

Migration and Oil-Centric Life: A Study on Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*

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Abstract

The oil narratives bring in a gamut of perspectives that would redefine the outlook of life. Modern life is embedded in the discovery of oil and the usage of hydrocarbon fuels. Petrofiction offers a scope for understanding the representation of oil aesthetics in literature. The research paper aims to critically expound the transformation after the sudden boom of wealth in Kuwait due to the discovery of oil, and the migration of Palestine refugees from Iraqi camps to Kuwait in search of jobs to upgrade their living conditions with reference to *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani. The study authenticates the oil-centric life in *Men in the Sun* by understanding that oil is the base structure that governs the “push”, “pressure” and “stay” factors of a refugee in flight with theoretical support of kinetic model of exile, displacement and resettlement as proposed by Egon F. Kunz.

Keywords: oil-centric, migration, refugees, oil narratives, Palestine refugees, petrofiction

The diachronic study of human civilization has actively recorded various facets of life including great events like war, political shift, geographical change, economic front, and their creative representation is eloquently manifested in various art, literature and popular culture. Either be it the independence struggle or the Renaissance that redefined learning, the mantle of literature has become inevitable. As the times change, and scientific advancements redefine the day-to-day lives, the role of literature in accommodating technological advancements have become a deliberate necessity. This inclusivity has led to revolutionizing the various ways in which we understand the history of human developments, where due importance is given to major changes in social, political, economic and also the evolution in the energy usage and consumption.

Understanding literary history and remapping them based on the effects sufficing the discovery of oil is a new trend that has paved the way to the field of energy humanities. Rewriting history from the perspective of energy humanities has opened up a new field of describing, understanding and interpretation of life since the twentieth century. Oil metamorphosed life in the twentieth century as it portrayed the dialogue between power and commerce in a new political and economic light with cultural undertones. Petrofiction studies the representation of oil and other hydrocarbon products in literature.

Here, then, is a way to reconceptualize literary history, in terms of the shifts and dislocations of, and moments of resistance to, the extraction of human energy by global empire in the long twentieth century: a century that has outlasted its time and carried on into ours. (Makdisi, 2011, p. 320)

The significant role of fossil fuels in contemporary life has facilitated the oil narratives to open up conversations about the centrality of energy resources. In such conditions, the petrofiction acts as a reservoir of narratives that combine creativity, fact and fiction to provide an oil centric view of the world. Oil and the Orient survive in a complementary relationship, where the one is always defined and represented by the other. Soon oil came to be represented not only as an energy resource, but also as an entity with hegemony, cultural and ecological values as Stephanie LeMenager (2014) in her book *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* says: “Energy systems are shot through with largely unexamined cultural values, with ethical and ecological consequences” (p. 4).

Within the premise of migration studies, the current research paper employs a critical inquiry of *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani to accentuate the role of oil in governing the movement of Palestinian refugees to Kuwait for employment with the theoretical support of *Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory* by Egon F. Kunz. In doing so, the paper adds migration and refugee studies also as a dimension of petrofiction.

Literature Review

As a significant narrative representing Palestine literature, *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani has been subjected to various literary and critical studies by the scholars. Shadi Saleh Neimneh (2017) examines the novella under the concepts of existentialism and naturalism in his work “Postcolonial Arabic Fiction Revisted: Naturalism and Existentialism in Ghassan Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun*”. As a translation work as well as a film adaptation, the novella and the movie has been the focal study for the translators and the film critics and it is effectively carried out in the work of Marwa J. Aldous and Rashid Yahiaoui (2022) titled “Death on the Page, Rebirth on the Screen: Literature Between Translation and Adaptation, Ghassan Kanafani’s *Men in the*

Sun as a Case Study”. The translation of Hilary Kilpatrick and the film adaptation of Tawfiq Saleh are taken for reference in this case study. The article by Raed Ali Alsaoud Alqasass (2021) titled, “The Diasporic Narrative: Identity Crisis in Ghassan Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun*” delineates the identity crisis faced by the Palestine refugees due to exile and displacement and examines how certain narrative techniques used by the author like split narrative and double plot narrative contributes to the overall thematic effect of the novella. He also credits that this exile and displacement has become an important part of Palestine narratives because, “The experience of diasporic existence has become a part of the Palestinian collective unconscious, developed either by first-hand experience or through oral narratives of what has taken place and handed down from one generation to another”. The works listed here facilitate a critical ground for analysing *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani, and an extensive review of literature helped identify that to study the novella as a petrofiction would only further extend the scope of the genre (Alqasass, 2021, p. 1).

