



Displacement and Exilic Guilt: Exploring Psychological Trauma in Ghassan Kanafani's "Returning to Haifa"

Zamurd Maqsood¹

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received:

August 25, 2025

Accepted:

December 25, 2025

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflict of interest:

The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest and falsification/fabrication of data with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

This study examines the intertwined relationship between guilt, trauma, loss, and displacement. It explores the psychological consequences of detaching from homeland, emphasizing that one's home plays an important role in shaping one's identity. The study also illustrates how suppressed emotions cause guilt and trauma when refugees are confronted with their familiar surroundings or homeland. The focus of the study is the mental struggles of Palestinian refugees resulting from prolonged exposure to war, violence, and displacement. The research is qualitative in nature and follows the narrative of Ghassan Kanafani, "Returning to Haifa." Theoretical props include Trauma theory (Herman and Caruth), Guilt theory (Tangney) and Freud's psychological ideas. The concept of complex trauma, deferred trauma, multi-layered guilt and the conflict between ego and superego are central to the analysis. This research offers a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and emotional struggles of Palestinian refugees, revealing that the trauma of exile is not just related to physical hardships but also emotional stress.

Keywords: *Displacement, guilt, loss, Nakba, Palestine, refugees, trauma*

¹ **Zamurd Maqsood** is a degree candidate of BS English at Superior Campus for University Programs Mandi Bahauddin. She may be accessed at shehzadi2k23@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5368-1112>



Introduction

From the very beginning of human civilization, the idea of homeland has been very significant. Throughout history, many individuals have been forced to leave their homes due to many reasons such as wars, political oppression, financial issues, or religious pursuits. While some migrations are voluntary, forceful displacement of people from their homes cause severe psychological and emotional anguish. The pain of losing one's home has become a central theme in postcolonial and diasporic literature. Various writers and theorists have focused on the mental and emotional struggles of the individuals who are forced to live away from the places they once called home.

The Palestinian experience stands as one of the most prominent and tragic examples of forced exile. The Israel-Palestinian conflict has persisted for more than seventy years. It can be traced back to the late nineteenth century with the rise of Zionism. It was a movement that aimed to establish a Jewish state through the colonization of Palestine (Khalidi, 2020, p. 14). Today, the humanitarian crisis of this conflict is evident in the predicament of round about 5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees. Whereas *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* estimated that actual figure of these Palestinian refugees exceeds six million ("Over 6 million Palestinian refugees," 2024). The continued displacement has given rise to the rich extent of resistant literature that documents their sufferings, resilience, and collective trauma.

Among the earliest voices in Palestinian literature is Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972), a writer who himself experienced the struggles as a refugee. His work served as a survival for both him and the people of Palestine, during the Palestinian cause. In response to rapidly increasing Jewish immigration, the Arab Higher Committee was established in the same month of April as he was born. A general Arab strike was called throughout the Palestine by the committee to protest British Government with respect to immigration. This strike paralyzed the activities for six months. As it is noted: "In 1948, on his twelfth birthday, events of Zionist struggles for Palestine took place, an ongoing cause of Isreal and Palestine conflict" (Riley 2000, p. 02)

Kanafani's fiction clearly articulates the guilt and trauma of Palestinian refugees. His short story "Returning to Haifa" (1969) serves as a representation of the struggles of refugees. The narrative follows a couple, Said and Safiyya who were expelled from Haifa during Nakba. The Nakba of 1948, frequently referred to the Palestinian catastrophe, resulted as the forced displacement of thousands of Palestinians and the destruction of their homes, towns, and communities. The tragic results of this historical event were not only physical displacement of people but also the long lasting psychological and cultural trauma. It kept on affecting the identities of Palestinian people. In "Returning to Haifa" this movement is very important to understand the sufferings of Said and Safiyya. Their loss mirrors the trauma of all other people who were forced to leave their homes at that time.

