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THE CULTURE TRAUMA REFLECTED IN KANAFANI'S
NOVEL *RETURN TO HAIFA* WITHIN THE GENRE OF
PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE NOVELS

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Abstract:

This study examined the portrayal of cultural trauma in Ghassan Kanafani's novel "Return to Haifa" through character analysis. The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the characters portrayed in the novel serve as a reflection of the cultural trauma that was endured during and in the aftermath of the Nakba, a catastrophic event that occurred in 1948. The investigation utilized Jeffrey C. Alexander's conceptualization of cultural trauma as a theoretical lens for examination. This study employed a textual analysis approach to examine the effects of trauma on the primary characters, Said and Dov, and their subsequent development of a collective identity. The analysis of data focused on the evolution of self-awareness throughout the narrative, revealing the impact of trauma on individual and collective identity. The findings suggested that the memories and experiences of Palestine diasporas like Said, who were forced to leave their homeland, contribute to their cultural trauma and shape their sense of identity; also illuminated the importance of the Nakba as a crucial occurrence in the history of Palestine and the lasting impacts it has on the communal awareness of Palestinians. The study contributes to the understanding of how literature represents and addresses cultural trauma and its implications for the Palestinian community.

Keywords:

Cultural Trauma, Nakba, Resistance Literature, Ghassan Kanafani, Return To Haifa.

Introduction

The inception of Palestinian resistance literature can be delineated to the 1860s, during which it assumed a salient characteristic of Arabic literature. The concept of resistance literature was officially presented with the release of "Resistance Literature in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Palestinian emigrant" authored by Ghassan Kanafani (Allaham, 2009). The category of resistance literature pertains to the written works produced by Palestinian authors who encountered arduous conditions in the aftermath of the 1948 occupation. According to Ghassan Kanafani (1982), the works of these authors represent a noteworthy example of resistance literature with a conscious, tenacious, and vigorous style that demonstrates both continuity and profundity in historical context. The researcher opted to investigate the trauma of the Palestinian people through the literary novels of Kanafani, given his pioneering status and significant influence in the realm of Palestinian resistance literature.

This study examines the literary pieces of Ghassan Kanafani, specifically *Return to Haifa*, through the lens of cultural trauma theory as proposed by Alexander (2004). The present study focuses on the theoretical framework that pertains to the social phenomenon in which individuals' traumatic experiences, such as wars, genocides, or natural disasters, are converted into a shared painful experience through social construction. This process is aimed at establishing or strengthening the collective identity of the group. As per the proposition of Jeffery Alexander (2004), the originator of this concept, the social occurrence in question transpires when a cluster of individuals discerns that they have undergone a distressing event that has a lasting influence on their communal awareness, culminating in a fundamental and irrevocable metamorphosis of their forthcoming identity. According to his analysis, discourse is utilised to construct significant catastrophic events as hazards to the communal identity, necessitating specific measures to protect and maintain this shared identity against potential future dangers. Alexander (2004) posits that socially constructed discursive practises endeavour to withstand challenges to their identity by recognising the factors, outcomes, and responsible individuals for their inception.

The present study has opted to examine literary works of Palestinian resistance in the context of the Nakba, a traumatic event. The term "Nakba" in Arabic refers to the calamitous occurrence that occurred to the Palestinian population in the year 1948. Israel declared its statehood on May 14, 1948, within the region of Palestine. The following day, the Arab coalition launched an attack on the newly formed state of Israel, marking the beginning of the first conflict in the Middle East, commonly known as the Palestine War. The conclusion of the conflict led to the cession of a substantial territory of Palestine by the Arab faction (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). According to Long Yaling (2020), around 75% of the Palestinian populace underwent displacement and subsequently became refugees. The social dynamics within Palestine suffered significant harm and sustained noteworthy setbacks. Long Yaling (2020) asserts that the war and its subsequent effects are commonly regarded as the most disastrous occurrence in the annals of Palestine. Moreover, this catastrophe has had a notable impact on the trajectory of Palestinian history. According to Even-Tzur's (2016) academic publication, the Nakba plays a crucial role in the formation of the communal identity of Palestinians. The prevailing academic discussion focuses on the traumatization of both individuals and the collective impacted by the Nakba.