Oil and the Orient

The study of the present topography of the Middle East as elaborated by Robert F. Mahfoud and James N. Beck in their article titled, “Middle East Geology: Why the Middle East Fields May Produce Oil Forever” (1995) published in *Offshore Magazine* reveals that the presence of hydrocarbons is governed by the chemical activity that takes place in the zones known as subduction or rifts. The sedimentary rocks that undergo subduction carry the hydrogen and carbon that combine to form the hydrocarbons or the fossil fuels, “The extensive literature on Middle East oils and oilfields, especially in the Persian/Arabian Gulf area, point out that hydrocarbons are formed from sedimentary petroliferous beds, mostly shales and carbonates” (Mahfoud & Beck, 1995).

After extensive geographical explorations carried out by George Bernard Reynolds, oil was discovered in Persia, present day Iran, in the year 1908. A year later, a subsidiary called Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) was formed, and it sold the company shares to the public. In the year 1914, through Winston Churchill, British Admiralty became an important customer of APOC as their navy fleet shifted from coal to oil powered ships to provide speed and assist better in warfare to gain upper hand in attacking the enemies. It recorded the entry of Britain into the oil economy and also aided in dominance, “Fossil capital launched industrial Britain into an era of accelerated economic growth, modernization, and labor exploitation, the economic regime of the Anthropocene” (Griffiths, 2018, p. 615).

The twenty years contract between APOC and the British government, naturally led to the British being the de facto power behind APOC. In 1935, APOC changed its name to Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The rise of nationalism during the Second World War re-evaluated the holdings of the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and that led to nationalization of assets. In 1954, with several developments, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company changed to British Petroleum and put Iranian oil back on international markets. All the oil companies based outside the Middle East were jointly named as “Seven Sisters” dominated the oil exploration and controlled the majority of the oil reserves until the 1950s. They dominated the oil scene by commissioning exploration in the Middle East and Africa and produced two-thirds of the global oil supply: “Prior to the 1970s, relations between the Middle East oil-producing countries and the big oil companies worked decidedly to the advantage of the latter, mainly because of their exclusive oil agreements with the oil-producing countries”. After the Oil Embargo of 1973, the oil industry nationalized throughout the Middle East (Rose, 2004, p. 430).

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait signed the oil concession grant in 1934. It was first granted to Kuwait Oil Company Limited formed in collaboration with Anglo-Persian Oil Company and Gulf Oil Corporation. On February 22, 1938, oil was discovered in Kuwait. In June 1930, the first crude oil export from Kuwait was initiated. A British tanker named Fusilier carried 10,567 tons of crude oil, loaded from the offshore pipeline. An agreement signed in the year 1975 by the State of Kuwait with Gulf Oil Corporation and British Petroleum gave Kuwait full control of its oil resources. The discovery of oil changed the economic atmosphere of Kuwait and provided abundant employment opportunities. The political turmoil in Palestine motivated the people to migrate to Kuwait in hopes of finding employment with the oil company that could provide them with a home and peaceful life.

The Palestine War from 1947 to 1949, the Palestine Exodus of 1948 and the Six Days War of 1967 witnessed the fleeing of Palestinians from their homeland, seeking asylum in countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria where they settled in the refugee camps. The squalid conditions of the camp, with no jobs and poverty, led to the refugees moving to Kuwait in search of jobs with the sudden boom of oil. In Iraq, the migrating Palestinians were provided with houses to live instead of refugee camps until the invasion of Iraq by the US and UK in 2003. According to the report prepared by *Nowhere to Flee* titled, “The Perilous Situation of Palestinians in Iraq,” there were 34,000 Palestine refugees living in Iraq prior to the Iraq war that began in the year 2003. Prior to the Gulf War there were around 400,000 Palestine people in Kuwait who later fled due to economic and political reasons. The pivotal role played by Palestine refugees in building the oil economy of Kuwait is mentioned by Susan Abulhawa in her novel *Against the Loveless World* (2020) where she highlights the temporariness of their life in association with oil:

The oil boom offered opportunity to build a new life there. Although Kuwait never allowed us more than temporary residence — making it clear we were always guests — Palestinians prospered and had a major hand in Kuwait as the world knows it now (p. 22).

