

**Placelessness and Existential Outsideness in the Palestinian Context:
Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun***

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Abstract:

*As Edward Relph (1976) defines it, “existential outsideness” is “a rejection of an individual by a place which he is condemned always to observe as though from outside. There is an awareness of meaning withheld and of inability to participate in those meanings.” This concept exposes the profound tension between place and human existence: the rootedness of being “inside” and the uprootedness of placelessness—of being an outsider. Place does not merely serve as a backdrop for life; it actively shapes identity, memory, culture, and emotion. For Palestinians, the condition of placelessness resonates with Relph’s idea that places “cannot be significant centres of existence but are at best backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimaeras, and at worst voids” (1976). Dispossessed of home and belonging, they inhabit a condition of placelessness in which all locations lose meaning and life itself is stripped of purpose, no longer sustained even by the idea of an imagined homeland. Through a textual analysis of *Men in the Sun* (1962) by Ghassan Kanafani, this article argues that existential outsideness is inscribed in the Palestinian experience, both in exile and within the homeland, revealing it as a condition marked by the erosion of identity, meaning, and purpose, and culminating in silence and death.*

Key words: *existential outsideness, exile, Ghassan Kanafani, placelessness, Palestine.*

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Introduction:

Ghassan Kanafani is a Palestinian author. He was born in 1936 in Acre, Mandatory Palestine. On the eve of the Nakba (1948) and during the mass displacement of Palestinians, his family fled to Syria and settled in Damascus. As with all Palestinians, Kanafani himself experienced the trauma of being a refugee at the age of twelve, having to face the agony of living in exile in several Arab countries with no official papers. He was an active member of the Arab Nationalist Movement. Later, he adopted Marxist ideas, believing that Palestinian liberation could be achieved through social revolution and Arab countries collaboration (Kilpatrick 1999, 9). Kanafani was assassinated in Beirut in July 1972 when his car was bombed, killing him and his niece. He left a widow and two children. He wrote five novels and five collections of short stories. For example, he wrote the novella *Men in the Sun* (1963) when he was in Lebanon hiding at home for more than a month due to the absence of official papers (Kilpatrick 1999, 10). During this period, Palestinians experienced a profound sense of displacement and loss in both their homeland or abroad. Many found themselves living in camps, wrestling with desperation and the unsettling experience of being uprooted. Kanafani captures this distressing journey of displacement to Lebanon during his childhood: “And in the morning, when the Jews withdrew menacing and foaming with rage there was a big truck standing at our front door” (Wild 1975, 11)

The central problem of this article concerns the question of how displacement reshapes human existence when place itself rejects the individual. Relph's notion of “existential outsideness,” defined as “a rejection of an individual by a place which he is condemned always to observe as though from outside” (1976, 51), articulates the tension between rootedness and the void of placelessness. Dispossessed of home and barred from belonging, Palestinians experience places, as Relph notes, not meaningful centres of existence but “voids.” This condition is not merely geographical; it is existential, psychological, and political.

To address this problematic, the article employs a textual exploration of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, analysing how the narrative carves existential outsideness both in exile and within the lost homeland. The approach associates close reading with spatial and existential theory to trace how identity, memory, and emotion are formed—or fractured—in the absence of place. The central hypothesis is that Kanafani portrays Palestinian placelessness not only as physical displacement but as an existential condition in which life loses coherence, purpose, and rooted meaning. A second hypothesis proposes that the characters' silence, movement across borders, and eventual death reveal how existential outsideness becomes the defining structure of Palestinian experience.

Thus, the objective of this article is to demonstrate how *Men in the Sun* renders the loss of place as a loss of self, and to illustrate how Kanafani gives literary form to

existential outsideness as a condition of exile, fractured identity, and human endurance at its limits.

