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“The Frying Pan” and “The Battle of The Stomachs:” The Workers’ Struggle and Possibilities for Resistance in Men in The Sun and Wild Thorns

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“The Frying Pan” and “The Battle of The Stomachs:”

The Workers’ Struggle and Possibilities for Resistance in *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns*

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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“The Frying Pan” and “The Battle of The Stomachs:”

The Workers’ Struggle and Possibilities for Resistance in *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns*

Introduction:

Men in The Sun is a novella written by Ghassan Kanafani, originally published in Arabic in 1963, and later translated into English by Hillary Kilpatrick. The novella takes place ten years after the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel, which occurred in 1948. This year is an extremely significant one in Palestinian history because it led to unprecedented land seizures, mass exile, and forced displacement for Palestinians. “Dubbed by Palestinians “al-Nakba,” 1948 forced approximately 750,000 Palestinians out of their homeland, many of whom became refugees and who continue to live in refugee camps until the present day” (Mir 122). Ghassan Kanafani was born in Acre, Palestine in 1936 where he lived until 1948 when his family was displaced by the occupation. After the Nakba, Kanafani’s family settled in Damascus, where he completed his studies and worked as a school teacher before moving to Kuwait and starting his career as a writer for the Arab National Movement (ANM). The ANM was a pan-Arab nationalist group founded by George Habash, which eventually became the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a secular Marxist and socialist organization founded in 1967. As a journalist and novelist, Kanafani was known as a militant defender of the armed struggle for Palestinian liberation and served as the official spokesperson for the PFLP between 1970 and 1972.

In 1972 Kanafani was assassinated along with his young niece, in a car bombing organized by the Israeli intelligence agency. Although he was only 36 years old when he was murdered by the Zionist state, Ghassan Kanafani’s legacy is undeniable and his writing continues

to lend power to the voices of Palestinians and their liberation struggle to this day. In his book *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present*, Bashir Abu-Manneh recalls, “his obituary in the Daily Star described him well: a ‘commando who never fired a gun’: ‘his weapon was a ballpoint pen and his arena newspaper pages. And he hurt the enemy more than a column of commandos’” (72). This characterization of Kanafani’s unwavering commitment to his country and his craft translates into his literary works and the genre which he dubbed Palestinian resistance literature. “It was Ghassan Kanafani who first applied the term “literature of resistance” (Adab al-Muqawama) in 1968 to describe every work with a patriotic or political stance in his study, *Adab al-Muqawama fi Filastin alMuhtalla 1948-1966* (The Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine 1948-1966).” (Tahboub 61) According to Frantz Fanon, this genre of writing “may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation.” (134) The influence of Kanafani’s position as a stateless refugee after the Nakba can be seen in his political expression through this “literature of combat.” In its portrayal of the struggles faced by Palestinians in exile, *Men in The Sun* seamlessly embeds Kanafani’s fictional narrative with nuanced political discourse, which complicates one-dimensional perceptions of resistance and life under Israeli occupation.

Men in The Sun tells the story of four migrant workers in exile on their journey from Basra, Iraq to Kuwait in search of economic opportunities. The three main protagonists represent three different generations of Palestinian refugees who have experienced distinct reactions to ten years of life under occupation. The oldest character is Abu Qais, an old man who spent most of his life living peacefully in his village before occupation. When his village was occupied in 1948, Abu Qais was stripped of his land, livelihood, and sense of self. Abu Qais’s narrative reflects a deep connection to the land which was taken from him and speaks to the greater sense

of dispossession and grief felt by Palestinians after the Nakba. In the 10 long years since the loss of his land, Abu Qais has lived in a humiliating state of stagnancy as a refugee in his own country. Although he is reluctant to set off on this journey to Kuwait due to his old age and fear of the unknown, Abu Qais is determined to find a way to provide for his family who lives in dire poverty and soon finds himself in the precarious position of being smuggled across checkpoints and borders, along with Assad and Marwan.

Assad is a young man who had been actively involved in political demonstrations and protests against the occupation during his time living in Jordan. Because of his precarious position as an undocumented Palestinian in exile and his acts of defiance against the state, Assad faced backlash from authorities and found himself faced with innumerable threats to his physical safety and livelihood. He tried multiple times to escape the physical and economic consequences of his political activism, however, he was deceived by smugglers and never successfully reached Kuwait. Thus, this journey in the water tanker across the desert to Kuwait was Assad's last attempt at establishing a new, safe, and prosperous life for himself.

The youngest of the main characters is Marwan, a sixteen-year-old boy who has lived as a refugee in Palestine for the majority of his life. Even though he is just a child, Marwan is charged with the task of leaving school and providing for his mother and siblings after they have been abandoned by his father who remarried for financial stability. Despite the pressure of his situation, Marwan's narrative does not reflect the same feelings of loss and mourning which haunt the older characters. He is young and hopeful that through this journey he will prove himself capable of supporting his family and establishing an honorable life for himself.

The story begins with an emphasis on the three protagonists' sheer destitution and lack of material resources. They each find themselves in Basra, Iraq in search of a smuggler to take them

across the desert to Kuwait, but none of them have the means to afford this voyage. Soon enough, the final protagonist, Abul Khaizuran is introduced and offers to take them across the desert to Kuwait in his empty water tanker. Abul Khaizuran is a middle-aged Palestinian man who is employed as a water tanker driver for a wealthy Kuwaiti businessman named Haj Rida. Abul Khaizuran's primary reason for choosing to help the other characters in their efforts to emigrate lies not in a moralistic or patriotic sentiment but simply in his desire to make some extra money. He confidently ensures his three passengers that he can take them across the checkpoints and the border undetected and that they will only have to endure two short instances of sitting inside the burning hot water tanker along the way. During the last leg of their journey, however, Abul Khaizuran's plan goes horribly wrong and he proves himself incapable of leading his three companions safely to Kuwait when they suffocate and die in the water tanker.

Since most of the story is conveyed through memories and flashbacks, a distinct sense of temporal instability is established from the very beginning of the novella. The present moment is constantly fragmented and disrupted by the characters' memories of the past ten years since the Nakba. Through these memories, the reader gains insight into how each character has come to find themselves in their current predicament as a result of their economic insecurity and search for financial stability. In their efforts to liberate themselves from the political and economic dispossession they have each experienced since the Nakba, Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan are put in a position where they not only lose their country but also their lives.

Wild Thorns is a novel written by Sahar Khalifeh which takes place in the occupied city of Nablus five years after the defeat of the Syrian, Egyptian, and Jordanian armies by Israel in 1967 (referred to as Al Naksa in Arabic). The novel, originally entitled *Al Subar*, was published in Arabic in 1976 and later translated into English by Trevor LeGassick and Elizabeth Fernea in

1985. Sahar Khalifeh was born in Nablus, Palestine in 1941 and began writing seriously after the war in 1967. In an interview with Penny Johnson, Khalifeh spoke to the deep effect that the Naksa had on her as a writer, stating, “1967 introduced us-West Bank intellectuals and artists- to the poetry of Palestinians "inside," those who had lived in the Israeli state since 1948” (24). As a native of Nablus who remained in Palestine during the escalation of the occupation after 1967, Khalifeh draws the focus of her novel away from Kanafani’s pan-Arab perspective, and more towards a reevaluation of the values within Palestinian society and the revolutionary movement on the “inside.” *Wild Thorns* takes a lot of the same questions which arise from the post-Nakba context of *Men in The Sun*, such as the relationship between economic and national liberation, and the role of armed struggle in the revolution, and turns them inwards so as to highlight the internal fragmentation and disparate conceptions of resistance which exist within the occupied territories after the Naksa.

In *Wild Thorns*, Sahar Khalifeh juxtaposes the narratives of the two protagonists Usama and Adil in order to reveal differing reactions to life under Israeli occupation, perspectives of patriotic duty, and modes of resistance. Usama, just returning to his hometown of Nablus after having left in 1967, is presented as an idealist who sees armed resistance as the only possible path to liberation and considers martyrdom his ultimate purpose and patriotic duty. Adil, on the other hand, has a very different conception of resistance which is deeply grounded in economic survival and his ability to provide for his family’s day-to-day necessities. In his analysis of *Wild Thorns*, Bashir Abu-Manneh establishes the centrality of the workers’ struggle to the construction of narratives of popular resistance in Khalifeh’s novel; he argues, that “her critique is presented from the vantage point of a rooted, everyday, feminist-workerist perspective: a realism from below” (124). While Usama is associated with revolutionary idealism, armed

resistance, and detachment from the material realities of life in Palestine after the Naksa, Adil represents this worker's struggle and steadfast resistance to the economic pressures of life under occupation, which he refers to as "the battle of the stomachs".