One of the significant native voices that worked for Palestine and its legacy is Ghassan Kanafani who was born in Acre, northern Palestine in the year 1936. He is a novelist, short story writer, playwright and essayist. His family fled Palestine in 1948 and settled in Damascus. He was an active spokesperson for the Liberation of Palestine and the Arab Nationalist movement. His career as a writer includes five novels, five short story collections, two works of study on Palestine literature and two plays. He was assassinated in July 1972. Kanafani's inspiration for writing came from the struggle of the Palestine-Arab, and he played a vital role in the Palestine liberation, making it into a pan revolutionary movement across Arabia. Kanafani became a refugee at the age of twelve and the trauma experience was represented in his writings: “His people were scattered, many of them living in camps or struggling to make a living doing the most menial work; their only hope lay in the future, and in their children, for whose education they made enormous sacrifice” (Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 10).

Men in the Sun by Ghassan Kanafani is a novella, which was first published in the year 1962 and tells the story of three Palestine refugees in Iraq, taking on the dangerous and fateful journey to Kuwait in search of a job to provide a better life for their family. The three men seek a smuggler who would help them illegally enter Kuwait, and the story talks about the difficulties that chaperones this journey that could prove fatal at any point of time. The certainty of death looms over the three men, yet they embark on a trail that so many have done before, hoping that they would find a job in Kuwait, a place with a sudden boom of wealth from oil resources. The three men, like several others, wish to get employed as the laborers possibly in

the oil rigs and send money back to their families. The story presents an insightful account of the migration of the Palestinians to Kuwait, and their migration patterns and motives can be deliberated in association with Egon F. Kunz's kinetic model of exile and resettlement in order to understand how oil governs the movement.

Push, Pressure and Pull

Kunz studies the pattern of exile and resettlement of the refugees in his theoretical work *Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory*. He identifies and groups the refugees into several categories based on the motive or circumstances behind each of them in choosing to flee their homeland and their replacement and resettlement pattern by seeking asylum elsewhere. The grouping of the refugees into five broad categories is carried out through the parameters of “push”, “pressure” and “pull”. The “push”, “pressure” and “pull” works at the basic level for all the five categories and determine the various reasons of why an individual or a community decides to flee their homeland and seek asylum in a completely alien land. Based on the intention for migration, which is determined by the three factors, the refugees are divided into five categories: anticipatory refugees, acute refugees, majority identified refugees, events-alienated refugees, and self-alienated refugees.

The kinetic model of displacement and settlement of Kunz describes the qualities of each category and explains the aftermath of the displacement, which varies according to the motives of the individual at flight. The risk factors are also calculated in this event of displacement, and the uncertainty and fatality both have an inevitable presence in every circumstance. The acute refugee movement is characterized by great political or military changes in a country. The refugees thus decide to flee from the country either as mass or groups or individuals with the prime objective of reaching safely to the neighboring lands to begin a new life. The acute refugees are also aware that this settlement is not a permanent one and that when the time comes, they must leave and settle elsewhere: “The emphasis is on the escape and at the time of passing through the border few refugees partaking in acute movements are aware that later further migration will become a necessity” (Kunz, 1973, p. 132).

While the circumstances determine the type of refugees, the decision to leave the homeland is influenced by these three factors. The “push” motive in this case places an important role in evaluation and decision-making for an individual or a community who is contemplating whether to stay or flee. Immediately after the decision to flee is taken, the journey of the refugee begins and it is accompanied by the birth of nostalgia and longing to return to the homeland. At this point, the refugee looks at all the dramatic events happening around and surrenders to the reality that the idea of returning is impossible. The “push” is followed by the “pressure” and it involves a refugee evaluating his living conditions that include surveying the refugee camps, searching for jobs, and the like. This “pressure” then influences the decision of the refugee to plunge, stay or return. The “push-pressure-stay” situations arise only when the refugees do not flee from the country of asylum and instead are granted official permission to stay there (Kunz, 1973, p. 134).