Study Objective

In order to study the ways in which the characters in Kanafani's resistance novel reflect the cultural trauma that they have experienced during and after Al Nakba.

Literature Review

The application of the term "resistance" to Palestinian literature, according to Harlow (1987), was initially introduced in Ghassan Kanafani's 1966 study titled *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*. In 1966, Ghassan Kanafani published the initial installment of a trilogy of literary analyses exploring the correlation between nationalist politics and literature. The work titled "*Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine, 1948-1966*" posits that the defining characteristic of Palestinian culture is the collective resistance to Israeli occupation, which is deemed to be the "authentic" feature. The attribution of the term to Kanafani confers legitimacy upon its application in his literary works. Kanafani is widely recognised as a literary pioneer and the creator of the phrase "Palestinian/Arab resistance literature." The aforementioned statement presents a structured approach to address the aforementioned relationship. Kanafani's study conducted in 1966 represents a preliminary effort to conceptualise the correlation between literature and resistance within the Palestinian milieu. According to Khoury (2013), the fundamental features of this ideology encompass the belief in a shared identity among Palestinians, irrespective of their physical location, a harmonious blend of pan-Arab and Palestinian nationalism, and a focus on the author's obligation towards communal and national matters, rather than individualistic and introspective issues.

According to Al Hudawi (2003), the literature of Palestinian resistance has emerged as a prominent symbol in the cultural and political spheres of the third world. This literature has also gained significant recognition within contemporary Arabic literature. According to Al Hudawi (2003), it is possible for Palestine resistance literature to possess an inherent political nature. In her 2014 paper, Mariam Danadneh (2014) discussed the political nature of resistance literature, stating that literature is an artistic medium that explores the political, social, and economic realities of a specific context through its unique language and style, thereby imbuing it with novel interpretations and implications. According to Kanafani (1966), the political aspect of Palestinian resistance literature is what distinguishes it from other forms of literature. He argues that over the past decade, the literature of Occupied Palestine has been characterised by its resilience, as it does not succumb to despair or contradict itself despite the challenging circumstances. Additionally, Kanafani notes that this literature does not exhibit nervous spasms or convulsions that stem from a misguided understanding of the situation. The reason for this is that resistance literature does not rely on emotional spontaneity, but rather on a deep and conscientious understanding of the various aspects of the struggle. As such, it positions itself as a crucial element within the struggle. Hence, it circumvents the occurrence of romantic self-reversals that are widespread in most modern Arabic poetry. Abu-Sitta (2016) emphasises the importance of Palestinian literature as a means of documentation that can revitalise the collective memory of Palestinians and Arabs. The study of cultural trauma places significant emphasis on the concept of collective memory. The present study focuses on the literary works of the Palestine resistance and employs Alexander's theory of cultural trauma as a framework for analysis.

As per the definition provided by Alexander (2004), cultural trauma pertains to the interpretation of a calamitous incident by a group's constituents, resulting in a lasting impression on their shared awareness. The enduring impact of the occurrence creates an

inerasable imprint on their memory and fundamentally transforms their subsequent self-identity. The focus of this study is the catastrophic occurrence within Palestinian resistance literature, which is widely referred to as the "Nakba." The Nakba refers to the events of 1948 that resulted in the devastation of Palestinian society and homeland, as well as the permanent displacement of a majority of Palestinian Arabs, as noted by Webman (2009). The observance of Nakba day holds great significance due to its political and social implications, as well as its historical repercussions within the Palestinian community. According to Sa'adi and Abu-Lughod (2007), the observance of Nakba Day carries weight as it poses a challenge to the Zionist account of the formation of Israel as a state and its credibility in the Middle Eastern area. Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) posit that the observance of this day functions as an enduring counter-narrative to the idea that the formation of Israel was a struggle against European bigotry. Furthermore, this presents a difficulty to Israel's ongoing endeavours to eliminate the Palestinian identity and stifle the Palestinian narrative regarding the 1948 conflict.