The first chapter of this essay focuses on the ways in which *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns* both portray the tension between their characters' possibilities for resistance and their economic struggles under occupation. In *Men in The Sun*, Kanafani represents the workers' efforts towards economic stability through the metaphor of "the frying pan." In the first section of this chapter, I will establish the primary factors which lead the protagonists of *Men in The Sun* to "dive into the frying pan" by emigrating to Kuwait. I pay special attention to the ways in which Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan's memories reveal their respective responses to ten years of life under occupation, specifically taking into account the generational differences which distinguish them. Through this analysis, I will show that these characters' attempt to escape the economic and political dispossession of life under occupation not only removes them from their homeland, but also thwarts any hopes they have of self-realization and possibilities for resistance.

While Kanafani's portrayal of the devastating consequences of "diving into the frying pan" shows how the economic struggles of life after the Nakba lead his characters away from both their country and their ability to defend it; Khalifeh positions the workers' struggle, represented by Adil's "battle of the stomachs," as a form of steadfast resistance, or in Arabic *sumud*. The concept of *sumud* is what Timothy Seidel refers to as "the sort of resistance that takes the form of an incarnational hope embodied in the mundane that is not spectacular or flashy, but that resists nonetheless in its quiet, non-triumphalist, non-dominating act of existence in the land"(33). In contrast to the life-negating nature of the workers' struggle in *Men in The*

Sun, the second half of my first chapter will discuss Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* and this novel's positioning of the workers' every day "battle of the stomachs" as indispensable to her characters' survival and ability to remain in their homeland despite the economic pressures of life under occupation after the defeat of 1967. I construct my analysis by drawing out the dichotomy between the novel's two protagonists, Usama and Adil, and their respective forms of resistance: the worker's steadfastness, or *sumud*, and armed struggle.

In the second chapter, I focus on the varying ways in which Kanafani and Khalifeh convey the internal fragmentation and disunity between Palestinians in their respective works as primarily based on economic factors and class conflict. In *Men in The Sun*, Abul Khaizuran turned away from his commitment to the national cause and armed struggle because of his castration which occurred as a result of injuries he sustained in 1948 during his time as a freedom fighter. I begin my analysis by examining how this traumatic event leads Abul Khaizuran to reject his past sense of patriotism and value money over morality. I further argue that, in his physical, economic, and moral impotence, Abul Khaizuran represents an inept Palestinian leadership who drives his people away from their homeland, and abandons them in exile.

Just as Abul Khaizuran's actions in the closing scene of *Men in The Sun* ultimately prove him incapable of leading his compatriots towards economic liberation or national unity, the privileged classes in *Wild Thorns* also contribute to the dispossession and alienation of the workers in the West Bank. By close reading one scene in which an unnamed worker recounts the factors which lead him to seek work in Israel, I will analyze Khalifeh's critique of the failures of bourgeois nationalism to create national unity. While Abul Khaizuran's pursuit of money over morals leads him to abandon his sense of patriotic duty, the privileged classes in *Wild Thorns*

seek to impose hypocritical standards of patriotism on their working-class compatriots. Through this close reading, I will show that in her portrayal of the worker's rejection of his wealthy former employer's materially detached bourgeois nationalism, Khalifeh defends the worker's decision to prioritize his livelihood over the economic interests of the privileged class. Once again, Khalifeh refuses to demonize Palestinian workers in Israel and she instead positions their steadfast efforts to remain in their homeland by any means necessary as a powerful form of resistance through *sumud*.

My goal in this essay is to explore the tensions that arise in *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns* from their portrayals of Palestinian workers' efforts towards economic survival and resistance to Israeli occupation. Specifically, I focus on the novels' respective depictions of the fragmenting effect of conceiving of a revolution without considering the material realities of the working class. I establish this critique by analyzing the subjugation and abandonment of the protagonists of *Men in the Sun* as well as the imposition of absolutist notions of patriotism on the workers in *Wild Thorns*. I further seek to show how, through their varying depictions of the subjectivities and nuances in the characters' responses to life under occupation, Kanafani and Khalifeh both refuse to romanticize any singular mode of combatting Zionist oppression and thereby open greater possibilities for national liberation. Ultimately, I argue that *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns* both effectively dispel the possibility of achieving national unity and liberation without prioritizing the voices of the working masses.

Chapter One: “The Frying Pan” and “The Battle of The Stomachs”

In both *Men in the Sun* and *Wild Thorns* national identity, notions of resistance, and material reality seem to be placed at odds with one another. In this chapter, however, I argue that the real work of the novels is to show how inextricably bound they are through Kanafani and Khalifeh’s centering of the worker’s experience and focus on class struggle. While the struggle for economic survival effectively disconnects Kanafani’s characters physically and emotionally from the national struggle and stifles their possibilities for resistance, Khalifeh positions the workers’ struggle in *Wild Thorns* as a form of political resistance to occupation through steadfastness or *sumud*. Furthermore, both writers make clear the connection between economic and national liberation and engage in critiques of monolithic or one-dimensional conceptions of resistance.

In the first section of this chapter, the relationship between class struggle and notions of resistance will be established through an analysis of “the frying pan” image in *Men in the Sun*, and “the battle of the stomachs” in *Wild Thorns*. These two metaphors serve as symbols of the daily struggles for economic survival faced by the workers in the novels. In *Men in The Sun*, Kanafani’s characters “dive into the frying pan” when they leave their families, homes, and country behind in search of economic opportunities in Kuwait. The occupation imposes physical and economic immobility, forcing these characters to not only abandon their personal hopes and dreams but also turn away from their respective commitments to the national struggle and past modes of resistance. As Bashir Abu-Manneh states, “*Men in the Sun* makes clear that the present for Palestinian refugees is about soulless and dubious interactions, money and opportunism, corruption and empty promises” (80). In my analysis, I highlight the generational differences which distinguish each character from the next in their reactions to ten years of life under

occupation. In the end, however, these generational differences are shown to make no difference in their ability to withstand the suffocating grip of “the frying pan.” The protagonists' efforts tragically fail as they are trapped in the vessel meant to bring them to a new life of economic empowerment in Kuwait, resulting in their death and abandonment in exile.

In *Wild Thorns*, Khalifeh illustrates “the battle of the stomachs”: the everyday steadfast resistance or *sumud* embraced by Adil as an alternative mode of resistance to his cousin Usama’s armed guerilla tactics. Usama, however, holds an absolutist view of armed resistance and does not understand how, in the same way that the workers in *Men in The Sun* are forced to emigrate by economic necessity, his friends and family must conceive of resistance as they are bound by economic dependence on institutions of occupation in order to survive. By presenting this nuance in how her characters approach resistance and by centering the worker’s struggles, Khalifeh invites the reader to consider the futility of absolutist notions of resistance which disregard the material realities and livelihood of the working masses.

“*The Frying Pan*”:

“In most of Ghassan Kanafani’s stories, the national question is connected with (and linked to) the class question. Kanafani creates many crushed characters that throb with life and that testify to their creator’s existential and intellectual conviction that the tragedy of losing a homeland is first of all a tragedy of the poor” (Ashur 40).

The main characters in *Men in the Sun* must emigrate in order to survive and sustain their families who live in conditions of total economic destitution. Because of the physical and economic immobility imposed on them by occupation, each character is driven to take the journey from Palestine to Kuwait in search of financial stability. The characters have varying

attitudes towards this decision because of generational differences in their experiences since the Nakba. By first highlighting how these differences in age affect their respective reasonings toward leaving, the metaphor of “the frying pan” will later be revealed as what ultimately leads each character, indiscriminately, to their death.