1. Diaspora in Palestinian Context:

The terms “diaspora” has always been difficult to define. Generally, it means a “global condition of mobility,” relating the dispersal of a group of people over “at least two countries of the world” (Schulz 2005, 8). Kim Butler defines “diaspora” as the expulsion of people from their “original homeland” (189). He adds that only in recent years the term was applied to the dispersal of Jewish people (189). Traditionally, he noted that the term “diaspora” has been primarily linked with the Jewish community, a perception often characterized by a sense of oppression. The term “diaspora” has frequently carried connotations of “powerlessness, longing, and exile” (190). It can also be extended to the deportation of Africans or others from their homeland to the hostland. The common feature shared by both Africans and Jewish communities is “discrimination”. However, Butlers identified two types of “diasporas” based on privilege and subalternity. For instance, it is likely to encounter a “diaspora” linked to imperial and conquering powers (191). All individuals seem to be born into diasporic status, given the historical reality that humans have toured and inhabited foreign lands, whether voluntary or involuntary. The true concept of “diaspora” should emphasise the relationship “between identity and active participation in the politics of hostland and homeland” (Butler 191). Robin Cohen (2008) traced the development of the concept of “diaspora” in 1960s and 1970s:

With the Jews, these peoples conceived their scattering as arising from a cataclysmic event that had traumatized the group as a whole, thereby creating the central historical experience of victimhood at the hands of a cruel oppressor. Retrospectively and without complete consensus, the Palestinians were later added to this group. (1)

He listed three traditional types of diasporas:

- (1) “labour diaspora” encompassed migrants who “were recruited for their labour to be used in the tropical plantations” (7)
- (2) “Trade diaspora” includes “all groups who migrate internationally in search of work” (Cohen 61)
- (3) “Imperial diaspora” refers to “the settlement and colonization of the areas” (68)

The mid-1990s, marked by postmodernism, witnessed a revolutionary change in the concept of “diaspora,” as it underwent deconstruction, reevaluating its fundamental

elements such as homeland and “ethnic/religious community” (Cohen 2008, 2) Cohen departs from the traditional definitions of “diaspora” that are based on territorial boundaries and return. He categorises a new type of diaspora, which he calls “deterritorialized diaspora” that “can be used to describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility even where historically exclusive territorial claims are not strongly articulated” (Pokharel 2020, 91). For Stuart Hall (1990) thinks that America “, Terra Incognita,” is an archetypal example of “the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference” (235). He argues against that belief that diaspora should be related to “those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea” (Hall 1990, 235; as qtd.in Cohen 2008, 125)

The concept of “diaspora” in Palestine’s case takes different trajectories. Not only are Palestinians denied access to their homeland or return but also are deprived of any sense of Palestinianness: “an alienation from previous forms of existence” (Schulz 2005, 21). Schulz defines diaspora as ‘condition’ of alienation and estrangement, of ‘shattered lives and homes’ (21). This form of diaspora goes beyond migration and displacement because Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza strip “are still rooted in their homeland” (21). However, Schulz argues that Palestinians “displacement, dispersal, forced movement and constraints on movement have a much wider significance in this case...their lives are defined by a diasporic condition” (22). Palestinian-ness is deeply ingrained in a collective sense of belonging to their land, which they no longer have or dream of returning to. Schulz stresses the connection between “place” and “nationalism”: “Nationalism is an ideology of boundedness and a believed or claimed congruity between people, territory and state, or population, geography and politics” (Schulz 15). Diaspora is usually connected to “nation-state” and nationalism (15). The Belfour Declaration (1917) deprived “the previous of inhabitants of Palestine their own statehood” (Ashcroft&Ahluwalia 1990, 2). This absence of place is an absence of a collective identity or nationhood. Place means the ability to “separate” an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’. Being inside ‘is the difference between safety and danger, cosmos and chaos, enclosure and exposure, or simply here and there’ (Schulz 15). Nationalism involves the concept of identifying who belongs to a particular group or nation, representing safety and order (the 'inside'), as well as determining who is excluded or considered an 'outsider,' symbolising danger and disorder. Janet Abu-Lughod (1988) distinguishes between being a migrant and a refugee: while migration is “need-driven,” usually individually, voluntarily moving for better opportunities, the situation of refugees is “particularly poignant, since the severance is always abrupt and forced” from one’s native land (Lughod 1988, 61, 62). In the case of Palestine, Palestinians are “exiles at home and abroad” (62). In Palestinians’ context, Palestinians are born displaced and exiled, which excludes the concept of return:

“Exile to the Palestinians, however, is neither transitional nor transitory; it is an inherited state.” (Lughod 1988, 63).