With inference to the characteristics of each category of refugee as classified by Kunz in his kinetic model, the movement of Palestinians from their homeland to Iraq and then to Kuwait in search of a job to provide a better living can be substantiated as a form of acute refugee movement. Hence, the Palestine refugees moving from the camps of Iraq to Kuwait in *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani represent acute refugees who align with “push”, “pressure”, and

“stay” motives. They flee to Kuwait in search of economic stability to provide their family with a better and safe future.

The three Palestine refugees in Iraq namely, Abu Qais, Marwan and Assad decide to flee to Kuwait hoping to get a job with the oil reserves. Their means of fleeing is through illegal crossing of the Iraq-Kuwait border and Abul Khaizuran, the man with a lorry that has the permit, decides to smuggle them. The three men hide in the truck’s water tank every time the lorry reaches various check posts. They stay in the airtight container for six to seven minutes until Abul Khaizuran returns from showing the documents to the officers. This goes successfully until they almost reach the border. At one of the check posts, Abul Khaizuran is delayed by the officers, and the three men in the airtight tanker die of suffocation. Along with them perish, their dreams of making it to Kuwait and earning money to provide for their family. Hence, the push factor is fueled by the presence of oil in Kuwait for the three men and it determines the importance and speed of the journey.

Oil and Migration

Abu Qais is introduced as lying flat on the damp land and could sense the throbbing of his heart beat. He also thinks about the River Shatt and Ustaz Selim, teacher of the Quran School in a village, that one night fell into the hands of Jews. This portrays Abu Qais as a refugee who is bound by nostalgia of his fallen village, the homeland and the lost wealth. Shatt River reminds him of his once bustling homeland that is suddenly lost due to political and military upheaval. On the other side of Shatt lies Kuwait, the land with wealth and a normal life that Abu Qais could only dream about. This nostalgia brings with it a sense of fragmentation and alienation to Abu Qais, who has fled his homeland to the safety of Iraq, only to be suffering in poverty. The poverty in Iraq pushed Abu Qais to consider another migration and Kuwait, shone as a possibility of better life to him and many other refugees because of its oil wealth, which had the power to bring dreams to reality: “Over there was Kuwait. What only lived in his mind as a dream and fantasy existed there” (Kanfani, 1999, p. 25). Thus, for Abu Qais, Kuwait was a land of possibilities, and it was the driving force behind him undertaking the onerous journey of illegally crossing the border for a better future.

The future as described by Abu Qais has so much uncertainty in it and is portrayed as a “black eternity” depicting a void (Kanafani, 1999, p. 22). The feeling of uncertainty for a refugee is governed by the environment they inhabit, which comprises the social, political and economic conditions that determine their living conditions. When they decide to migrate, the ambivalence includes the risk factors that accompany the refugee during the journey. For refugees like the three men in the story, unlawful crossing to reach Kuwait poses climatic challenges as well because of the harsh desert. Yet, they are willing to face the challenges to reach the glossy reality projected by the oil wealth. Under such circumstances, the presence of oil resources only widens uncertainty and dubiousness of the future of the three men. On the contrary, for countries like Kuwait, the presence of oil resources determines certainty, stability and growth because of their contribution to the holistic growth of the nation. Hence, oil plays an important role in determining the push phenomenon by motivating the refugees to move for better life opportunities and influences the stay factor by offering stability and peaceful life.