"Returning to Haifa" "A'id ila Haifa (عائد الى حيفا)" (trans. Harlow & Riley 2000) has two historical settings, roughly twenty years apart: 1948 and 1967. The

primary actions of the story take place after the end of war (1967), in which Israel captured the West Bank, Sinai, Gaza, and the Golan. For the first time since 1948, the borders between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza were opened by Israelis for Palestinians in 1967. Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* exposes the psychological consequences of 1948 displacement through the characters of the protagonists of the story Said and his wife Safiyya. They return to their former home in Haifa from their residence in Ramallah. Their thoughts are intertwined with the memories of events of 1948, when they were forcefully displaced from their homeland along with thousands of Haifa's Palestinian residents. "By May 14, 1948, when Israel declared its statehood, at least 200,000 Palestinians had fled Palestine; by the end of war, 700,000 had become refugees" (Harlow & Riley 2000, p. 20). The situation remained the same until the borders were reopened for Palestinians and the refugees could go to see their old homes. During the forced exile Said and Safiyya had to abandon their infant child Khaldun in Haifa. After twenty years, when they return to their home, they find it occupied by a Jewish immigrant family, Iphrat and his wife Miriam. They adopted Khaldun and raised him as Dov. Now he has become an Israeli soldier and denies to accept Said and Safiyya as his parents. This situation foregrounds the central theme of the text and reveals how colonial structures manipulate personal histories.

Twenty years ago, they were displaced from their home and separated from their son. Although the couple reclaim their home, but have lost their son forever. He harbors no emotions for his parents. They can't explain the situation to him ever and he is unable to understand that it was not their fault. In this way Kanafani's portrayal highlights the emotional consequences of displacement, exile, guilt, and trauma for Palestinian refugees. Instead of giving them relief, their return to their homeland triggers their trauma and they feel guilty about leaving their son behind. The text juxtaposes their experience with that of Faris al-Lubda, a character in another story in the same anthology of his story "Returning to Haifa." Through the character of Faris al-Lubda, Kanafani explores themes of memory and displacement. Faris al-Lubda also returns to his home in Haifa to reclaim the photograph of his martyred brother. The photograph was also left behind 20 years ago and his house is now occupied by another family. On his return he comes to know that the family got emotionally attached to the photograph. They ask him to move on from the past and tell him that a single photograph will not recover his loss. He takes away the photograph for them and then comes half way back to return it. He also feels guilty that he has no right to keep that photograph. Somehow, through the character of Faris al-Lubda, Kanafani foreshadows the ending when Said and Safiyya must return to Ramallah without their son Khaldun (Harlow & Riley, 2000, p. 177).

This study explores how displacement from homeland and memory of past events trigger the minds and causes trauma afterwards. Number of researchers have addressed the same issue. For instance, Rabia Aamir (2022), in her work "Changed Landscape of an Arab Place': A Study of an Interpellated Realm in Karmi's Return," gives a detailed analysis of Ghada Karmi's memoir. She explores how returning to one's home fosters feelings of alienation and also complicates one's identity. Her research illustrates that the familiar surroundings which were once a source of comfort, become the reason of tension. It forces the individuals to negotiate their

past experiences with present realities. Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* portrays the crack of identity that occurs when one's homeland is defined by others. The return of the protagonist reveals the same thing which Aamir, in her other work, term as the condition of an "outside insider," the person who is "not Arab enough in Palestine, but too Arab in England" (2023, p. 299). This doubleness mirrors the feelings of alienation of Said and Safiyya. Their loss is showcasing the trauma collectively produced by the colonial structures. Similarly, Salman Abu Sitta, in *Mapping My Return* (2016), manifests his desire to return to his home in Beersheba. He explores the pain and alienation caused by long years of displacement. For instance, memoirs such as Amira Haas's *Drinking the Sea at Gaza* (1999), Miko Peled's *The General's Son* (2012), and Reja e Busailah's *In the Land of My Birth* (2017) represent the experiences of sufferings caused by displacement and then confrontation with the familiar surroundings. These insights perfectly align with the focus of the current study which is a survivor's guilt and the return to familiar environments. It emphasizes how displacement can reshape the emotions, thoughts, and actions as observed by the estrangement of Said and Safiyya.

This theme of belonging and identity in "Returning to Haifa" strongly reverberates with the experiences of Palestinian diaspora. Said and Safiyya's journey is not only physical but a psychological and emotional confrontation with their present selves and past traumas. Similarly in Aamir's analysis of Ghada Karmi, she explores how Karmi reflects on the loyal attachment towards her homeland. According to her, Karmi is "a full-time Palestinian" even after living in adopted country for decades (Aamir, 2022, p. 178). This longing shows the doubleness of the object due to displacement. It can be rooted in memory and identity despite of being separated from homeland.