Abu Qais’s narrative is heavy with nostalgia and grief for his land, olive trees, and life before the Nakba. The novella opens with a memory of Abu Qais’s life ten years prior, through which Kanafani establishes the love and longing he has for his land, a profound and direct attachment which he likens to the love of his wife. Kanafani writes, “Every time he breathed the scent of the earth, as he lay on it, he imagined that he was sniffing his wife’s hair when she had just walked out of the bathroom, after washing with cold water” (21). The land in this instance is not represented as some inanimate or material object but rather, it is personified, imbued with life, given a heartbeat and a pulse. Abu Qais’s deep connection to the land is the characteristic which most distinguishes him from the other characters in the story. It also signifies a generational distinction between him and the younger men whose understandings of their personal and national identity were formed after, or in tandem with, the process of occupation, displacement, and loss of their forefathers’ land. He remembers life before these ten long years, when he was able to live in dignity and self-reliance, which he can now only reach through memories and flashbacks of his land, olive trees, and people.

Having been stripped of his land, olive trees, and ability to provide for his family, Abu Qais has felt the weight of time passing while he has been stuck in stagnation and economic impotence. In the ten years since the occupation of his village, Abu Qais and his family have lived as refugees in their own country, struggling to get by and meet the basic necessities for their survival. After all these years, Abu Qais’s wife finally convinces him that he must emigrate

to Kuwait in order to work and send money back to his family. Even after committing to efforts to emigrate, Abu Qais remains conflicted. He is torn by weighing between options; whether it would have been better to remain in his homeland and live out his days in poverty, or whether it is still worth it for him, at this late point in his life, to try and redeem ten years of stagnancy by freeing himself from the grip of his memory, as well as his physical and economic immobility under occupation. On page 63, as the characters continue on their journey in the water tanker, Abu Qais thinks to himself, "I'm an old man; I may arrive or I may not. And do you think the life you lead here is better than death?... Will you spend the whole of your life eating the flour ration for one kilo of which you sacrifice all your honor at the doors of officials?" This line of questioning is seemingly infinite, where the argument that death as his escape is more honorable than the endless instances of suffering at the hands of external forces. Here, he would rather die with the memories he has than live making new ones. In Edward Said's "Reflections on Exile and Other Essays" he writes, "impelled by exile and dislocation, the Palestinian must carve a path for himself in existence, which is by no means a given or stable reality for him. Like the land he left, his past seems broken off just before it could bring forth fruit; yet the man has family, responsibilities, life itself to answer to, in the present" (Said 52). Here, Said illuminates the struggle of Abu Qais's internal debate and external reality. The loss of his land and livelihood, and the fear of continuing to submit to the subjugation and indignity of occupation, are the primary factors that drive Abu Qais to commit to the journey which ultimately ends his life.

As a way of contextualizing Abu Qais's character, Kanafani allows the reader to travel ten years back in time to life before the occupation and tells the story of his old friend, Ustaz Selim. Abu Qais remembers, "God was good to you when he made you die one night before the

wretched village fell into the hands of the Jews” (Kanafani 23). Abu Qais’s memory of Ustaz Selim displays a deep longing for his life before the occupation, as well as a twisted sense of jealousy of the fact that Ustaz Selim had not lived to see his land occupied, his people dispersed, and his prospects for self-realization shattered. From Abu Qais’s perspective, Ustaz Selim dying on his land, his dignity and autonomy intact, serves as an epic triumph over the occupation and reclamation of political agency. These memories reveal that the major difference between Abu Qais and the other characters in *Men in The Sun* is that he is an old man who lived most of his life before the occupation, free from the sense of dependence that he finds himself faced with ten years later.

Like Abu Qais, economic impotence is also a great source of hardship and shame for Assad and is the main reason behind his need to migrate to Kuwait and search for work. Although Abu Qais and Assad both faced economic struggles following the Nakba, Assad’s memories are not rooted in idyllic memories of Palestinian land or nostalgia for better days past. Whereas Abu Qais lived most of his life before the occupation, tending to his land, trees, and family, Assad, as a young man, had yet to establish a life for himself whatsoever. Therefore, rather than idealize or long for the past, Assad’s narration reflects the ways in which the political and economic disenfranchisement of Palestinians following the Nakba has been foundational to his being, seeping into every aspect of his life. Circumstances under occupation force Assad to forfeit the possibility of choosing his partner, his work, and even his political activism. In order to escape this predicament, Assad is forced to submit to external forces- from accepting money from his uncle in exchange for marrying his daughter, to entrusting complete strangers such as Abul Abd and Abul Khaizuran with his life.

Assad must constantly sacrifice self-determination for dependence on others in order to survive. For instance, Assad feels driven to agree to a loveless marriage arranged by his uncle for the sake of financial stability, “Otherwise he would never have collected fifty dinars in the whole of his life” (Kanafani 64). Assad’s lack of resources or agency in his homeland makes him feel that he must sell himself to his uncle in order to save himself from political and economic imprisonment. Through the narration of his memories, Assad expresses the feelings of humiliation and objectification which this arrangement evokes in him, explaining, “[His uncle] wanted to buy him for his daughter as you buy a sack of manure for a field” (33). Although Assad seems to be a resilient person with a strong sense of pride, it is revealed during these moments in which Assad’s narrative slips into memories of the past, that he has in fact been continuously faced with dehumanizing experience after dehumanizing experience. Assad’s frustration with his dependence on external forces is expressed throughout this narrative and extends beyond his personal dispossession, speaking to a wider sense of dispossession felt by displaced Palestinians after the Nakba. Not only must Assad risk his life by plunging “into the frying pan” (64) and traveling as a fugitive in order to escape the consequences of his political resistance and economic impotence, but he must also give up his hopes for autonomy, self-realization, and previous involvement in the national struggle.

In addition to his economic motivations for migrating, Assad is in a particularly precarious situation because he has faced consequences in Jordan for his participation in political demonstrations against the occupation and is thus on the radar of the authorities, in danger of imprisonment or worse. Unlike the other characters, Assad had already gone through a life-threatening experience attempting to travel as a fugitive from Jordan to Baghdad. Assad endured the cruelty and deception of a dishonest smuggler, Abul-Abd, who promised to save his

life but ultimately abandoned him in the desert miles from the Iraqi border. Before ripping off and abandoning Assad to fend for himself Abul-Abd shouts, “What do you think will happen? Your name is registered at all the frontier posts. If they see you with me now without a passport or an exit visa, a plotter against the state, what do you think will happen? Stop making difficulties” (30). Finding himself in exile as a “plotter against the state” without papers or finances, Assad is placed in a position of extreme vulnerability and complete loss of choice or autonomy. Assad’s narrative points to the immense barriers placed on Palestinians physically and economically, and the inhumanity with which migrant workers and political asylum seekers are treated in their efforts towards survival and self-sufficiency. Not only must Assad repeatedly risk his life by traveling as a fugitive in order to escape the consequences of his political resistance and economic impotence, but he also gives up his dignity, agency, and above all, his life.

For the younger characters in the novella, Assad and Marwan, the economic realities of living under occupation are all they have ever known. These characters have lived most of their lives after 1948 and serve as representations of the Palestinian youth whose personal and political understanding of their homeland has been deeply entwined in and fundamentally based on their experiences living under occupation. Thus, the events of the ten years since the Nakba do not push Marwan into a state of stagnancy like Abu Qais nor one of dependence like Assad, but rather propel him into action and force him to prematurely become the backbone of his family’s livelihood. Over the course of their journey, Marwan thinks about all the lessons which he has yet to learn, focusing on the growth that working in Kuwait may have to offer. Marwan fantasizes about the success he will have in fulfilling his role as the head of his family, vowing that “he would send every penny he earned to his mother, and overwhelm her and his brothers and sisters with gifts till he made the mud hut into a paradise on earth and his father bit his nails

with regret”(43). As a young boy who has had to mature too fast, Marwan still retains a sense of youthful hope as he seeks to grow into manhood and self-sufficiency on both a personal and economic level. His sense of hope, unlike the older characters, is intact, and he sees himself as the gateway to transform his family’s life. Perhaps romantic with his endeavors, the “paradise on earth” that Marwan wishes for his family is similar to the memories Abu Qais had of Palestine before the occupation.