2. Existential Outsideness

Edward Relph (1976) thinks that “existential outsideness involves a profound alienation from all places” (51). This existential alienation manifests a deep sense of estrangement felt by “newcomers” or those who “have been away from their birthplace” upon their returning home (Seamon and Sowers 2008, 45). Although humans inhabit physical spaces, their experience of these spaces is “deeply existential” (Stafford 2019, 26). Existential outsideness involves “a selfconscious and reflective uninvovement, alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging” (Relph 1976, 51). Seamon and Sowers (2008) explain that the opposite of “existential outsideness” is “existential insideness” which is “a situation of deep, unself-conscious immersion in place and the experience most people know when they at home in their community and region” (45). It refers to a state of being at home and having boundaries and protection. (Stafford 2019, 29). Being inside implies that one’s existence becomes meaningful or one’s environment or place gives one meaning. Unlike existential insideness, existential outsideness is a is “a situation in which “the person feels alienated from an environment devoid of meaning” (Agnew & Duncan 2014, 86). For Relph, “To be human is to have and to know *your* place. (1976, 3). This shows the importance of or connection between place and being human, implying a sense of rootedness, belonging and identity. Lisa Stafford (2019) describes her lived experience with her everyday experience and her disability, portraying how she experiences body/space and insideness/outsideness: “the act of nudging open the door is also an indication of the ongoing clash between me and the ableist door” (34). In Stafford’s case, the door symbolically becomes the gate to outsideness and identity loss, a space where reality ceases to give meaning. As John Agnew and James Duncan (2014) put it, existential outsideness is “the most extreme separation from place” (86). Knowing one’s place helps one shape his or her perceptions, actions, realities, choices, and identities. It also indicates the existence and possession of human depth and freedom. As Relph argues, “To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place” (1976, 49). There is inextricable link between place, meaning, and existence and any disconnection or disjointedness signifies the end of coherent or meaningful life or existence. The absence of place is the absence of meaning or vice versa. As emphasised by Relph (1976), “To be inside a place emphatically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these

meaning are not only linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stems from one's own experiences" (55). Unsurprisingly, place is a space that one occupies to such an extent that it becomes, so to speak, one's spirit.

3. Placelessness

Home represents existence and reality (Schulz 111). While exile existence, whether within their homeland or imposed through siege or apartheid, as in the Palestinian case, epitomises the absence of meaning, home, and "reality" (Schulz 2005, 112) Fawaz Turki describes how it feels to be born Palestinian having no home or anywhere to belong:

that all the countries I had visited had been placeless places; that I wanted to escape the crazed condition of my history and my situation; so I travelled to Hind and to Sind, and I lived many lives except my own. (As qtd. In Schulz 2005, 111)

Palestinians have lost even the imaginary home that all diasporic individuals sustain and nourish in their imaginations and dreams, as "there was no longer a specific Palestine with olive trees, orange groves and the scent of jasmine to return" (Schulz 224). The real concept of "home," the first Palestine, has been eroded and replaced with "anything" or "anywhere." As Mahmoud Darwish says, "Nothing of our ancestors remain in us [...] We wish to live for a time just to return to something anything anything to a beginning, an island, a ship..." (as qtd. In Schulz 224). Fawaz Turki states, "In the 1950s it was unclear who was in exile, we or our homeland (18, 1988). "Statelessness" leaves Palestinians in state of placelessness, "no state, no embassy, no institution of any kind to protect you in a moment of crisis" (Turki 1988, 6). One's own place, a place to belong to, means that one is enveloped by security and fairness. Palestinian identity is often defined by what it is not supposed to be: "Where have Palestinians been more wounded at the core than at airports, refused entry, detained, expelled, questioned, humiliated, and so on [...]" (Turki 1988, 10). Place is more than just a physical location. It embodies human existence and experience, serving as a point of reference from which meaning emanates. As Relph defines, "The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence" (Relph 1976, 43). Edward Said defines "exile" as state of "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (as qtd. Lughod 1988, 61). Palestinian identity is defined by its displacement, loss, and placelessness, as it is

shaped by the lack of homeland rather than by the homeland itself. (Schulz 2005, 183).

4. Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*:

As mentioned above, "existential outsideness" is "a selfconscious and reflective uninvolvedness, alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging" (Relph 1976, 51). This definition will guide the analysis of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* in what follows. It helps explore Palestinian identity, which is defined by statelessness, placelessness, meaninglessness, and outsideness, through the portrayal of three Palestinian characters' fragmentation and search for meaning during the Nakba. Ghassan Kanafani depicts Palestine in *Men in the Sun* as a place devoid of meaning, where the present destroys the past, "often a senseless place, populated by characters who are filled with nostalgia or bitterness over the past" (O'Neil 2004, 688).

Men in the Sun (1962) opens with the arrival of three Palestinian characters in Basra, Iraq, hoping to be smuggled to Kuwait, the dream place for having a better life. Displaced after the Nakba (1948), Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, each one has a motive for reaching Kuwait. Abu Qais, the eldest, wants to help his family and secure better life and education for his children. Assad, middle-aged, hopes to overcome poverty and the harsh reality of exile, despite having failed many times. Driven by responsibility, Marwan, the youngest, bears the burden of helping his family after his father abandons them. The significance and tragedy of the story lie in its end when characters, hidden in a water tank, die in silence, waiting for the truck driver to sign entrance papers to Kuwait. It is all due to Abu Khaizuran, a Palestinian refugee once castrated in the 1948 war, who used to smuggle Palestinians for money. While waiting at the crossing checkpoint, Abu Khaizuran had a long conversation with the guards about silly topics and his affairs with women, forgetting about the scorching heat and the three men being suffocated. The story ends with his sad cry, "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank?" (Kanafani 1999, 74).

a. Alienation from People and Places:

As the story takes place in a barren desert, characters find themselves in a place that, unlike the urban life, lacks fixed boundaries. The new place symbolises the loss of Palestinian homeland, presenting the desert as a space that "contains no centers of meaning or framework or significance as did the Palestinian's own land" (Parmenter 1994, 59). The desert stands as a relentless reminder of the deprivation of not only one's land and memories but also of the loss of deliberately stolen identity. Crossing the desert to Kuwait is a journey from the past and rootedness to the unknown where Palestinian characters confront the bitter reality of existential outsideness, of

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belonging to nowhere. The desert becomes an erasing road of identity and meaning, as it were. Instead of being a dark journey that ends with light and hope, it stages a march to disillusionment and disconnection. Therefore, "The boundaries and meanings Palestinians inscribed on their native land vanish in the desert of exile, leaving no context within which to make experience coherent" (Parmenter 1994, 59). For Abu Qais, who represents the older generation of Palestinians, the scorching heat and inhospitable, barren landscape of the desert pre-empt the bleak future of "pointlessness" and erosion of landmarks:

The sun was pouring flame down on his head, and as he climbed the yellow slopes, he felt he was alone in the whole world. He dragged his feet over the sand as though he were walking on the seashore after pulling up a heavy boat that had drained the firmness from his legs. He crossed hard patches of brown rocks like splinters, climbed low hills with flattened tops of soft yellow earth like flour. If they had taken me to the desert prison, Al-Jafr, at H4, I wonder if life would have been kinder than it is now. Pointless, pointless. (Kanafani 1999, 31)