Theoretical Props

Ghassan Kanafani highlights the psychological consequences of loss and displacement through the characters of Said and Safiyya. Their return expresses the trauma, suppressed at the time of their displacement during Nakba. This study addresses their experience through an integrated framework, grounded in Psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud (1923) and trauma theory by Judith Herman (1997). It is evident that Said and Safiyya's sufferings are not the result of one moment of loss but from long years of silence and dislocation. Their confrontation reveals the symptoms of Hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. These are the core concepts of complex trauma, a severe psychological state in which memories of the tragic events resurface again and become beyond control. As Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1997) states, "Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts" (p. 37). This delayed resurfacing also echoes in Caruth's notion of delayed onset trauma or deferred trauma (1996), when the full effect of a tragedy is felt lately. She argues: "The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (Caruth, 1996, p. 07). Same as the couple's return and their

emotional breakdown highlight how trauma is triggered upon revisiting the same place, they once called home.

Evenly, Tangney's (2007) idea of "multilayered guilt" (p. 347) illuminates their moral anguish of Said and Safiyya. Their torment is not only of losing their son, Khaldun, but the guilt of failing as parents is an immensely significant part of this emotional torture. Their guilt is personal and collective, as it represents other Palestinians also. The foundation of this inner conflict is Freud's psychoanalytical model (1923). His model clarifies the internal struggle between id (desire), conscience (ego) and superego (repression). The couple's avoidance to discuss their past events and the moments of silence are actually a form of defense mechanism. It protects them from intolerable guilt. By uniting all these concepts from trauma and psychoanalytical theory, the narrative uncovers the scars of exile that play an important role in molding someone's identity and memory. The short story represents the lived experiences of these concepts which reveal that they are not merely abstract concepts, they exist in real life.

Using qualitative approach and focusing on textual analysis rather than statistical data, this paper is a symbolic interpretation for uncovering the meanings behind characters' emotional conversations. Moreover, all the interpretations are grounded in an integrated framework combining insights from trauma and psychoanalytical theory.

Dislocation, emotional and psychological crises, and shaping of the experiences of survivors

Through Kanafani's narrative, this paper explores the impact of prolonged exposure to traumatic events like war, violence, displacement, and confrontation with already known places, and how this worsens the feelings of displacement and internal guilt.

The psychological impacts of prolonged trauma that Palestinian people faced by displacement and loss, are evident in the short story, "Returning to Haifa" (1969). Said and Safiyya, the protagonists suffer from emotional paralysis and become numb to their stress and pain. They spend twenty long years of separation from their son and home. In all those years they avoid talking about Khaldun, but they both were silently disturbed by his absence. Each secretly wants to return home but holds back from mentioning it to the other. When the borders finally reopen (1967), Safiyya suggests that they should visit Haifa, and Said's hand freezes mid-meal at her words. Though he, too, desires to return but he fears confronting his past and facing his lost son. Eventually, they decide to revisit their home. One night, Said declares: "Let's go to Haifa tomorrow. At least take a look. Maybe we can pass near our house. I think they're going to issue an order prohibiting it soon" (Kanafani, 2000, p. 159). Said's sentence reminds us of what Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) says about trauma as an affliction that renders the victim powerless. She says: "Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (Herman, 1992, p. 35). The notion of trauma uncovers the characters' emotional

condition due to unending confrontation with war, violence, and displacement, which further leads to their deep emotional and psychological paralysis.

There are three significant signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in human beings that include hyper arousal, intrusion, and constriction which are very explicitly observed and explored in "Returning to Haifa."