The main reason behind Marwan going to Kuwait is to work and provide for his mother, make his siblings study, and raise their living conditions. When his elder brother Zakaria stopped sending money from Kuwait, Marwan had to give up his studies to flee to Kuwait to earn money. He was young and willing to take up a job in Kuwait to fight poverty. Assad in his

middle age was the most practical of the lot and took responsibilities in matters of negotiating with Abul Khaizuran in the arrangement because Abu Qais was old and Marwan was too young for matters of money. Assad carried optimism within him about fleeing, and it is reflected in his thoughts about Kuwait and the money that waits there, which would help him pay off his debts. According to Assad, “A man can collect money in the twinkling of an eye there in Kuwait” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 32). The riches of Kuwait attract the Palestine refugees in Iraq to move there in search of a job, and it is fascinating to note that the primary factor governing the political, economic, and social conditions of life is oil. The discovery of oil in Kuwait, the oil business and the wealth changed the outlook of life and carried with it a new beacon of hope. Hence, the oil-centric life determines the “push-pressure-stay” factor of the characters in the story *Men in the Sun* because oil wealth becomes the reason and urge for migration to Kuwait. Thus oil is the base structure on which the political, economic, social and humanist superstructures are built.

The draggled living conditions of the refugee camps along with their will to return to the homeland has now become an impossible reality, determines the push factor of the three men in the story. The lines that Saad talks to Abu Qais trying to persuade the latter to move to Kuwait portray the underlying “push” in the movement of Palestine refugees from Iraq to Kuwait. Saad says,

In the last ten years you have done nothing but wait. You have needed ten big hungry years to be convinced that you have lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your whole village. People have been making their own way during these long miserable years, while you have been squatting like a dog in a miserable hut. What do you think you are waiting for? Wealth to come through roof of your house? Your house? It is not your house? (Kanafani, 1999, p. 26)

The unpredictability of the journey from Iraq to Kuwait does not hinder the progress of any men. The pressure factor is influenced by the intervening obstacles at physical and emotional levels. Here it is instigated by poverty, the uncertain journey of illegally crossing the borders, and the country of Kuwait itself. The men are willing to undertake all of this with the ray of hope brought by the oil wealth in Kuwait. The difficulty of the people fleeing from Iraq to Kuwait is heightened by the climatic conditions like the scorching sun and waterless desert, “If they had taken me to the desert prison, Al-Jafr, at H4, I wonder if life would have been kinder than it is now. Pointless, pointless” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 31). Nevertheless, the magnitude of difficulties that are determined using the “push” and “pressure” of Kunz did not impede the men in the stories who carried the dreams of a better future in Kuwait from making their journey. The money as an abstract presence, a dream, and a hope provides an optimistic turn amidst every obstacle, “He suddenly fell silent. Abul Khaizuran had begun to laugh. 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, 1999, p. 42). Thus, the role of money in the entire story confirms that it is also one of the “pressure” factors because it alone has the power to rectify the poverty experienced by the Palestine refugees in Iraq. Yet, the reality of oil wealth is different,

The people eventually understand oil as a potential source of wealth, but wealth that is only ever realized via the accumulation of its money and commodity form by the Americans, the emir, and several designing individuals. For the workers receiving a wage, oil wealth remains obscure (Riddle, 2018, p. 56).

The three men in the story are the collective representation of various sad realities with the refugees across the world and their migration experiences. The “stay” parameter is governed by the voluntary migration of the three men, their acceptance of the uncertainty of the return and consent to make the great odyssey as a means of deliverance from poverty. Abu Qais, after being convinced by his friend Saad to move to Kuwait for a job, envisions a future where he would be able to send his children to school, buy olive shoots and set up a living shack. All these dreams have the potential to become reality one day, depending upon his safe return. In such a case, the presence of oil resources acts as the rivulet of optimism that has the power to evade the uncertainty that surrounds the life of a refugee. Despite all the struggles, he is fixed on going to Kuwait and staying there with the hopes of a better future. Abu Qais says about his vision of a better future to his wife and then utters, ““Certainly.” “If I arrive. If I arrive”” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 27). The author’s repetitive usage of “if” heightens the tone of uncertainty that looms over the three men in their journey through the desert

Similar to Abu Qais, Marwan’s situation is also bound by poverty. As a brother who must care for his family, he takes the journey with hopes of reaching and staying in Kuwait and earning money. The sudden abandonment by his father and elder brother, Zakaria, makes Marwan as the sole breadwinner of the family that is drowning in poverty. In order to improve their conditions, Marwan, young and in school, leaves everything to go to Kuwait in search of a job. The pressure of reality portrays his consent to stay in Kuwait and make better use of the circumstances. The money that he makes in Kuwait would deliver his family from all the miseries. “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” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 43). The vision that Marwan has of a better life that awaits in Kuwait serves as the pressure that is forcing him to take the difficult journey. While the vision is the driving force, the prosperity of Kuwait after the oil encounter is the sole motivation behind Marwan considering staying in the place as a migrant and improving the livelihood of his family.