Alienation is also seen in the city life of Basra, Iraq. Kanafani reflects the dehumanisation and cynical attitudes towards Palestinian refugees in the Nakba. The story mirrors the rejection and manipulation of Palestinians through Abul Khaizuran, who smuggles Palestinians refugees to Kuwait, showing his pragmatism and cynicism. For instance, Abu Qais stayed in "The Shatt Hotel" that Iraqis call it "the rats' hotel". After Abul Khaizuran abandons Abu Qais on the road alone, a foreigner and his wife picks him after he has waved to them. They ask him about his origin, Ramleh, and where he has stayed lately in Iraq. He replies, " 'The Shatt Hotel.' 'Ah, the rats' hotel.' The wild rat ran across the road, its little eyes shining in the car's headlamps'" (Kanafani 1999, 31). His wife thinks that rats are foxes and her husband wonders why she confuses rats with foxes: "'Look! Look! There's another fox. Didn't you see how his eyes glitter?' 'He's a rat, my dear, a rat.'" (35). Palestinians are often treated as pests and burdens in societies due to their constant displacement, stripping them of humanity and dignity. The "rats' hotel" implies that this place is often visited and inhabited by poor Palestinians who want to cross the Iraqi borders. Thus, rats symbolise Palestinians' struggle to survive because rats always hide and depend on the leftovers of human beings. They are often viewed as unwelcome and dangerous intruders, or mythically venomous: "'Oh. This desert is full of rats. What on earth do they eat?' He answered quietly: 'Rats smaller than them.' 'Really?' said the girl. 'It's frightening. Rats themselves are horrible, frightening animals.'" (35).

b. Homelessness:

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There is no match to the feeling of being homeless after long years of having home, place, and identity. For instance, when Abu Qais ends up in Basra surrounded by greedy smugglers, he starts reminiscing about his teacher, Ustaz Selim, who dies just one night before the occupation of Palestine: "God was certainly good to you when he made you die one night before the wretched village fell into the hands of the Jews. One night only. O God, is there any divine favor greater than that?" (Kanafani 1999, 23). Abu Qais even envies Ustaz Selim's death with honour and dignity than his life with humiliation and displacement: "You stayed there. You saved yourself humiliation and wretchedness, and you preserved your old age from shame." (Kanafani 1999, 23-4). He equates home with definition and coordination whereas he associates homelessness with loss, indignity, distress, and unhappiness. Abu Qais envies Ustaz Selim's death in his homeland with honour and dignity and despises his life with humiliation and displacement. He equates "home" with definition and coordination, while homelessness is associated with loss, distress, and unhappiness. Abu Qais' state of disappointment begins with his sense of a meaningless life and extends to the triviality of bringing children into a world marked by placelessness and dislocation. Deeply saddened as his wife goes into labour, Abu Qais begins pondering the new burden he is going to endure:

Abu Qais! I feel I'm going to give birth!"

"All right. All right. Keep calm."

He said to himself.

"I wish that women gave birth after a pregnancy of a hundred months. Is this the time for labour?" ...

He hurried outside. But as he shut the door behind him he heard the cry of the newborn child, so he turned back and put his ear to the wood of the door. ...

More than at any time in the past he felt alien and insignificant.
(Kanafani 1999, 25)

Abu Qais' wife gave birth to a girl, Hosna, who died later of extreme emaciation. Abu Qais foresees the consequences of having more children while experiencing homelessness and deprivation. He knows the future of homelessness and exile awaits his children. He sulks, recalling the words of his friend Saad, who has just returned from exile, about Kuwait's lack of trees:

There must be lanes and streets, men and women, and children running about between the trees. No. No. There were no trees there. Saad, his friend who had emigrated there, worked as a driver, and come back with sacks of money, said there were no trees there. The trees exist in your head, Abu Qais, in your tired old head, Abu Qais.

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Abu Qais starts to lose the sense of place that gives meaning to his life. The absence of trees, particularly olive trees that he used to play under in Palestine, deepens this feeling. Despite Saad having “sacks of money,” he could not find the trees that existed in Abu Qais’ “old head,” i.e., symbolising home. Therefore, Abu Qais had no longer a desire for having children because he had realised that they would have no home to belong to and permanent family relations, only lose, rejection, and misery. As Ellen Hart-Shegos (1999) reports, “homelessness influences every facet of a child’s life — from conception to young adulthood.” (2). Thus, delaying birth, his child’s birth, in Abu Qais’ mind hinges upon the existence of trees, permanent home or place, not in a state of pariah or outsideness.

c. Selfconscious and Reflective Uninvolvement:

