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## Zionism in Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*

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### Abstract

Since an early period of the twentieth century, the Palestinian issue with the usurped Israelis has been in the forefront on the Arabic and international level. By the wrong people in the wrong moment, the Palestinian land were occupied by the Jews after what came to be known Belfour Promise in 1917, after the Ottoman Empire collapse, to be exact. Since then, the usurp Zionists occupy Palestine and realize that the original people; Palestinian Arabs would reject the voluntary abandonment of their homeland. So they hardly worked with all their power to occupy the land and cleanse its people. As a result, Palestinian people find themselves dislocated and abolished from their own motherland. The Palestinian issue has been the central concern on the supranational level; and hardly find any Arabic literary work without intimation to the Zionist colonization for the Arab land in Palestine. Zionism and the Zionist character have occupied a large portion in most of the Palestinian and Arabic, political, cultural and literary productions, particularly the post-colonial literature and the establishment of the Palestinian armed struggle. This paper explores the Palestinian –Israeli conflict in Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*. It exposes the bloody and ugly face of colonization on the psyche of the relocated Palestinians who have been under horrible and cruel destiny. In short, it shows the suffering of the relocated and exiled Palestinians out of their homelands as portrayed in *Returning to Haifa*

**Keywords:** Zionism, Palestinian resistance, relocation

### Introduction

#### Zionism: The Synonym of Terrorism

Zionism is "The national movement of the Jewish people that supports the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory defined as the historic Land of Israel (roughly corresponding to Canaan, the Holy Land, or the region of Palestine)" <sup>[1]</sup>. The Zionist movement was founded in among growing anti-Semitism in Europe. The Jewish Theodor Herzl is the founder father of political Zionism. The Zionist movement was founded on the idea of collecting diaspora Jews throughout the world. They lived in the communities as minorities that suffered from marginalization and contempt and lived on the margins of the political and economic life. Therefore, the Zionism movement seeks to collect the Jews into one political entity and to establish a national homeland for the Jews in the land of Palestine because they consider Palestine their holy land. Zionism believes that the promised return will only be done with a Jewish effort to establish a national homeland in Palestine. After their participation in the Second World War beside British, the movement was able to obtain support from Western European governments to establish their Jewish homeland on Arab land, the historic land of Palestine. After the Second World War, The Zionist movement greatly encouraged the mass immigration of European Jews to Palestine during the first half of the twentieth century.

In 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the President of the World Zionist Organization, declared the establishment of the State of Israel on the land of Palestine with the supporting of the British colonizer. The Zionists asserted that Israel would be a safe national homeland for the Jews, and encouraged all Jews in the world to emigrate there and obtain Israeli citizenship. After that declaration, the armed resistance between Palestinians and the Zionism terrorist gang erupted to recover their land from the new colonizer. In that time the terrorist Zionist gang ran to extend in the Palestinian land so after the 1967 defeat the Israeli army occupied the Golan Heights in Syria and Sinai in Egypt. The main aim of the Zionists was to occupy as much of the historic Palestinian and Arabic land as possible and the goal remains even today.

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### The Zionist character in the novel *Returning to Haifa*

*Returning to Haifa* was written by Ghassan Khanafani in 1967 and published in 1969. It has been translated into English by Barbara Harlow & Karen E. Riley in 1984. It displays the ideological conflict between the Palestinians and the Israeli occupation. It deeply treats the historical themes of home, land, and return broadly shared by Israelis and Palestinians. It is a political novel which displays the conflict between two different ideas and thoughts. The two main characters in the novel (Said S. and Dov) embody two different political, ideological and religious personalities.

Dov, who was a Palestinian child, became a soldier in the Israeli army against his land and roots. During the violence and the chaos of the 1948 catastrophe, his parents had been forced to leave him in his crib at home and his age was only five months. When the sudden British decision to evacuate the Palestinians from Haifa and allowed the Zionist gangs to occupy her in 1948, his mother Safiyya went out searching for her husband in the middle of the crowding. Her husband, Said S. was prevented from the Zionist gangs from arriving to his home in the middle of the city. Said S. and his wife had been swept by the crowding to the port. They resisted coming back to their child Khaldun but without benefit. After the 1976 defeat, the Israeli authorities allowed the Palestinians to visit their homes in the cities that they had occupied in 1948. Said S. and his wife visited Haifa and their home with a hope to know the fate of their missing child since twenty years, but they found the real catastrophe. They returned to find their home was occupied by the Jewish couple Miriam and her husband Iphrat and their child Khaldun became Israeli soldier whose name was changed into Dov.

In this novel, Kanafani writes about two kinds of the Jewish settler characters; the Jewish character and Zionist character. Miriam and her husband Iphrat are from the European migrants fleeing from the massacres of the Nazis during The Second War. They are from the Holocaust survivors who arrived in Palestine from Poland. Miriam is Jewish but not Zionist. She witnessed the killing of her small brother by the German soldiers during The Second World War. She felt sympathy for the murdered Arab, who was killed by the terrorist Zionist gangs and was thrown to the truck as a piece of the wood. She related this crime to the Nazi crimes during the Second World War despite the difference of the country and the criminals.

*That was a dead Arab child! I saw it! And it was covered with blood!... Did not see how they threw it onto the truck, like a piece of wood? If it had been a Jewish child they never would have done that* <sup>[2]</sup>.