Similarly to Assad, Marwan’s father also remarries for economic reasons, abandoning his role as a father and provider, and thereby imposes a massive economic burden onto his son. Marwan’s father had experienced first hand the privation of living as a refugee in his own homeland and, “His one and only ambition was to move from the mud house that he had occupied in the camp for ten years and live under a concrete roof, as he used to say” (40). Despite his being only a young teenager, Marwan’s memories of his father reflect a notably mature understanding and a shocking amount of compassion regarding his abandonment and the consequences this decision had on his family and his own future. Marwan “could quite understand his father’s circumstances and he could forgive them” (39). He expresses little bitterness towards his father and brother for their efforts at self-realization and courageously takes on the burden of fully stepping up to the plate and providing for his family in their absence. Whereas Abu Qais is held as a prisoner to his memory and can find no justifications for the pain which he has faced during these ten past years, Marwan’s understanding and resilience can perhaps be attributed to the fact that he has spent most of his life living with the constraints and tribulations of occupation and is thus more capable of coming to terms with and meeting the challenges of its reality.

Marwan's older brother, Zakaria, had held years of resentment towards him for pursuing his education rather than leaving school to work. Kanafani describes the relationship shared between the brothers as strained because "Zakaria had been quite unable to understand why he had to spend ten years providing for the family while Marwan went off to school every day like a baby" (Kanafani 43). Zakaria had left school and emigrated to Kuwait in search of economic opportunity, helping to support the family until, eventually, he married and stopped sending money. Zakaria compares his brother to a baby, seeing Marwan's hopes as ignorant of the struggles he has been put through, and out of jealous inclinations, Zakaria wishes for Marwan to endure the same fate as him. After Zakaria stops sending money, Marwan is given no choice but "to leave school and plunge into the frying pan" (43), taking on the role of provider for himself and his family. The metaphor of "the frying pan" is established when Marwan recalls his brother telling him, "You're still a boy and know nothing more of life than a babe in arms knows of its house. School teaches nothing. It only teaches laziness. So leave it and plunge into the frying pan with the rest of humanity" (Kanafani 64). The word choice used by Kanafani when describing Marwan's entering the workforce is extremely powerful in that the "frying pan" into which Marwan must plunge seems to allude to the sizzling metal tank in which he and his companions meet their end.

The hot tanker, symbolized by the frying pan, acts as a physical representation of life in exile and the inescapable barriers imposed on Palestinians after the Nakba; the burn is inevitable and will hold these characters until death. The water tanker itself is described as an oven-like prison locked within an even more hellish and perilous prison — the desert. Kanafani writes, "This desert was like a giant in hiding, flogging their heads with whips of fire and boiling pitch. But could the sun kill them and all the stench imprisoned in their breasts?" (Kanafani 63) This

excerpt suggests that the characters' freedom from, or the riddance of "all that stench in their breasts" can only be accomplished through either escape from this insidious prison—symbolized by the water tanker, the desert, and national borders—or through death. It is important to note here that the characters are taking this perilous trip because of financial necessity, the other "giant in hiding," bidding the characters to quantify in dinars the price of searching for stability. In Omer Elmahdi and Abdulrahman Hezams's "The Deep Meaning of Symbolism Significance in *Men in the Sun*" they write, "The tank is the image of hell and the height of the tragedy of the Palestinians, the great prison they have to destroy if they want to survive"(Elmahdi Hezam 36). The writers suggest that until the obstacles to their livelihood are destroyed, the survival of the characters is one of imprisonment, whether within Palestine or in exile. The obstacle that propels the three characters to be in that water tanker is economic, and the height of tragedy is only amplified by their choices made out of necessity.

Each characters' decision to "dive into the frying pan" in *Men in The Sun* only results in the loss of their physical ties to their homeland and ultimately, their tragic death and abandonment on a garbage heap. This representation of the workers' struggle suggests that in the end, their efforts towards economic liberation were all in vain. In this first half of the chapter, I have used the generational differences which are portrayed through the characters' memories as a means of arguing that the frying pan does not distinguish or discriminate between the older or younger characters. Just as Abu Qais, despite his old age, must resolve to make a new beginning for himself after ten years of stagnancy and destitution, the young Marwan is also thrust "into the frying pan with the rest of humanity" (Kanafani 64). Through this analysis, it is evident that the perilous voyage which leads each character away from their families, homes, and country, was not a voluntary personal choice for any of them. The burden of economic reality outweighs each

of the character's sense of hope in themselves and for each other, becoming the lens through which they project their individual lives and collective identity. The status of being a Palestinian in exile is equated with not only the land being taken but also the inability to make decisions without factoring in economic consequence. Muna Tareh writes, "Palestinian refugees must first change the materiality of their refugee conditions in order to conceive a revolutionary vision through which true liberation can be achieved" (195). In this sense, the novel reveals the ways in which economic necessity leads to the self-abnegation of the protagonists, as well as their disconnection from their homeland and possibilities for resistance.

"The Battle of The Stomachs:"

Just as Kanafani sets the tone of his novel by highlighting the faith-crushing formalities, restrictions, and limitations of mobility that the Palestinian people endure because of occupation, Khalifeh also presents these very issues from the onset of *Wild Thorns*. The novel opens with Usama's disheartening experience of crossing a military checkpoint into the West Bank, after having spent 5 years working abroad. In his review, Phillip Metres writes, "Because it begins in the point of a view of Usama, a Palestinian romantic turned revolutionary who has been living abroad and unused to life under military occupation, the novel invites and interpellates the reader-regardless of national origin-into the subject position of the exile" (Metres 88). Usama's hopeful expectations of his return are disrupted early on by the realities of occupation and the changes of five years gone by, which he encounters upon his arrival. As he is crossing the checkpoint on the way to his family home in Nablus, Usama is interrogated by an IDF soldier. "Why did your mother move to Shekem?" asks the soldier- to which Usama responds, "'She likes Nablus.' ... 'Why does she like Shekem?' ... 'She's got lots of relatives in Nablus'" (13).

Usama's attitude at the checkpoint upon his return to Nablus gives the reader insight into his political disposition quite early on. As Loubha Qutami and Omar Zahzah state, "We have lost our land. We think this is the worst of it. But we cannot lose our words" (76). "When it comes to power, and specifically the symbolic power of Zionism, Palestinians and their allies need to escape the frame. To smash it to bits. This is anti-normalization work"(80). His insistence on using the Arabic name for Nablus, rather than the Hebrew "Shekem," in the face of the Israeli officer gives him the sense that he is resisting the narrative and legitimacy of the occupier's language and asserting ownership over as well as belonging to his city. Through this opening scene, Khalifeh portrays Usama's resistance to the changes which have occurred during his absence and his absolute refusal to work within the institutions of occupation, even at the most basic level of language.

In his conviction to deny the occupier's reality, however, Usama is also unable to acknowledge or accept the ways in which Palestinians have had to adapt to the political and socio-economic changes after the Naksa. In her review of *Wild Thorns*, Fadia Faqir notes, "Usama is a symbol of the Palestinian who lives outside Palestine, in the Arab or Western countries, and comes back to scrutinize and sometimes punish the Palestinian Arabs who chose not to leave their country but to live under occupation, accepting all the complications and concessions that accompany that choice" (Faqir 1407). When Usama is confronted with the realities of life under occupation, he chooses to deny or reject the imposition of any narrative of resistance besides that which he has committed himself to- the armed struggle. Following his return, Usama fails to take into account the struggles of the workers on "the inside," and from his point of view, the complacency he perceives on behalf of those around him represents a normalization of life under occupation and above all, a failure to the cause. He consistently

judges characters like Adil and his fellow workers for working in Israeli factories and feels as though they, “like everyone else here, have abandoned the revolutionary movement” (Khalifeh 98). Usama sees his cousin Adil as crossing the picket line every time he goes to work in Tel Aviv and displays little regard for his lived experiences and economic struggles, as symbolized by “the battle of the stomachs.” In his one-dimensional conception of resistance, Usama cannot recognize the political act of remaining inside Palestine by any means. Thus, the two main characters’ narratives are in constant tension with each other, searching for consensus between armed struggle organized on “the outside” and the material realities of workers on “the inside.”

From the very beginning of the novel, the reader immediately becomes aware of the dichotomy between internal and external worlds on both a narrative and physical level. The distinction between Palestinians in exile (on “the outside”) and those living under occupation (on “the inside”) is made extremely clear when Usama is reunited with his cousin Adil and asks him, “What are you doing about the situation here? What have you done over there, on the inside?” To which Adil reluctantly replies, “The same as what you’ve done to oppose what’s outside” (28). In this reunion scene, Usama simultaneously expresses his exasperation at the state of the resistance on the inside, while also revealing the extent to which he has become alienated from the lived experiences of his people during his time outside of Palestine. He goes so far as to tell Adil, “You’re the ones to blame. You’re the ones who hold the key to the situation” (28). It is clear in his accusations that Usama does not consider himself one of those on the inside, and therefore is not to blame. This impression is not lost on Adil as he retorts, “Say ‘we,’ why don’t you!” It is clear that Adil senses Usama’s disconnect from his people and the material realities of life under occupation through his inability to see the multidimensional and nuanced nature of conceptions of resistance for the working masses on “the inside.”