Talking about "**Hyperarousal**" with the reference of PTSD, it is a state of alertness, irritation, anxiety, and anger in human body and mind (Herman, 1997, p. 36). A person seems helpless and body is constantly in a surviving mode. Said's character is evident of this inner turmoil and through his conversation with Miriam it is also revealed how he struggles to keep himself rational despite his inner pain or torment. On the one hand, there is his tireless efforts to control himself despite his buried resentment and it is reflected through sudden shift of tone. There is an episode when Miriam recommends to him that their son Khaldun should be given a choice to associate himself with his biological or adoptive parents, Said's response shows his inner confused or tired state of mind which shows his charged emotions. He says:

What Khaldun, Safiyya? What Khaldun? What flesh and blood are you talking about? You say this is a fair choice? They've taught him how to be for twenty years, day by day, hour by hour, with his food, his drink, his sleep. And you say, a fair choice! Truly Khaldun, or Dov, or the devil if you like, doesn't know us! Do you want to know what I think? Let's get out of here and return to the past. The matter is finished. They stole him. (Kanafani, 2000, p. 172)

This lament on his own condition shows his efforts to make himself stable in this situation. He tries to maintain his rational ability despite his language showing his grief and anger. He seems helpless and this also reflects a symptom of hyperarousal. As Hamza observes: "The subject, in *One Bright Moon*, experiences displacement across multiple cultures, and through narrating his life story in alignment with relationality, he recalls past events and reconstructs his sense of self in relation to spaces that are no longer entirely 'home'" (Hamza, 2023, p. 19). This mirrors the experience of Said in "Returning to Haifa," whose return also shows his compromise with the situation. Consequently, he had to adjust himself in another landscape where his home shifted. He tries to reconcile with his past identity but his exile also causes an identity crisis in him.

We find strong elements of Intrusion, a repetition or revival of traumatic memories in one's flashback, in Kanafani's text. "**Intrusion**" is a kind of nostalgia that occurs mostly when a person revisits a place or encounters memories of loss and violence (Herman, 1997, p. 37). In "Returning to Haifa," Said and Safiyya both experience a strong feeling of intrusion when after two decades they return to their homeland. They are overwhelmed with the memories which haunt them. Said is seen driving very confidently in the streets which shows his bond with the land where he once lived two decades ago. Exile does not end his inner love and bond with the land and geography of Haifa, which remains printed in his mind despite years of exile. When he enters home, he finds no change there. He feels a strong

connection with the land and memories of past renewed in a few seconds. As Kanafani describes: “He looked around, rediscovering the items, sometimes little by little and sometimes all at once, like someone recovering from a long period of unconsciousness” (Kanafani, 2000, p. 162). Similarly, returning to a homeland altered by occupation can trigger powerful memories of loss and trauma. Similar observations are made by Ghada Karmi when she sees how “...even the traffic lights are called ‘ramzone’ by their Hebrew name; . . . ‘Ramallah’s agricultural land [which] hemmed in the town on all sides, making its expansion impossible;’ or ‘the giant settlements high up on the hills, their houses cascading down towards the town’s outskirts” (Aamir, 2023, p. 182). This encounter with the changed landscape shows how physical environment can also evoke haunting memories of past tragic events. It makes the return not only a physical journey but it's an addition to the emotional history of suffering.

“**Constriction**” is the emotional state that represents the numbness of feelings (Herman, 1997, p. 42). The individual feels detached from reality and avoids to remember the past traumatic experiences. In “Returning to Haifa,” the character of Safiyya exhibits this numbness while on the other side Said tries to avoid his pain. Safiyya remains silent and let's Said take the lead in conversations and interactions. She uses a coping mechanism to protect herself from intense grief of losing her dearest son and home. She loses control when she observes Miriam moving around in her house confidently and exclaims: “As if she’s in her own house! She acts as if it’s her house!” (Kanafani, 2000, p.171). This moment reveals the hidden grief in her calm behavior. Similarly, when Said tries to be rational and philosophical, as he remarks: “Let’s get out of here and return to the past. The matter is finished. They stole him” (Kanafani, 2000, p.172). Apparently, he appears rational and calm, but in reality, he is suffering from deeper emotional paralysis. “Returning to Haifa” illustrates how trauma still inhabits the minds and bodies of refugees. Through Said and Safiyya, Kanafani reveals how PTSD symptoms shape the emotional realities of Palestinians who continue to grapple with the unhealed wounds of 1948.

Deferred Trauma, also known as delayed-onset trauma, refers to a psychological condition in which the emotional impact of a tragic event is not experienced at the moment it occurs, but resurface later through memories or confrontations. During some tragic event the individual appears emotionally numb and feels its intensity only afterward. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, emphasizes that trauma is belated, arguing that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent return” (1996, p. 9). The revisit of Said and Safiyya to their former home plays the role of encouragement and helps them to release their emotions. Surely it was a trigger for buried memories, as they were on the roads of their homeland after two decades, Kanafani describes this moment, saying: “The incidents and events came to him suddenly and began to pile up and fill his entire being. He told himself that Safiyya, his wife, felt exactly the same” (Kanafani, 2000, p. 149).