Many critics consider Miriam and her husband Iphrat are Zionist characters because any Jewish Settler is Zionist. Other critics went to another side; they think that they are Jews and not Zionists or Israelis because they are innocent. But from the novel, we can realize that everyone has a separate and different character. The husband Iphrat is a Zionist character because he conceived his wife, Miriam, to stay and live in Palestine after her desire to come back to Poland after the horrible and brutal Zionist crimes against the Palestinians. The scene of the murdered Arab child is one of those terrible crimes. He also joined the Israeli army and had fought in their battle with Egyptian army in Sinai. Miriam's sympathy and innocence towards the murdered

Palestinian child, who was heartlessly killed and thrown into a truck is clearly reflected in her behavior. She refused the injustices that the Palestinians have been experienced from the Israeli gangs and insisted to travel back to Poland. Her civilized approach without intolerance, she gave Dov a choice between her and his real parents. "I know who his father is. And I also know that he is our son. But let's call on him to decide. Let's call him to choose"<sup>3</sup> all those things deny the Zionism from her character.

Kanafani focused on the character of Khaldun who has grown up in Zionist education by his Jewish parents. They changed his Arabian name to Hebrew name Dov and become a soldier in the Israeli army. The Zionist education made him ready to fight and kill his brother Khaled, who insists to join the resistance movement in any battle between the Palestinians and Israeli army. The Zionist education made him deny his Arabian roots and his real parents. But also he gave him a humiliating lesson in the parenthood and the home. Sa'id defends this stand as he explains to his wife, about Khaldun,

*What Khaldun, Safiyya? 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 drinks, 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* <sup>[4]</sup>.

The Zionist Dove gave a lesson to the disabled Palestinians in the fatherhood and homeland. He taught him that the man is the cause and principles; and the fatherhood is not blood. He refused their parenthood and boasted by his Jewish parents. Dove told his Palestinian parents that he belongs to the Jewish parents who took care of him while his original parents fled and left him in the fifth month of his age. He also admitted the Palestine is from the Zionists' rights because they are struggling to achieve their old dreams in living in Palestine. In this way, he says that the child is for those who take care of him and the land is for those who defend and struggle about her.

*You should not have left Haifa. If that wasn't possible... you should not have left an infant in its crib. And if that was also impossible, then you should never have 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?... Is there any stronger motive? You're all weak! Weak! You're bound by heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! Don't tell me you spent twenty years crying! Tears won't bring back the missing or the lost. Tears won't work miracles! All the tears in the world won't carry a small boat holding two parents searching for their lost child. So you spent twenty years crying... Is this your dull, worn-out weapon?* <sup>[5]</sup>

The Zionist Dov woke up the awareness to the Palestinian and inspired him to the truth when he asked him about his struggle to recover his land and his child. At that moment, Said realized the truth and the crime they have committed; they lost their land and their child. Their son became a Zionist fighter and he only confessed his Zionist father who

was killed in the battle. "I don't know any mother but you. As for my father, he was killed in the Sinai eleven years ago. I know no others than the two of you."<sup>[6]</sup> Thus, the original Arab child who has been grown up with the Zionist education became a fighter and is carrying a weapon with the Zionists against his origin because his Zionist father was a Zionist fighter; therefore, he inherited the Zionist warrior son. On the contrary, the Palestinian gave up his son and his homeland. He also prevented his second son from joining the resistance movement. The Zionist father died in the battle for Palestine and left behind him a boy ready to fight at any time in defense of the land; while the Palestinian father fled from his land, leaving her to the occupiers and he up brought his sons on fear and cowardice.

After the humiliating lesson for Said, the Arabian parents realized the size of the loss and the price they paid for their guilt when they left the land to the occupation. He realized that Palestine and Khaldun are some things are worth carrying the arm for, fighting and the sacrificing for them. "There's no doubt who paid the price. It began the day we left our son. We should have not left anything behind"<sup>[7]</sup>. By this meeting with Dov, Said realized the searching journey for Khaldun and Palestine finished and the last way now in their hands to support the Palestinian resistance movement. He started thinking in the correct way. He directly changed his beliefs about his negative attitudes towards the Palestinian issue and his decision from his second son Khalid, who wants to join the resistance movement but he prevented him by using the parenthood. He said, "I pray that Khalid will have gone—while we were away!"<sup>[8]</sup> He responded to the humiliating lesson from the Zionist, Dov, the Palestinians will not still in the same mistake. He promised him that his next battle will be with his brother Khalid.

*Maybe your first battle will be with a fida'I named Khalid. Khalid is my son. I beg you to notice that I did not say he's your brother. As you said, man is a cause. Last week Khalid joined the fidayeen. Do you know why we named him Khalid and not Khaldun? Because we always thought we'd find you, even if it took twenty years. But it didn't happen. We didn't find you, and I don't believe we will find you*<sup>[9]</sup>

## Conclusion

*Returning to Haifa* is a realistic story which reflects the state of loss and assimilation of the Palestinian identity. At the same time, it disclosed the trauma of belonging through a family that forcefully left its place and did not reunite because home was occupied by the Israeli usurpers. In this story, we realize that there are two kind of Jews; Jewish and Zionist. The innocent Jewish is a normal individual you can live with him in peace and mutual respect in a society that accepts another and coexists with him. Another kind of the Jews is the religious and political fanatic Zionists who love themselves only. They see themselves as the leaders of the world. They are seeing the other people as a second class and they had been created only to serve them. They hope to rule the world and establish their state (Israel) in the holy land of Palestine. They are killing brutally and mercilessly to achieve their goals. The Zionist gangs have committed a lot of the mass massacres in the Palestine to banish the original population and give their properties to the Jewish immigrants from the different parts of the world. In this

way, we see in the novel how the Zionist Polish Iphrat changed from a victim from the Nazi in Europe during the Second World War to an executioner and fighter in Palestine. This change shows the contradiction in the morals and principles of the Zionists; which change according to place, time, power, and profit.

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