In the context of “existential outsideness,” breaking “selfconscious and reflective uninvolvement” into digestible bits reveals that “selfconscious” denotes an acute state of awareness about one’s own dislocation, loss of connection to a place, fading identity, and loss of the past. Ghassan Kanafani realised this self-conscious placelessness in his lonely years in Kuwait in the 1950s, representing the desert as playing a major role in exacerbating characters’ existential outsideness. As Patrick M. O’Neil (2004) writes, “in his works the desert is a stark, unforgiving landscape upon which characters come to terms with their own existence.” (689). The desert reminds characters of the indefinite boundaries of their existence, place, and identity. It embodies this placelessness “in which stability and consistency and the boundaries of things are not clearly defined” (Parmenter 1994, 59). Abu Qais felt this indefiniteness of boundaries:

There was one black bird circling high up, alone and aimless. He did not know why, but he was suddenly filled with a bitter feeling of being a stranger, and for a moment he thought he was on the point of weeping...Those miles of road speeding through a void, like black eternity. (Kanafani 1999, 22)

Another example of “selfconscious” is Marwan’s reflection on his uncle’s money and the poverty of his family:

He felt the unuttered insult wound his throat, and he had an urge to give the fifty dinars back to his uncle, to throw them in his face with all the strength in his arms and all the hatred in his heart. (32)

Marwan is deeply conscious of himself, his pride, and the scale of humiliation. His self-consciousness makes him aware of the “outsideness” even among his own relatives, particularly his own degrading, controlling uncle.

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“Reflective uninvolvedness,” however, matches a state of deep introspection in which characters wrestle with memories, fragmentation, dislocation, and estrangement. Despite this awareness and understanding, they experience a deep sense of disconnection and disintegration from people and the world around them. Consequently, they disengage from all from all involvements in social activities. As mentioned earlier, Abu Qais says to his wife, “is this the time for labour?” (Kanafani 1999, 25). Marwan is another character in the novella who hopes to live in Kuwait. He finds himself in Basra grappling with greedy smugglers. In the crowded streets of Basra, he paused to reflect on his alienation and disappointment at the moral anarchy of the world. After being hit by the smuggler on the face, Marwan went out:

Crowds of people walked past without paying him any attention. Perhaps it was the first time in his life that he had found himself alone and a stranger in a throng of people like this. He wanted to know the reason for that remote sensation that gave him contentment and rest. (Kanafani 1999, 37).

For Marwan, all places have become insignificant and meaningless, “simply backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimaeras, and at worst are voids” (Relph 1976, 51). He reflectively stops and thinks about his conscious outsideness and uninvolvedness. As a Palestinian who is denied home and origin, Marwan would always reflect on the places he occupies and experiences. Assad is also a quintessential example of “reflective uninvolvedness” after he loses faith in smugglers and promises: “Personally, I’m only interested in reaching Kuwait. I’m not concerned with anything else.” (Kanafani 1999, 51). He emotionally steers away from politics and social engagement. Existential insideness suggests that a person does not require conscious awareness or perception of a place because they are in complete unity with it, experiencing an unquestioned insideness and acceptance. In other words, “Insideness is that in which a place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full with significances.” (Relph 1976, 55).

d. Sense of Unreality:

Abu Qais felt a deep sense of disbelief at the new reality in which he was forced to live. He is left in a state of loneliness, struggling with his fading, distant memories of Palestine. These memories, when combined with the reality of displacement and loss, magnified the effect that the current reality is unreal, illusory, and insubstantial:

Abu Qais rested on the damp ground, and the earth began to throb under him with tired heartbeats, which trembled through the grains of sand and penetrated the cells of his body. Every time he threw himself down with

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his chest to the ground he sensed that throbbing, as though the heart of the earth had been pushing its difficult way towards the light from the utmost depths of hell, ever since the first time he had lain there. (Kanafani 1999, 21).

Not only does the ground, or Palestine, evoke the beating of Abu Qais' heart or a sense of lost life, but it also lulls him into recalling the smell of his wife's hair: "Every time he breathed the scent of the earth, as he lay on it, he imagined that he was sniffing his wife's hair" (21). This juxtaposition of reality, memory, and fantasy shows the importance of place to a man's identity or existential insideness, as does his bond with his wife.