While Usama was gone for the five years following the Naksa, Adil remained in Nablus and “epitomizes the structural changes that have taken place in the West Bank as a result of the Israeli occupation” (Abu-Manneh 126). Adil is portrayed as a tortured pragmatist, whom Usama’s mother describes as “working away day and night” (31). His personal form of resistance lies in his commitment to enduring the economic pressures of life under occupation and remaining in his homeland despite the challenges and sacrifices that may come with that decision. Suha Sabbagh notes, “Khalifeh’s strong point lies in her ability to depict the inner struggle of workers who must find a balance between meeting the financial needs of their families by working on building settlements, often on land confiscated from their own village, and their desire to assert national and individual rights” (63). Adil is desperately dedicated to ensuring the survival and stability of his family and fellow workers above any ideology or cause and he feels that, “through supporting his family and allowing them to have a dignified life, he ensures the survival of the Palestinian cause itself” (Cotter 9). His determination to provide for his family despite the hardships of occupation, allows them to stay on their forefathers’ land and can be read as a political act of resistance to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians which occurred after the Nakba and worsened after the Naksa. Thus, Khalifeh positions Adil’s “battle of the stomachs” as a form of steadfast resistance, or *sumud*, which she presents as an alternative to his cousin Usama’s guerilla tactics.

Over the course of the novel, Usama repeatedly seeks to reason with his cousin and convince him to give up his job in Tel Aviv and his family’s livelihood in the name of the cause. Since Adil is in a position where “he’s got nine people to support, apart from the machine” (31) and lives in a constant state of scrambling to provide for others, he perceives Usama’s absolutist commitment to armed resistance as a sign of his disconnection from reality and the daily

struggles of workers to survive under occupation. Adil resents his cousin's inability to acknowledge the necessity and complexity of navigating the economic barriers and exploitation imposed by the occupation and "the battle of the stomachs." The metaphor of "the battle of the stomachs" is explicitly introduced when, one night after having drunk heavily, Adil expresses his frustrations with his cousin's one-dimensional understanding of resistance and he proclaims, "Convince me that what I'm doing isn't part of the struggle and that the fight has fixed ground rules [...] And who's going to fight the battle of the stomachs? (63) He continues his defense, adding, "You can have my life Usama, if you can only convince me that freedom means that people who can't defend themselves go hungry. And that there's happiness to hunger. Come on, convince me!" (63) In his drunken rage, Adil is able to express his commitment to the cause in the form of his steadfastness, or *sumud*, and dedication to fighting "the battle of the stomachs." Furthermore, through his questioning of Usama, the supposed freedom fighter's understanding of the meaning of "freedom," Adil critiques his cousin's armed resistance as being too detached from the material realities and hunger of the people to be regarded as the singular defensible mode of resistance.

In his reading of *Wild Thorns*, Philip Metres states, "Despite the fact that Palestinian writing frequently appeared in the vanguard of resistance literature and its theorizations- Palestinian literature has questioned, complicated, and sometimes rejected romanticized representations of the resistance fighter" (Metres 86). Khalifeh's characterization of Usama certainly rejects a romanticization of the resistance fighter by incorporating representations of not only his revolutionary convictions but also his self-doubt and insecurities. Even in his apparently unwavering stance and commitment to his mission, Usama still questions the relationship between the absolutist principles of armed struggle and the physical reality of this

form of resistance. He has moments of hesitation when thinking about the mission which he has committed himself to; “Although he believed unequivocally that all the Egged buses had to be blown up and that the workers had to abandon their treacherous role, Adil’s unexpected presence among them created a cruel dilemma” (86). Although “Usama firmly believed that there was no longer more than one dimension to the issue, not after the 1967 defeat and the occupation that followed” (88), these moments of insecurity reveal that he is in fact deeply conflicted between “at one level, the Palestinian national narrative which synthesizes the absolutism of violent struggle, and on another level, the personal and familial narrative, which is produced by economic and social necessities following the Israeli occupation of Palestine” (Malkawi 45). The dissonance between what Usama believes and the reality in which he and his family live creates a moral dilemma that adds nuance to the image of the resistance fighter and combats a romanticized or monolithic perception of the armed struggle. Moreover, through her portrayal of Usama as an idealist who is detached from the material realities of the worker, Khalifeh also speaks to the impossibility of conceiving of liberation while denying the material reality of the working class’s daily lived experiences.

Bashir Abu-Manneh illuminates the extent to which Usama’s conception of resistance is detached from the workers’ struggle, stating, “Usama not only misreads forced economic dependency as political acquiescence, but arrives in the West Bank with a ready-made answer to the problem of occupation. Fida’i Usama had already figured out the ‘equation’ of resistance” (Abu-Manneh 125). Usama showed up in Nablus with a mission that was already formulated for him by external powers, the guerilla organization which remains unnamed throughout the novel. Having been constructed and executed without regard for the context or lived experiences of the Palestinian workers, Usama’s out-of-touch mission is ultimately ineffective in creating any kind

of collective liberation for his people. Bashir Abu-Manneh proposes that *Wild Thorns* serves “as a way of constructing a politically more realist liberation struggle than Usama’s romantic fantasies of armed struggle” (Abu-Manneh 125). Khalilfeh manifests this political realism in her novel by placing the workers’ struggle at the center of this conflict, thereby positioning economic liberation as an indispensable part of the struggle for national liberation. In this way, Khalilfeh is able to create a nuanced narrative, dispelling the existence or legitimacy of any singular isolated ideal of resistance that fails to prioritize the survival and livelihood of the working masses.

Chapter 2: The Abandonment of The Worker

This chapter focuses on how fragmentation and disunity within the nation are manifested through a lack of solidarity with and abandonment of the workers by Abul Khaizuran in *Men in The Sun*, and the Palestinian “upper classes” in *Wild Thorns*. Both Abul Khaizuran and the Palestinian bourgeoisie characters in *Wild Thorns* are relatively privileged in comparison to our working-class protagonists and are able to more easily function within and profit off of the systems and institutions which keep these working people in a position of economic and political subjugation. In the first half of this chapter, I focus on Abul Khaizuran’s rejection of his former patriotism and role in the armed struggle as a result of his castration. I will show how, in the end, Abul Khaizuran’s impotent leadership and prioritization of money over morals goes terribly awry, resulting in the death and abandonment of his compatriots in exile. Whereas Abul Khaizuran rejects his past sense of patriotism in his efforts towards economic advancement, the “upper classes” in *Wild Thorns* engage in a sort of nationalistic chastising of the working poor who are employed in Israel. In the second half of this chapter, I explore how Khalifeh’s portrayal of the upper class’s clear prioritization of their own financial profits over any “patriotic duty” serves as a critique of the hypocrisy of bourgeois nationalism and its failure to create national unity or support the liberation of the working masses living under occupation in the West Bank.

Abul Khaizuran, The Impotent Leader:

Throughout *Men in The Sun*, Abul Khaizuran’s memories reveal that his disillusionment with patriotism and rejection of his past forms of resistance stemmed from the traumatizing experience of his castration which happened as a result of his fighting against the Zionist army in 1948. Since his injury, Abul Khaizuran has had a very cynical outlook on life. He has felt as

though his resistance was all in vain and therefore resorted to striving towards economic advancement in order to compensate for the deep sense of loss he has felt in his seemingly futile efforts towards national liberation. When faced with Marwan's youthful naivete, Abul Khaizuran tells him, "I'm glad you are going to Kuwait, because you will learn many things there. The first thing you will learn is: money comes first and then morals" (Kanafani 42).

