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Dreams Turned into Devastations: A Critical Reading of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men In The Sun*
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ABSTRACT

From being forced to exile at the age of twelve, to getting assassinated by the Israeli Mossad at the age of thirty-six, Ghassan Fayiz Kanafani's life has stood as a testimony to the horrors created by Israeli occupation. As a teenager, Kanafani became more politically aware and joined the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) as its spokesperson and the editor of its weekly magazine, *Al-Hadaf*. Palestinian journalist Rassem Al-Madhoun was awestruck to witness the transformation of Kanafani from having a fragile grasp of Arabic to one of the most influential writers of the Arab World. Madhoun says, "He extracted the language's most beautiful expressions and became one of its most captivating writers." *Men in the Sun* by Kanafani skillfully depicts the predicament of three Palestinian men who emigrate to Kuwait in search of better living conditions, but die tragically. The author deftly weaves the aspirations of the three men into a poignant narrative that explores the cost the displaced people have to pay in realizing their dreams. Their journey to Kuwait depicts a dream of escape from their constrained status of being a refugee to creating a new life. This article aims at shedding light on the instances in *Men In The Sun* that depict the "Devastation of Dreams," a recurring theme in the novel.

KEYWORDS: Occupation, Resistance, Exile, Aspirations, Homeland, Escape, Dream

INTRODUCTION

Dream according to Sigmund Freud

Freud is perhaps one of the most famous figures associated with dream interpretation. He believed that dreams were a window into the unconscious mind, representing repressed desires and unresolved conflicts. Freud divided dreams into

manifest content (what we consciously experience) and latent content (hidden, symbolic meanings). *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) is Freud's seminal work where he introduced his theories on dream analysis, including concepts like the unconscious mind, manifest and latent content, and the Oedipus complex.

Dream according to Carl Jung

Jung, a contemporary of Freud, had a different approach. He saw dreams as a way to access the collective unconscious and explore archetypal symbols. Jung emphasized the importance of personal and cultural symbols in dream analysis, suggesting that dreams could provide insights into personal growth and self-discovery. *Man and His Symbols* (1964), although written by Jung and several other authors, provides a comprehensive overview of Jungian psychology, including his thoughts on dream symbolism and archetypes.

Dream according to Aaron Beck

Beck, a cognitive psychologist, proposed that dreams are connected to waking thoughts and concerns. He suggested that dreams are a way for individuals to process emotions, problem-solve, and make sense of their experiences. Beck's perspective aligns with the idea that dreams serve adaptive functions for the mind. *Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders* (1975) outlines Beck's cognitive therapy approach, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

ANALYSIS OF *MEN IN THE SUN*

The Characters' Dreams

In *Men In The Sun*, Kanafani portrays the dreams of three Palestinian men—Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan—each representing different generations and perspectives within the Palestinian refugee community. Abu Qais, the elder of the three,

dreams of providing a better future for his family and reclaiming his lost dignity. Assad, the middle-aged man, aspires for financial stability and independence, while Marwan, the youngest, dreams of escaping the crippling poverty that defines his existence.

The Journey to Kuwait

The journey these men undertake to Kuwait is fraught with peril and symbolic meaning. Their decision to travel illegally in a water tanker signifies their desperation and the extreme measures they are willing to take to achieve their dreams. The tanker, in this context, can be seen as a metaphor for the claustrophobic and oppressive conditions under which Palestinian refugees live.

The Devastation of Dreams

Kanafani masterfully depicts how these dreams turn into devastations. Despite their efforts and sacrifices, the men succumb to the harsh conditions of the tanker, dying from suffocation and heat. This tragic end underscores the broader theme of the unattainable nature of their dreams. The novel's conclusion, where the truck driver, Abul Khaizuran, contemplates the futility of their deaths, reflects the pervasive sense of hopelessness and the brutal reality of the Palestinian refugee experience.

Symbolism and Themes

Men In The Sun is rich with symbolism. The sun represents both a source of life and a force of destruction, mirroring the dual nature of the characters' dreams. The tanker, as previously mentioned, symbolizes the suffocating conditions of exile. Kanafani's narrative technique, which juxtaposes the men's hopeful aspirations with their tragic end, effectively highlights the theme of "devastation of dreams."

CONCLUSION

Ghassan Kanafani's *Men In The Sun* is not merely a narrative about the physical journey of three men; it is a profound exploration of the psychological and emotional journeys of Palestinian refugees. The novel poignantly captures the essence of dreams and aspirations as fundamental human experiences, while simultaneously exposing the devastating realities that can shatter those dreams. Through the tragic fates of Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, Kanafani illustrates the broader socio-political struggles and the deep-seated despair experienced by displaced Palestinians.

The sun in the novel is a multifaceted symbol. It represents the harsh, relentless force of the political oppression that Palestinian refugees endure, but also the burning hope and relentless desire for a better future. The water tanker, a vehicle meant to transport life-sustaining water, ironically becomes a tomb, symbolizing the betrayal of dreams by the very means intended to achieve them.

Kanafani's work transcends its narrative to become a timeless commentary on the human condition. It underscores the fragility of dreams when confronted with the harshness of reality, a theme that resonates universally. The characters' deaths are not just personal tragedies but emblematic of the collective suffering of an entire people. The novel compels readers to confront the human cost of political conflict and the enduring impact of displacement and dispossession.

Kanafani's narrative technique, combining stark realism with rich symbolism, invites readers to engage deeply with the characters' inner worlds. His portrayal of their dreams as both a source of strength and a pathway to devastation provides a nuanced understanding of the refugee experience. This duality reflects the complex interplay between hope and despair, resilience and vulnerability, that defines the lives of displaced individuals.

In conclusion, *Men In The Sun* remains a powerful and relevant work, shedding light on the ongoing plight of Palestinian refugees. Kanafani's ability to weave personal stories into a broader political and existential tapestry makes the novel a seminal piece in Palestinian literature. It serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring struggle for dignity and justice, urging readers to recognize and empathize with the human stories behind the headlines. By integrating the perspectives of Freud, Jung, and Beck on dreams, this research article delves into the psychological dimensions of Kanafani's characters, enhancing our understanding of their aspirations and the tragic outcomes of their quest for a better life. The comprehensive analysis of *Men In The Sun* underscores its significance as a literary and political work, highlighting Kanafani's enduring legacy as a voice for the Palestinian people.

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