When they were first displaced in 1948, Said and Safiyya experienced stress and confusion, but not the full emotional weight of their loss. Now, upon their

return, they are confronted with overwhelming guilt and grief. As when they reach near their old home silence overtakes them which signifies the resurfacing of the emotions they had once repressed. While living in Ramallah, they avoid speaking about Khaldun, though his absence haunts them. When Safiyya reaches Halisa, she breaks down, calling out her son's name unconsciously:

Khaldun! Khaldun! For months her injured voice remained hoarse, barely audible. That name, Khaldun, was the one unchanging note floating wretchedly in the midst of that endless torrent of voices and names. (Kanafani, 2000, p. 157)

Nakba (1948) not only dislocated them from their home but also split their family. It became the reason of unhealing wounds. The decision of naming their other two children as Khalid and Khalida evinces that they wanted to preserve the memory of their lost son Khaldun. Kanafani's portrayal reveals that memory is not just a still or permanent state, it continuously reshapes with the experiences of present and past.

The emotional struggle of Said and Safiyya is further explored by employing the concept of multi layered guilt—the guilt of loss, displacement, and parental failing. Although they were alive and adopted another place as their homeland, but they lost their sense of belonging and their son. June Tangney's classification of guilt echoes in this situation. She distinguishes between different levels of guilt using terms like “situation-specific,” “anticipatory,” “consequential,” and “dispositional”, based on different circumstances (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007, p. 347). In this way Kanafani highlights that trauma resurfaces not only through memory and emotion but equally through burden of guilt. In “Returning to Haifa,” the return of Said and Safiyya after twenty years, brings back the painful memories of the day they were forced to leave Haifa. When they learn that the borders have reopened, Said remarks:

They opened the border as soon as they completed the occupation, suddenly and immediately. That has never happened in any war in history. You know the terrible thing that happened in April 1948, so now, why this? Just for our sakes alone? No! This is part of the war. They're saying to us, 'Help yourselves, look and see how much better we are than you, how much more developed. You should accept being our servants.' (Kanafani, 2000, p. 151)

These words uncover psychological depth of those people who survived guilt and Said interprets borders' reopening as an act of political gesture to further humiliate these people and add to their suffering and loss. He does not see it an act of reconciliation on the part of government. This opportunity of returning home reminds them of their displacement and defeat in the past. The society which displaced them in the past, now allows their son to become a part of it again which further complicates the situation and intensifies their guilt and gives them a sense of emotional conflict.

The episode of Dov also intensifies a moral anguish of both Said and Safiyya. They are forced to confront the outcome of their past actions of their exile

for decades. Dov is seen blaming and accusing them for leaving their infant all alone in Haifa, and their reason for being absent for twenty years. Dov challenges their reclamation of their son. He says,

You should not have left Haifa. If that wasn't possible, then no matter what it took, you should not have left an infant in its crib. And if that was also impossible, then you should have never stopped trying to return. You say that too was impossible? Twenty years have passed, sir! Twenty years! What did you do during that time to reclaim your son? If I were you, I would've borne arms for that. Is there any stronger motive? You're all weak! Weak! You're bound by heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! (Kanafani, 2000, p. 185)

Dov's accusations shatter Said and Safiyya despite the fact that they were helpless in the past because the situation was beyond their own control. Tangney's concept of moral guilt is evident here because this guilt arises when individuals fail to uphold moral standards. (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007, p. 349). They remain silent due to burden of guilt.

Faris al-Lubda's return to Haifa in another story by Kanafani is symbolic because when he demands a photograph of his martyred brother, it shows a sense of "deferred (belated) trauma" (Caruth, 1996, p. 07) and "multilayered guilt" (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007, p. 352). This twenty years old photograph also evokes his suppressed emotions and he bursts into tears. Faris' condition and his emotional tension over seeing the photograph is heart rendering. Later, he does not take the photo because of a sense of guilt experienced by those who are connected with loss and survival. All these aspects of the story highlight the psychological consequences of loss, displacement and guilt as portrayed by Kanafani. These themes or elements are not only in Said and Saffiya but also seen in the events of Nakba. By employing Tangney's lens, the guilt caused by displacement is quite evident in the narrative. The unending and enduring psychological impacts of trauma and separation lead to guilt which further has the ability to shape a person's self-perception event after the occurring of an event.