In the following pages, I will analyze how Abul Khaizuran's painful memories of the loss of his "manhood" as a result of his armed resistance have led him to reject his previous patriotism in favor of the pursuit of money over morals. I will further draw out this analysis and apply it to a reading of the closing scene in which Abul Khaizuran abandons his passengers' corpses on the side of a garbage heap upon their arrival in Kuwait. Through this reading, I seek to show how, in his inability to lead his passengers to economic liberation, Abul Khaizuran represents an impotent Palestinian leadership that is incapable of creating national unity and ultimately diminishes the workers' possibilities for survival and resistance.

The loss of "manhood" is a prominent theme in *Men in The Sun* that Kanafani uses in order to shed light on the deeply traumatizing and irreversible nature of the effects of the occupation, and the violent denial of Palestinian autonomy after the Nakba. Although Abul Khaizuran is the only character in the novella to have been literally castrated, the sentiment of economic impotence ties each character to the next in their sense of grief and lack of self-determination. "For Palestinian refugees, the need to invoke the right to self-determination is bound to their collective history of dispossession and their expulsion from their homeland. In this sense, the need for the right to self-determination is founded in materiality" (Tareh 193). Whether in the case of Abul Khaizuran's unforeseen and unforgettable castration, or the irrevocable loss of one's land, livelihood, and dignity, the evocation throughout the novella of the

loss and despair caused by the Nakba leads each character away from their homeland and into exile. Despite this connection shared between the characters in their trauma and dispossession, Abul Khaizuran never tells Abu Qais, Assad, or Marwan of his castration. It is only through his memories and flashbacks that the reader comes to understand that Abul Khaizuran's rejection of the national cause and decision to put money over morals are deeply rooted in the traumatizing experience of the loss of his "manhood" in 1948.

On page 53 of the novella, Abul Khaizuran experiences a flashback to the day of his castration; he remembers, "For ten long years he had been trying to accept the situation. But what situation? To confess quite simply that he had lost his manhood while fighting for his country? He had lost his manhood and his country, and damn everything in this bloody world." Abul Khaizuran remembers the physical and emotional agony of his castration and this memory carries a lot of weight especially considering the fact that Abul Khaizuran incurred the injuries that resulted in his castration while fighting for his country. For Abul Khaizuran there is no accepting the situation because, after ten long years, the situation in Palestine had only worsened and the passing of time seemed to prove that his efforts towards national liberation and the sacrifice of his "manhood" were worthless. Kanafani explains, "Ten years had passed since they took his manhood from him, and he had lived with that humiliation day after day and hour after hour" (Kanafani 53). This memory, heavy with frustration and resentment, portrays more than just the loss of Abul Khaizuran's "manhood;" it also shows the death of his patriotism and will to resist. He asks himself, "And what good did patriotism do you? You spend your life in an adventure and now you are incapable of sleeping with a woman! And what good did you do? Let the dead bury their dead. I only want more money now, more money" (64). The way in which Abul Khaizuran expresses his grief through the abandonment of the national struggle, in favor of

pursuing economic advancement shows a drastic disruption in his relationship with his country. Abul Khaizuran decides to detach himself from his nationalist convictions, revolutionary aspirations, and role in the armed struggle; he resolves, in turn, to focus on combating the economic impotence imposed by the occupation and making money by any means necessary.

During his time working with the “Freedom Fighters,” Abul Khaizuran, “had the reputation of being the best lorry driver anyone could find” (Kanafani 47). After leaving the resistance, he used this skill and reputation to procure a job driving a water tanker for a wealthy Kuwaiti businessman named Haj Rida. Abul Khaizuran is protected by his relationship with his wealthy Kuwaiti employer and that physical and economic mobility which spares him from the life-threatening measures which his fellow countrymen must undertake. It is significant to note, however, that though Abul Khaizuran is relatively privileged in comparison to Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, he is still dependent on his proximity to Haj Rida’s class privilege in order to survive. He explains:

I’m only connected with that lorry because I drive it. Its owner is rich and well known, and so it doesn’t wait long at the frontier or get searched. The owner of the lorry is well known and respected, the lorry itself is well known and respected, and consequently, the driver of the lorry is well known and respected (Kanafani 47).

During their journey, as his companions suffer through the excruciating heat while waiting inside the tanker, Abul Khaizuran even engages in what seems like common amiable banter with the guards at the checkpoints along the way. At one point, while crossing the first checkpoint in the Iraqi desert, a customs officer asks Abul Khaizuran what he has with him, to which he jokingly responds, “Arms. Tanks. Armored cars. And six planes and two guns” (Kanafani 60). Abul Khaizuran’s seemingly nonchalant moment of laughter with the guards confidently conveys his ability to work within the very institutions which physically and economically entrap his fellow countrymen. Even though he holds a relatively small position of power, Abul Khaizuran’s

respected status and freedom of mobility set him apart from his compatriots. Thus, the other three protagonists' denial of physical and economic mobility as undocumented Palestinian workers and refugees in exile is what most clearly distinguishes them from Abul Khaizuran and, in the end, seals their tragic fate.

Abul Khaizuran is the only character in *Men in The Sun* who survives at the end of the story and he spent the length of the journey between Basra and Kuwait sitting outside of the suffocating heat of the water tanker, the oven-like prison in which his entrapped passengers meet their end. If the water tanker represents the innumerable hardships that Palestinians must face in their efforts towards survival and self-realization, then Abul Khaizuran is the impotent leader who drives the workers to their demise. In her book *After Lives: Legacies of Revolutionary Writing*, Barbara Harlow supports this allegorical reading of Abul Khaizuran's character. She claims, "Abul Khaizuran, the truck driver, represents the Palestinian leadership at the time, emasculated and impotent, having lost his manhood in 1948 in the first Arab-Israeli war surrounding the creation of the state of Israel" (Harlow 48-49). While Harlow argues that Abul Khaizuran has been corrupted by "his personal despair and moral weakness" (49) it is also significant to note that part of the reason why his passengers die in the end also has to do with Abul Khaizuran's own position of economic and political precarity. Keeping this in mind allows the reader to look beyond the questionable nature of Abul Khaizuran's morality, to the larger tensions in the novel such as his abandonment of patriotism for the sake of economic advancement. Through this reading, it is evident how powerless Abul Khaizuran truly is within the greater political and economic institutions which he navigates as a Palestinian in exile. Furthermore, by working within the systems and institutions which subjugate and dehumanize

his compatriots as a means of advancing his own economic interests, he too destroys any hopes they have for survival or future possibilities of resistance.

Despite his desire to keep his word and safely deliver Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan to a new life in Kuwait, Abul Khaizuran, in his impotence and decision to put money over morals, is incapable of freeing his passengers from the insidious grip of “the frying pan.” In the ending scene of the novella, any solidarity between Abul Khaizuran and the other protagonists is rendered completely nonexistent as he abandons their corpses on the side of a garbage heap in Kuwait. Abul Khaizuran’s actions in this closing scene certainly reflect his words regarding the prioritization of money over morals when he takes his passengers’ money and few belongings before driving off into the night. In an effort to comfort himself, Abul Khaizuran “said to himself: ‘The municipality piles up the rubbish here... If I dumped the bodies here they would be discovered in the morning and buried under official auspices’” (Kanafani 72). Through the lens of Harlow’s allegory, this final act of abandonment can be read as a critique of the Palestinian leadership after 1948 who, in their hopes for and reliance on international support for Palestinian liberation, ultimately leave the fate of their people in the hands of external forces. It is abundantly clear in the ending of *Men in The Sun*, however, that this is only a false hope and that Abul Khaizuran, along with every international political and economic institution, has failed his compatriots and abandoned them for dead in exile, unheard and stripped of all possessions. Thus, the novel presents little hope for the dispossessed migrant worker or any prospects for solidarity with their struggle.

Ibrahim Taha points out the significance of death occurring at the end of a text:

In certain cases death should be seen as a factor impelling the fictional character and the reader of the text to continue their search for solutions. Death at the end of the text may be seen as a textual catalyst to examine textual reality retroactively from a different point

of view. In such cases, death does not close the plot but opens it to various new directions after the reading of the text ends. (Taha 210)

In this hopeful analysis, Taha suggests that there is still room for solutions outside of the text. However, like Abul Khaizuran, the reader is left surrounded by questions, without a clear path forward. At the very end of the novel, upon discovering that each of his passengers has died in the water tank, Abul Khaizuran asks, “Why didn’t you knock on the side of the tank? Why didn’t you say anything? Why? The desert suddenly began to send back the echo... Why? Why? Why?” (Kanafani 74). These resounding echoes beg the question, Who is really to blame? The victims for not helping themselves, or for choosing to take such a big risk in the first place? Abul Khaizuran for his negligent disposal of his countrymen? Or perhaps the states and governments which have abandoned the Palestinian people to independently free themselves from their imprisonment under Israeli occupation? It is important to note that Abul Khaizuran receives no answer to his questions and neither does the reader.