Return to Haifa is a literary work authored by Ghassan Kanafani, which narrates a tale centred on the Nakba tragedy. This literary work chronicles the encounter of a couple who revisit Haifa two decades after their deportation. Anaqash (2002) asserts that the novelist Kanafani adeptly addresses the themes of identity and the notion of returning to a transformed "home" in the context of the protagonist's enlistment in the Israel military. Singer (2011) offers a critique of the transcultural and transnational implications of Returning to Haifa: the ideological assertions of the text have the potential to overshadow its intricate literary and narrative complexity. The text explores various interconnected storylines pertaining to the concept of homecoming and conducts a thorough analysis of the problematic metaphors associated with the notions of home and land. According to Singer (2011), the novel Returning to Haifa delineates the Palestinian historical landscape from 1948 to 1967, and advances a discursive framework for Palestinian resistance, while critically examining the outcomes and ramifications of this approach. Singer (2011) discusses the concept of subjective narrative specificity in relation to the literary work Returning to Haifa. This work delves into deeply historical themes such as home, land, and return. Singer (2011) mentions, Returning to Haifa processes deeply historical themes of home, land, and return broadly shared by Israelis and Palestinians. In the context of the story, the answer to Said S.'s repeated question - "What is a homeland?" - is forward thinking (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). Said S. concludes, "The homeland is where none of this [exile and dispossession] can happen... Palestine is something worthy of a man bearing arms for, dying for... We were mistaken when we thought the homeland was only the past... the homeland is the future" (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). According to El-Hussari's (2019) analysis, the primary themes in Return to Haifa revolve around the complex psychological challenges encountered by the four main characters, as well as the redefinition of notions of homeland and familial connections. Kanafani's argument centres on a close examination of the discourse of the characters, which exposes their conflicting personal perspectives. This analysis draws on social psychology and attribution theories to highlight the interplay between the textual and real-world contexts.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study deviates from conventional literary analysis techniques by placing greater emphasis on character analysis as opposed to plot-centric approaches. This decision is made in opposition to the traditional Aristotelian viewpoint which prioritises the plot as the focal point in the analysis of narratives. In contrast, current methodologies, as expounded by Bamman, O'Connor, and Smith (2013), underscore the

importance of characters as principal agents propelling the narrative through their actions. In order to provide a rationale for this decision, it is crucial to emphasise the distinct viewpoint that character analysis offers in comprehending the narrative. Characters play a pivotal role in driving the storyline forward and conveying cultural and psychological themes (Min & Park, 2016).

As per the scholarly work of Labatut and Bost (2019), the examination of characters in novels commonly encompasses an investigation into their internal qualities, outward appearances, and behavioural inclinations. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the extraction of character networks, a vital component of this analysis, is frequently performed manually and restricted to a limited set of narratives. Hence, this approach requires the identification of character roles, including protagonists and antagonists, along with the emphasis on characters of notable significance. Furthermore, this process entails assessing the suitability of pertinent literary theories as proposed by Rochat and Kaplan (2014).

This study utilises textual analysis as the primary method for data analysis. This analysis centres on the utilisation of imagery in the characters chosen from Ghassan Kanafani's novel "Return to Haifa" within the theoretical framework of "cultural trauma" as proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004). The primary thesis of this research posits that the selected characters serve as symbolic representations of the Palestinian populace and their cultural anguish. This analysis focuses on the examination of the specific impact of the traumatic event known as Al Nakba on the main characters, and how this event influences their developing sense of identity. Furthermore, it explores how this impact contributes to the formation of cultural trauma.