The entire journey of the characters' emotional dilemma on their return to home after exile of twenty years and meeting their lost child may also be seen through Freud's psychological approach or Psychoanalytical Theory. Freudian division of human psyche into three parts of id, ego, and superego plays out in the narrative of the story. Id, desire driven force, is part of psyche manifest in Said's id, that forces him to return to his homeland despite past events and their outcome. He is driven by the desire to meet his lost son Khaldun, and expects his son to recognize his parents. Said's id is demanding an immediate emotional gratification.

Ego is the rational part of the psyche that balances and links desire with actual life or real life. Said, while avoiding his past, reflects ego's fear to face real life because his return can be harmful or dreadful. A lot of changes have occurred and Said's meet up with the family who now occupy his home, can be emotionally painful and destabilizing for him.

Superego is guided by societal norms and personal ideals. Said and Safiyya are also guided by superego which shape their responsibilities toward their homeland and particularly towards their son. They feel a kind of moral guilt after leaving their son on his own for twenty long years. This superego punishes and forces them for not fulfilling their roles as parents.

Freud's three elements of id, ego, and superego arouse a sense of guilt and emotional conflict in Said and Saffiya. Freud made the analogy of the id being a horse while the ego is the rider. The ego is "like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superiour strength of the horse" (Freud, 1923, p. 15). So the characters' Id desires lost things to be reclaimed for an emotional relief. Ego is aware of social anxieties and threats. Superego leads to guilt and moral judgement. Said also questions the worth and value of home and fatherhood. He says, "What is a homeland? Is it these two chairs that remained in this room for twenty years? Khaldun? Our illusions of him?" (Kanafani, 2000, p. 184). This reflection uncovers the inner conflict of Said due to his responsibilities of bygone days or past and present. Guilt constantly haunts him for leaving his innocent child behind.

Freud highlights repression when a person consciously pushes his memories into unconscious by suppressing his emotions to avoid a psychological discomfort. Said and Safiyya also did this in the past by avoiding their discussion about their children. There was no possibility of returning to homeland without Safiyya's consistent insistence to return to their homeland. "Freudian repression" is clearly evident in "Returning to Haifa," because Freud also illustrated that the suppressed emotions resurface or re-emerged violently by creating mental, emotional, and psychological stress (Billig, 1999, p.05).

Ahmed and Aslam (2019) have declared in their work that Palestinian autobiographies are breaking the long silence. Writers highlight their sufferings and "present a panoramic view of the harsh reality of Palestine" (p. 56). This idea echoes in Said and Safiyya's story, as their trauma is also collective and resurfaces upon their return. It perfectly reveals the concept of repression that Freud connects with trauma and guilt.

This study can also be related to the loss of humanity through war and displacement, when people are forced to leave their homes and have to struggle to find a new place to live. This struggle is not just material but rather it leaves a deep emotional effect on the psychological health of the refugees. The process of displacement forces individuals to confront the feelings of grief, guilt, and loss. They often face emotional paralysis. They feel numb and disconnected from the society in which they are living. "UNHCR states that in 2020 worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded. Many of the displaced persons are traumatized or have other mental problems, such as depression or anxiety caused by displacement" (Christina 2021, p. 01).

In conclusion, this study proposes the idea that "Returning to Haifa" functions not only as a narrative of personal and collective grief but also provides an understanding of the psychology of displacement, guilt, and memory. By employing a multipronged theoretical framework, it explores how guilt and trauma

are portrayed in “Returning to Haifa” by Ghassan Kanafani. The personal experiences of characters help the readers to understand the psychological and emotional impact of displacement, loss, and war. Findings of the study also show that literature shows the real-life emotional struggles of human beings. Kanafani was himself a Palestinian refugee and he portrayed other refugees in his works. This research contributes to a broader discussion related to trauma theory, post-colonial literature, and memory studies. It argues how Palestinian studies conceptualize loss as both a burden and a mode of resistance. This work further invites scholarly inquiry, and future research may expand this conversation by examining the narratives written in the context of exile and exploring contemporary Palestinian writings. Ultimately this analysis highlights the need for mental support for displaced people. Human spirits endure even when homes are lost and history is fractured. In the face of loss and exile “Returning to Haifa” reminds us that memory is not only a burden, but also a way to face oneself and reality.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article, and that the data presented have not been fabricated or falsified.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant or financial support from public, commercial, or not-for profit funding agencies.