In the end, the desert, the very force that drained the life from Kanafani’s main characters, is the last voice presented to the audience, and the reader is left in a vast space of unanswerable questions. Even though Abul Khaizuran is relatively more privileged than his passengers, every character is portrayed as a victim in varying degrees. Kanafani insists on this nuance; the reader must consider the material realities of the working masses when Abul Khaizuran is left alone with their dead bodies. Abul Khaizuran’s economic priorities speak to the impossibility of achieving national unity and liberation when he chooses money over morality. Despite the fact that the reader never finds out whether Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan really did knock on the side of the tanker, the repeated questioning at the end of the novel suggests that silence, moral impotence, or failure to resist oppressive forces, will lead Palestinians to their own demise. The prison will only answer Abul Khaizuran’s questions in echoes, and the reader must

realize that asking dead people why they have died only serves the purpose of evading a solution to the conditions that bring death where it ultimately could have been avoided.

The Failures of Bourgeois Nationalism:

In *Wild Thorns*, perceptions of “patriotic duty” are associated with the characters’ varying economic situations. From consumers’ decisions on what to buy and from where, to whom certain characters choose to work for and why—the workers’ material realities deeply influence their possibilities for resistance. While the abandonment of the workers by Abul Khaizuran in *Men in The Sun* only results in a life-negating lack of solidarity and diminishes any possibilities for resistance, Khalifeh once again portrays how the worker’s struggle brings into being an alternative form of resistance based on steadfastness, or *sumud*, and rejection of bourgeois nationalism. In this section, I focus on the workers’ steadfast resistance with regard to the wealthy Palestinian class. I will analyze the way that Khalifeh engages in a critique of bourgeois nationalism through her portrayal of the experiences of Palestinians working in Israel in the post-Naksa period. This critique reveals her concern with the internal fragmentation within the national movement and the failures of bourgeois nationalism to recognize the workers’ struggle as a legitimate form of steadfast resistance. I further seek to show how this reading speaks to Khalifeh’s broader belief that economic and national liberation must go hand in hand and that revolution must be organized with the class interests and livelihood of the working people at the center of the agenda.

Through her centering of class struggle, Khalifeh critiques not only the systems of Israeli occupation that subjugate Palestinian workers but also the wealthy Palestinian class as complicit collaborators in their exploitation. In his analysis of *Wild Thorns*, Bashir Abu-Manneh notes that

for Khalifeh, “the Palestinian ruling class never showed any sign of national solidarity with or sympathy for Palestinian workers” (Abu-Manneh 128). He goes on to reference a scene in the novel in which one worker questions, “Why should Palestinian workers be asked to forego their own class interests in the name of a nationalism which merely safeguards the Palestinian bourgeoisie’s own rights of exploitation, even as the bourgeoisie itself freely trades and cooperates with the Israeli occupiers?” (Abu-Manneh 128). In the following pages, I will analyze the ways in which this unnamed worker’s anecdote in the aforementioned scene effectively exposes the upper class’s complicit involvement in the exploitation of the working masses, portraying the hypocrisy and failures of their bourgeoisie nationalism. Through this close reading, I further argue that in her critique of this bourgeois nationalism Khalifeh goes so far as to hold the worker above the nation and positions class struggle as not only integral to, but ultimately transcending the national struggle.

One day, as Usama is sitting in a crowded cafe, he overhears a conversation between a group of workers discussing the hardships of making a living under occupation. As one worker at a nearby table tells his story, he expresses to his comrades the feelings of betrayal and resentment he has towards “the upper class... with their five-story apartment buildings” (89) whom he describes as living in extreme detachment from the material realities of their working-class compatriots and benefitting from their economic dispossession. The unnamed worker goes on to explain how he came to work in Israel due to the alienation he felt and the unlivable wages he received from his previous employer. The worker recounts, “When I asked one of them for a decent wage like everyone else he told me I should be ashamed of myself. He had the nerve to say that by working for him at half wages I was performing a patriotic duty. I told him that life was getting more expensive all the time, but he just went on about patriotism!” (Khalifeh 90).

The worker is clearly uninspired by his boss's talk of "patriotic duty" because he recognizes the hypocrisy and lack of class solidarity which taints his conception of patriotism. The wealthy Palestinian's appeal to his employee's "patriotic duty" does nothing but prove his disconnect from the lived day-to-day struggles of the workers, and their "battle of the stomachs." As the wealthy boss chastises Palestinians who work in Israel, he proposes a form of patriotism that negates the worker's livelihood. This bourgeois nationalism would ultimately lead the worker to no longer be able to afford to stay in Palestine, thereby contributing to the Zionist state's goal of eradicating and displacing Palestinians from their land.

Through this worker's story, it is clear that the upper classes in the West Bank see the working poor who accept jobs in Israel as traitors to the national cause in their efforts towards economic survival. The influential Palestinian novelist Emile Habiby has suggested that "for somebody looking down at 48 Palestinians from outer space, they could easily be mistaken for collaborators or traitors- as if the everydayness of living under the imposed structures and institutions of occupation turns victims into complicitous participants" (Abu-Manneh 125). In the cafe scene, Khalifeh highlights this misconstruction and goes so far as to defend these 48 Palestinians who work in Israel. She positions the "everydayness of living under the imposed structures" as steadfast resistance, or *sumud*, and an alternative to the fragmenting bourgeois nationalism imposed on the worker by the privileged upper classes. She further highlights how this nationalist rhetoric only serves the interests of the upper classes by placing blame on the working poor as traitors to their country, further contributing to the fragmentation of Palestinian society and disunity within the national movement. Therefore, in order to survive and steadfastly remain in Palestine, the worker cannot depend on any solidarity or sympathy from the upper classes. It seems that these Palestinian workers who have lived through the ever-increasing

economic pressures of occupation have no choice but to either work in Israel or emigrate in search of better economic opportunities.

Life after the Naksa was becoming increasingly expensive for the working class as the occupation went on and the higher wages being offered in Israel pushed many Palestinians to work in their factories and settlements. In his article entitled “Palestinian Social Stratification: The Political Implications” political scientist Don Peretz explains that wages in Israel post-1967 “have been higher than those existing before the occupation in the West Bank” (64), and because of this difference in wages, “by 1974, [two years before *Wild Thorns* was published], about 45 percent of those employed in the West Bank [...] found their employment in Israel” (Peretz 63). This historical and socioeconomic context is crucially important to understanding the tension between the working and upper-class expressions of patriotism in the novel and their respective possibilities for resistance. It is also important to establish that, despite their relative economic privilege and their “five-story buildings,” the wealthy Palestinian class was also caught in an economically precarious and codependent relationship with the occupying power which they so adamantly claim to morally oppose.

In *Wretched of The Earth*, Fanon argues that there is no such thing as a true bourgeoisie in the colonized land because even those wealthy members of society still live in positions of economic domination and subjugation by the colonial power. According to Fanon, this class “is a bourgeoisie in spirit only” in that “it lacks something essential to a bourgeoisie: money” (178). Peretz appropriately contextualizes Fanon’s theory in the West Bank after 1967: “While labor at the bottom of the social scale, including many refugees, has improved its living standards, middle class, and professional Palestinians, and the well-to-do, often suffered a decline” (Peretz 64). Fanon’s analysis in this context may explain why, when faced with his employee’s plea for a

livable wage, the worker from the cafe scene's former employer can only consider his own economic struggles and disregards those of the worker by responding, "you can easily see how bad my economic situation is" (Kanafani 90). The precariousness of their own economic position under occupation contributes to the Palestinian bourgeoisie's participation in and perception of the disenfranchisement of the working class as a necessary sacrifice for their own gain. The wealthy Palestinian class therefore paternalistically expects the working people to accept lower wages and economic destitution as an act of "patriotic duty" rather than seek more gainful employment in Israeli factories in order to survive.