In order to operationalize the methodology, the researcher engages in the classification of the characters within the literary work, taking into consideration a range of factors such as their names, nationalities, experiences, memories of catastrophic incidents, and ultimate outcomes. This classification aims to assess the fundamental elements that contributed to their distressing encounters and the development of their identities. Subsequently, the analysis delves into visual representations related to the concept of national identity in the literary work, conducting a comprehensive examination of each depiction to elucidate the evolution of national identity consciousness throughout the narrative's progression. This methodology allows for a nuanced exploration of character dynamics and their relationship to the overarching theme of cultural trauma in the context of Palestinian resistance literature.

Discussion of Data

Data analysis conducts by the following protagonists in the novel:

Said—

Said is the main protagonist of the novel, serves as both the conduit for Kanafani's political aspirations and the representative of the Palestinian diaspora, as portrayed by Kanafani. Throughout the novel, Said successfully maintains an air of nonchalance, beginning from his decision to return to Haifa and continuing until his encounter with the Jewish settler who have taken over their home. The prevailing sense of tranquillity was disrupted by the interjection of the elderly Jewish woman, whose utterance of the word "but" served as a catalyst for Said's repressed emotional turmoil to surface with great intensity. The experience of trauma is an objective reality that cannot be concealed or disregarded as a mere emotional state. The

memories of diasporas, such as Said, who were compelled to depart from their homeland, have been ingrained into their individual recollections and sustained as collective memories.

“I mean, your presence here, in this house, our house, Safiyya’s and my house, is another matter. We only came to take a look at things, our things. Maybe you can understand that.”

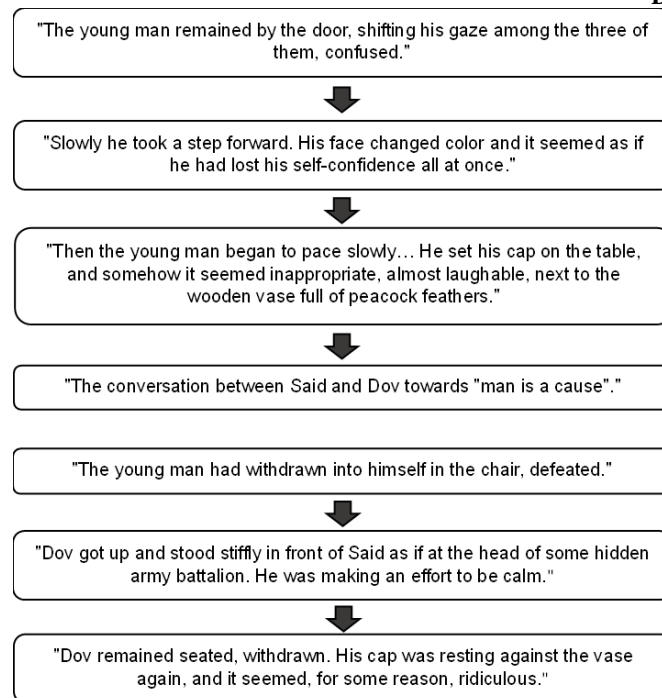
She said quickly: “I understand, but . . .”

Then he lost his composure. “Yes, but! This terrible, deadly, enduring ‘but’ . . .” (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000).

The evolution of Said's self-awareness is evident throughout the narrative, particularly during his pivotal exchange with Khaldun/Dov. This dialogue marks a turning point in Said's psychological journey, as his sense of identity undergoes a discernible transformation. Upon discovering that his eldest son Khaldun had enlisted in the Israeli military, he began to experience uncertainty regarding his resolution to prevent his younger son from joining the guerrilla forces: “...Khalid whom he prevented from joining the Fidayeen by means of that worthless whip he used to call fatherhood! ...What a failure his presence here would turn out to be if he returned and found Khalid waiting at home”(Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). The formation of cultural trauma is observed as a consequence of the sense of identity that is fostered by the aftermath of the trauma, which occurs several years after the disaster, as posited by Alexander's (2004) theoretical framework. However, the traumatic experience did not end there: “It seems to me every Palestinian is going to pay a price. I know many who have paid with their sons. I know now that I, too, paid with a son, in a strange way, but I paid him as a price . . .” (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). The Nakba has had a lasting impact on the Palestinians, as evidenced by Elias Khoury's (2012) assertion that it is a traumatic event that persists to this day. The pain and suffering associated with the Nakba are not limited to historical accounts, but rather are ongoing phenomena.