Participant Consent: The author confirms that Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was duly maintained.

Data Fabrication/Falsification Statement: The author declares that no data have been fabricated, falsified, or manipulated in this study.

Copyright: Copyright (c) 2025 Zamurd Maqsood

References

- Aamir, R. (2023). *Environmental ethics: Life narratives from Kashmir and Palestine*. Lahore: Vanguard Books.
- Aamir, R. (2022). ‘Changed landscape’ of an ‘Arab place’: A study of an interpellated realm in *Karmi’s return*. *Insight Turkey*, 24(1), 173-193.
- Abu Sitta, S. (2016). *Mapping my return: A Palestinian memoir*. American university in Cairo press.
- Ahmed, M., & Aslam, S. (2019). Palestinian narratives of silence and consciousness raising: A critical study of *Mourid Barghouti’s autobiographies*. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 17(1), p. 55-66. <https://www.numl.edu.pk/journals/subjects/1587801347Mavra%20Ahmed%20%26%20Dr.%20Saiyma%20Aslam.pdf>
- K. E. Riley (Trans), Ghassan Kanafani: A biographical essay. *Palestine’s children: Returning to Haifa and other stories* (p. 1-12). Lynne Rienner Publishers.

- B. Harlow & K. E. Riley (Trans), Introduction, *Palestine's children: Returning to Haifa and other stories* (p. 13-28). Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Billig, M. (1999). *Freudian repression: Conversation creating the unconscious*. Cambridge University Press. <https://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam032/99012788.pdf>
- Busailah, R.-e. (2017). *In the land of my birth: A Palestinian boyhood*. Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id* (J. Riviere, Trans.). The Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1923)
- Hamza, M. (2023). Relationality and identity: A performativist perspective on the displaced subject in Andrew Kwong's *One bright moon*. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 21(1), 18–32. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cd94/57ee757c36a7aee5b31e7a44151cab4ffa5a.pdf>
- Hass, A. (1999). *Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and nights in a land under siege*. Metropolitan Books.
- Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Karmi, G. (2002). *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian story*. Verso.
- Kanafani, G. (1962/1999). *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories* (H. Kilpatrick, Trans.). Lynne Rienner. (Original work published 1962)
- Khalidi, R. (2020). *The hundred years' war on Palestine: A history of settler colonialism and resistance, 1917–2017*. Metropolitan Books.
- Kanafani, G. (2000). Returning to Haifa. In B. Harlow & K. E. Riley (Trans), *Palestine's children: Returning to Haifa and other stories* (p. 149-188). Lynne Rienner Publishers. (original work published 1969)
- LaCapra, D. (2001). *Writing history, writing trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press
- Lengfelder, C. (2021, August). Displaced, traumatized and human development deprived: The psychology of impaired capabilities. *United Nations Development Program*. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.30425.44644>
- Over six million Palestinian refugees forcibly displaced since Nakba, says Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. *Gulf Times*. (2024, June 20, 01:14 p.m.). <https://www.gulf-times.com/article/685138/region/over-6-million-palestinian-refugees-forcibly-displaced-since-nakba-says-palestinian-central-bureau-of-statistics>

Peled, M. (2012). *The general's son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine*. Just World Books.

Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). *Moral emotions and moral behavior*. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 345–372.

Copyright Statement

Copyright © 2025, the authors assign *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry* and National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, to use this document for publication, personal use of research scholars, and in courses of instruction. The authors also grant permission to *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry* to use this document in worldwide publication, distribution, and reprint in all languages, forms, and media. Any other usage is prohibited without the express permission of the author.

- *NUML JCI* allows the authors to retain copyright under the CC BY NC license.
- *NUML JCI* is licensed under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to authenticate material submitted by research scholars, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, is not responsible for the content of papers accepted for publication in *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*.