Fanon further argues that "a bourgeoisie that provides nationalism alone as food for the masses fails in its mission and gets caught up in a whole series of mishaps" (Fanon 204). The failures of this bourgeois nationalism are clearly exposed as the worker questions his boss's patriotic duty, asking, "How come I'm the only one with a patriotic duty... what about you?" (Khalifeh 90) He highlights the hypocrisy in his former employer's unwillingness to consider his own role in the exploitation of his working-class compatriots and eagerness to place blame on them as traitors to the national cause. He also points out that the privileged classes happen to be the first to make business deals with the occupying power and are therefore in no position to be chastising the daily factory workers who participate in Israel's economy out of sheer desperation. The worker defends the positions of his fellow workers, claiming, "Not one of us went over to them before you did. Weren't you the very first to put your hands in theirs? What do you call that agency your company has? A 'patriotic duty'?" (Khalifeh 90) The worker's questions suggest that, as stated by Fanon, "The national bourgeoisie, since it is strung up to defend its immediate interests, and sees no further than the end of its nose, reveals itself incapable of simply bringing national unity into being, or of building up the nation on a stable and productive basis" (Fanon

159). Her portrayal of the privileged class's inability to "bring national unity into being" reveals Khalifeh's deep concern with the internal fragmentation within Palestinian society which spurs from class inequality and the exploitation of the working masses on the inside by both Israeli and Palestinian bourgeoisie actors. The lack of solidarity between the worker and his former employer and the disconnect between their varying notions of "patriotic duty" are thus fundamentally based on their different economic positionalities on an individual and institutional level.

In an interview with Peter Nazareth, Khalifeh spoke to this problem of class inequality and the complacency of the privileged classes as issues that both fragment and transcend the boundaries of the nation. In Khalifeh's own words, "When we talk about the social structure, to focus on nationalism is really a mistake. Even in the society itself, when you don't have homogeneity between classes, and when you have such a crisis [...] the privileged class makes use of the unprivileged [...] As if it is an indirect collaboration, indirect cooperation with the exploitative foreign power" (72). This insight into Khalifeh's position on the fragmentation of the nation as caused by economic inequality helps shed light on how her novel reflects a critique of a bourgeois nationalism that "... suggests that national allegiance and devotion from which the bourgeoisie stand to benefit, are paramount and represent the only viable route to sovereignty, security, national unity and prosperity" (Alahar 111). As I have argued in my first chapter, Khalifeh rejects the over-simplification of narratives of resistance whether they be the absolutism of Usama's armed resistance or the imposition of bourgeois nationalism as the "only viable route" to liberation. In her realistic and multi-faceted portrayals of her characters' various conceptions of and possibilities for resistance, Khalifeh defends the worker's decision to

prioritize his financial stability as a form of *sumud* and a means of ensuring his ability to remain in his homeland despite the economic pressures coming at him from all sides.

Towards the end of his story, the worker adamantly rejects the hypocritical standard of patriotism and judgment placed on him by his wealthy employer and resolves to focus on his own steadfast struggle for survival above all else. The worker “flung his miserable wage packet right in his face and yelled, ‘Here, take it! I’m going ‘over there’ tomorrow!’” (Khalifeh 90) He decides that he would no longer seek the validation of his wealthy employer and that he would rather go work in Tel Aviv than continue to tolerate the simultaneous economic exploitation and moralistic chastising which he experienced working on the inside. Bashir Abu-Manneh argues that Khalifeh “clearly shows that Palestinian labourers felt freer working in Israel than working for the Palestinian landed class (despite Israeli racism and humiliation)” (127). The neglect and abandonment which the workers face at the hands of their more privileged compatriots, “explains why when the Israeli occupation arrived, offered higher wages and less domineering work conditions, many workers preferred Israeli exploiters over Palestinian ones” (Abu-Manneh 128). By portraying the ways in which bourgeois nationalism disregards and threatens the livelihood of the working class, Khalifeh shows how a revolution that is removed from the material realities of the masses is bound to fail. Through her defense of the worker’s struggle as a powerful form of steadfast resistance, Khalifeh further underscores the necessity of having a revolution that is grounded in and driven by the lived experiences of the working masses, rather than a top-down approach to nationalism that prioritizes the interests of the ruling class.

Conclusion:

In both *Men in The Sun* and *Wild Thorns*, economic survival and material reality are the main determining factors for the workers' possibilities for resistance. Through his portrayal of the abandonment of the three workers by not only Abul Khaizuran, but also the international systems and institutions which disregard the humanity of Palestinian refugees and workers in exile, Kanafani seemed to anticipate the disappointment of pan-Arab efforts well before the defeat of 1967. In its foresight, the novel serves as a call to action for Palestinian self-reliance, internal solidarity, and popular resistance based on the material realities of the working class.

Although Kanafani himself was a proponent of armed resistance, he does not romanticize it in the novel and his characters still question the futility of their resistance.

If guerilla armed struggle marked the moment of Palestinian resistance and revolutionary challenge in the diaspora, popular revolt is what the occupied opted for (especially after the failure of armed resistance in the West Bank immediately after 1967 and Gaza by 1971). This explains so much about Khalifeh's own grassroots vantage point in her novels and her fundamental rejection of PLO armed struggle in the occupied territories as means of liberation. (Abu-Manneh 118)

As is suggested in the ending of *Wild Thorns*, Usama's guerilla tactics do little to change the material reality of his family and compatriots. At the end of the day, as Abu Adil's home was being blown up by Israeli soldiers, "people went about their business, buying vegetables, fruit, and bread" (Khalifeh 207). Thus, Khalifeh ends her novel by proving that "the battle of the stomachs" never ends, and Adil is ultimately the one who must face this reality. Both novels leave the reader and characters in a space that is unaffected by actions of resistance; people continue to work and eat just as the desert remains hot. In the same way that Adil must leave behind the rubble of his father's house and continue to feed his family, Abul Khaizuran must reckon with his abandonment of the workers on the garbage heap and the reality of going back to

work within the institutions that condemn countless Palestinians to the same fate as Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan.

Elias Khoury speaks on the very real implications of the ending scene in *Men in The Sun*:

The Palestinians are knocking, not just with their fists, but with their lives and bullet-riddled bodies and the uprooted trees of their lands. Who would dare to claim that “the Palestinians are not ‘knocking’”? Wouldn’t it be more accurate to ask, “Why do you not hear?” Or rather, “Why do you pretend to be deaf when you hear the knocking?”(90)

Khoury reminds us that the conflict in Kanafani’s novella extends to reality- that to this day, Palestinians are suffering at the hands of Israeli settler-colonists, forced into exile, and abandoned by international institutions. He further suggests that even questioning a lack of resistance on the part of the Palestinian victims is violence benefiting a colonial narrative.

Reading *Men in The Sun* in tandem with *Wild Thorns* allows for a reassessment of Palestinian possibilities for resistance. Both novels serve as a call to action for Palestinians to reject the monolithic narratives which have been imposed on them since the occupation. In their centering of the material realities and daily struggles of the Palestinian workers, the authors suggest that any possibilities for future liberation will be found in solidarity with the working masses. The writers suggest that abstractions in resistance serve no purpose other than to push the cause further from reality and obscure, even postpone, liberation. In his essay “Remembering Ghassan Kanafani, or How a Nation Was Born of Story Telling,” Khoury writes on Kanafani’s assassination, “But the splattered remains of his body upon meeting with death suggest a new form of writing—one where, in anticipation of the homeland, the words must suffice to spell nationhood, and the sum of the parts is made whole” (90-91). The “sum of his parts” not only applies to Kanafani’s remains, but also the millions of Palestinians who have been displaced from their homeland.

As Khoury suggests in this excerpt, one must resist the over-simplification of the individual parts making up a whole, and recognize that that by solely focusing on one narrative or perspective of resistance, one chooses to see the whole as dismembered, as unable to be identified in its entirety, a whole otherwise separated from its original intention. This is integral as to why Khalifeh ends *Wild Thorns* with the image of Adil in the square, observing that “Nothing has changed” (207) after Usama has fulfilled his mission and sacrificed his life in the name of the cause. In my focus on the workers’ struggle for economic liberation as crucial to conceiving of national liberation, I do not seek to disregard other forms of resistance; I rather seek to illuminate the existential importance of not foregoing one struggle for another. Without this, the enduring working masses are left waiting for solutions that may or may not include them, and are ultimately put at risk in the hands of external forces – a part of the whole made invisible, material reality made abstract.

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