Khaldun /Dov—

Based on his dual names, this particular role appears to possess a dual identity and a level of complexity. Khaldun, the firstborn of Said and Safiyya, was tragically separated with his parents during the catastrophe of 1948. Dov, who was adopted by a Jewish couple placed in the legal domicile of Palestinian residents. Upon As Said and his wife's return to Haifa, Dov was confronted with the truth regarding his identity. This revelation led to a shift in his previously unwavering commitment to his Israeli identity, ultimately resulting in a state of confusion and eventual breakdown. The present study depicts the cognitive trajectory of the protagonist Khaldun/Dov as portrayed by the author Kanafani, through a comprehensive exposition of the character's actions. This mental journey is presented in the form of a flow chart by the researcher.

**Figure 1**

Hamdi (2011) asserted that Kanafani's portrayal of Dov in his work serves as an interrogation of the Palestinian self, identity, and history. Dov's character similarly adopted Said's inquisitive voice and embarked on a journey of ceaseless self-examination regarding his own identity. When said made the decision to "lose this son", he also expressed Dov's reality at that moment: "...but surely, he's lost himself after all this. He'll never be the same as he was an hour ago" (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). Dov, being a member of the newborn in the aftermath of the Nakba, was inevitably affected by the intergenerational transmission of trauma, thus becoming a victim of the same. The intricate nature of his identity resulted in a direct manifestation of cultural trauma upon his being. Like Said's words, Dov, who has acquired knowledge regarding his true identity, is precluded from reverting to the "Jewish" identity that he previously espoused and defended. Now he currently identifies as both Khaldun and Dov. Dov who joined the Israeli army and was influenced by the living environment can no longer be recognized by his Arab biological parents (Kanafani & Harlow, 2000). And his Arab ancestry may not be entirely embraced by the Israeli military. Dov has been impacted by intergenerational trauma, resulting in a significant disruption to their sense of identity, despite the fact that the traumatic memory in question did not originate from their own personal recollection. This statement corroborates Alexander's (2004) proposition that trauma does not arise from a group's experience of suffering, but rather from the penetration of this profound discomfort into the fundamental essence of a shared sense of identity.

Conclusion

This paper delves into the notion of Palestinian resistance literature by analysing the literary works of Ghassan Kanafani, with a specific emphasis on his novel titled "Return to Haifa." This study employs Jeffrey C. Alexander's cultural trauma theory framework to examine the portrayal of characters in the novel, and their depiction of the communal trauma endured by Palestinians following the Nakba in 1948. The text delves into the importance of the Nakba as a distressing occurrence, resulting in the relocation of a vast majority of the Palestinian

populace and influencing their communal sense of self. The study examined the two primary protagonists in the literary work, the researcher emphasizes the evolution of Said's cognitive processes and his direct encounter with the distressing recollections of the Nakba. Furthermore, the cognitive processes exhibited by Dov throughout the course of the novel demonstrate the progression of his introspective understanding and the influence of his distressing encounters on his sense of identity. The significance of this study is rooted in its examination of Palestinian resistance literature, aims to illuminate the deep-seated influence of the Nakba on the shared consciousness of Palestinians. Consequently, this study contributes to a more comprehensive comprehension of the cultural and psychological aspects of resistance literature, as well as its role in shaping Palestinian's national identity.

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