"A sense of the unreality of the world" is also seen in Abul Khaizuran's behaviour and character, the Palestinian smuggler who vowed to transport his fellow Palestinians Marwan, Assad, and Abu Qais to Kuwait. He offered them a cheap price and guarantee, on the condition that they hide in the tank for only six minutes to sign the crossing papers. When Marwan reminded him to leave the tank door open, "Abul Khaizuran cried cheerfully: 'And leave the tank door open.'" (Kanafani 1999, 63). He put them in the tank of his lorry and had a long silly conversation with the checkpoint guards about Abul Khaizuran's extramarital affairs. It was long drawn-out chat. When Abul Khaizuran comes back, he immediately checks the tank to find the three of them tragically dead. The unreality of Abul Khaizuran's character gives the impression that he has mutated into a heartless monster, feeding on the Palestinian plight. The narrator hints that Abul Khaizuran is aware that the three men are destined to die during the journey: "Before he went to take his truck out of Haj Rida's garage, he told himself that he wouldn't bury them. He would throw the three corpses into the desert and return home." (Kanafani 1999, 71). When Abul Khaizuran also opens the door of the tank, "he couldn't tell whether he was trembling because of this oil covering his chest and back or whether it was caused by fear" (Kanafani 1999, 71). These moments reveal his detachment and moral corruption. Abul Khaizuran promised himself that this time he would not throw dead bodies in the desert and return home. He would properly place them in separate graves. However, after the smell of the putrid bodies hits him, he decides to throw them in the highest piles of rubbish dump so that they will be found by garbage trucks.

The narrator emphasised Abul Khaizuran's cold and dehumanising manner as he dragged and disposed of the bodies from the tank. Despite this harsh treatment of his companions, the reader expects and waits for his return to the bodies he left, ignited by remorse, respect, and dignity; unexpectedly, he "walked back to where he had left the bodies, and took the money from their pockets. He also removed Marwan's watch. Then he retraced his steps to the lorry, walking on the edge of his soles" (Kanafani 1999, 74). The suffocation of the three men also shows the growing

sense of the futility of their efforts to live and survive cruel reality. It betrays their dreams and aspirations to survive meaninglessness and loss. Instead of transporting them to a new life and safety, the tank becomes a coffin that ends the surreal life of the Nakba: "On the other side of this Shatt, just the other side, were all the things he had been deprived of. Over there was Kuwait. What only lived in his mind as a dream and a fantasy existed there" (Kanafani 1999, 25). Abul Khaizuran is notorious for his greediness, manipulation, and cold-heartedness. What he always preaches is, "The first thing you will learn is: money comes first, and then morals." (Kanafani 1999, 42). Nonetheless, the scene of the three men, who are left dead on the barren desert, without even a dignified death or a marked grave, arouses sympathy. It suddenly slips into his heart, and an idea strikes his mind: "Why didn't they knock on the sides of the tank?...Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?" (74). The silence of the three men, and their inability to survive, echoes the absurdity of their fate and the ineffectiveness of all survival attempts, while also showing a collective betrayal of their cause. It triggers a sense of unreality for Abul Khaizuran, who failed to fathom the existential philosophy of placelessness that Palestinians had been forced to live through. The scale of the unseeing suffering of Palestinians forces Abul Khaizuran's moral compass to coordinate Palestinians within the boundaries of human existence, whether inside or outside.

Conclusion

The condition of "existential outsideness", as developed by Relph and represented by Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, exposes the depth of the Palestinian struggle. This example goes beyond politics and geography, reaching to the very heart of human existence. For Palestinians, displacement is not only the loss of place and coordination—a physical homeland—but also the erosion and loss of identity, belonging, and meaning itself. Kanafani's narrative clearly articulates this crisis. It gives it voice and reveals how placelessness casts life into a void, where participation in meaning is constantly denied. By locating Palestinian exile within the framework of existential outsideness, the analysis emphasises the trauma of dispossession experienced not merely as historical injustice but as an ontological dislocation. In this sense, *Men in the Sun* not only portrays the hardship and humiliation of exile but also conveys the existential consequences of displacing people who are fated to view their homeland from afar, deprived of the rootedness that gives coherence to life. Each character in the novella mirrors the unbearable reality of existence beyond the boundaries of what it means to be human.

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