight for their land, thus sparing the younger generation lives of exile (p. 98).

More significantly, the author criticizes leadership through the figure of Abul Khaizuran, who believes he is doing a service to others by smuggling those unfortunates to Kuwait. The impotent and passive leaders are also made to believe that these illegal businesses, which provide them with a share of the profit, are the best sacrifices they make for Palestinians (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 11). Their capitalist ambitions are portrayed through Hajj Rida, who owns the truck and employs many professional smugglers in Basra. Rida overcharges his clients and refuses to guarantee their journey, exemplifying Arab leaders and regimes who, while pretending to support Palestinians in their struggle for national security, exploit them for their own opportunistic ends. In short, Abul Khaizuran and Hajj Rida represent the unsympathetic Arab authorities who betrayed the Palestinians. Khaizuran, for instance, is teased by officers at the Mutlaa checkpoint and is involved with belly dancers in Iraq. They even invite him for a drink in their air-conditioned office while his fellow Palestinians agonize in the scorching midday heat in a closed water tank of his truck.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Kanafani's novella reveals that Frye's analysis of the tragic quest aptly explains the peripeties of the three Palestinian refugees' adventures. First, the main characters, Marwan, Abu Qais, and Assad, engage in a quest to escape their dreadful living conditions in a refugee camps, hoping to find a better life in Kuwait. Their quest is tragic because they perish suffocated inside the tanker truck. Second, the characters face a series of obstacles and challenges during their journey: harsh desert conditions, lack of proper documentation, the fearsome sun, and the indifference of the smuggler who abandons them in the truck. These obstacles represent the "tragic" elements of their quest. Furthermore, the characters' inaction and inability to overcome these obstacles and reach their objective symbolize the failure of the Palestinian people to find a secure place that could become their homeland after the Nakba. The disastrous death of the three characters epitomizes the ongoing trauma for Palestinian refugees and the futility of their attempts to escape their dire circumstances. Their silence,

passivity, and inability to cry out for help as they suffocate represent the silencing and disempowerment of the Palestinian people. Thus, the characters' tragic quest in *Men in the Sun* can be interpreted as an allegory for the Palestinian national struggle and their enduring collective tragedy.

Moreover, Kanafani's novella embodies Frye's concept of the "moment of recognition of the errors" when depicting the characters' awareness of their doomed efforts to escape their awful circumstances and the impossibility of reaching their objectives. Kanafani's treatment of the incidents reveals that the characters' deaths, a key element of Frye's tragic quest archetype, reflect the flaws in their society. According to him, Kuwait cannot provide a viable solution to the Palestinians' afflictions. This outcome is ironic as their pursuit of a brighter future ends in tragedy, highlighting the cruel twists of fate and the unforgiving nature of their circumstances. Additionally, the interactions and decisions made by the characters throughout the narrative are laced with irony. For instance, Assad's negotiation with the truck owner to pay for smuggling contrasts with his ultimate demise in the water tank, showcasing the irony of his efforts leading to a tragic end. Likewise, Marwan's eagerness to reach Kuwait and his willingness to take risks starkly contrast with the grim outcome he faces in the water tank. The novella's ironic twists and outcomes deepen the complexity of the characters' experiences, emphasizing the struggles and tragedies tied to their pursuit of a better future. The story poignantly portrays how the characters' displacement from their homeland has caused a profound crisis of identity and severe existential suffering. Therefore, Kanafani's story not only fits into Frye's cycle of the tragic quest but also vividly represents what Mahmoud Darwish describes as the predicament of homelessness, which is an acute crisis that deeply affects one's being. Therefore, Roger Allen is right when he notes that Kanafani manages to capture the full combination of anger and despair with which different generations of Palestinians confronted their bleak fate, either within the boundaries of the new Zionist state or in the diaspora of exile from their homeland (Allen, 2004, p. xi).

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