By analyzing the migration of three men in association with the kinetic model, the presence of oil in determining the push, pressure and stay is established. Initially, the push for the three men begins with political turmoil in their homelands and as they reach Iraq, another displacement becomes inevitable because of the poverty. Kuwait as the destination is evaluated by the refugees based on the riches provided by the oil wealth. Hence, the presence of oil resources in Kuwait supports the push factor of these three men. Again, the presence of the oil resources also contributes to the pressure factor of the refugee. When the legal means to cross the Iraq-Kuwait borders is overruled, the unlawful crossing through the harsh desert without proper food, water and shelter adds more to the already difficult and unreliable journey. Yet, the presence of oil wealth and employment in Kuwait contributes towards the pressure to take up the journey. The willingness and determination of the three men to migrate despite knowing all the complications strengthens the stay factor. As the political, economic and social life has gradually improved because of the oil boom in Kuwait, the peace and stability that it promises influences the three men to stay there and improve their living conditions. Thus, the movement of the refugees in this novella is highly determined by the oil encounter in Kuwait, and it infiltrates into all the base structure of the kinetic model by Kunz, and corroborates its centrality.

Metaphoric Representation

The shift in energy resources directly increased the speed of the movement from one place to the other. The advent of automobiles that run on fossil fuels have become the mechanical

materialization of oil wealth. Along with it, the coming of cars and trucks created a new market for oil that increased the demand and supply and ended the dependency on coal. It resulted in fervent explorations especially in the Middle East, “These new vehicles would go on to conquer the pedestrian, the bicyclist, and the railways themselves, paving over their rights-of-way with smooth asphalt for their immense engines, creating a thirsty new market for the oil industry in the process” (Shah, 2004, p. 9). The automobiles have thus improved the speed of life and possibility of movement even into the harshest terrains. The discovery of oil resources facilitated movement while the prospective employment opportunities aided the migration, “The discovery of oil, the petroleum as the mode of fuel allowed for the mushroom growth of automobile industries and usage” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 26). Thus, the presence of oil resources is an integral part of the migration of the three men and it establishes the centrality of oil in governing the dynamics of life

The metaphor of oil centric life is heightened in the story by the presence of a lorry. So far, the oil resources contributed only to the dreams of better life for the refugees and had an omnipotent presence that governed the movement and decisions of each man planning to move to Kuwait. The presence of fossil fuels in determining the safe and successful movement of the three men can be delineated through the usage of automobiles. The lorry that the three men board becomes the mode of bringing their dreams come true. While the three men depend on it to safely reach Kuwait, the lorry is the means of income for Abul Khaizuran. Thus, the lorry, an automobile powered by oil-based fuel, on the road to Kuwait becomes the tool of deliverance to better life, thereby accentuating the dependence on fossil fuels for movement and wealth. The lorry also serves as a symbol of security for the three men as Khaizuran assures safe arrival at Kuwait:

The huge lorry was carrying them along the road, together with their dreams, their families, their hopes and ambitions, their misery and despair, their strength and weakness, their past and future, as if it were pushing against the immense door to a new, unknown destiny, and all eyes were fixed on the door’s surface as though bound to it by invisible threads (Kanafani, 1999, p. 63).

The oil motif expressed through the lorry and the dreams it carried makes a convincing portrayal of the change in the way of life after the discovery of oil. The oil encounter acted not only as a finding of a new energy resource, but also as a means of writing the history of human civilization from energy perspectives. Hence, the oil centric life adds one more lens to understanding social, economic and cultural developments across the globe.

The journey was not a successful one and the three men died right before the end of the journey. They almost reach the end, and this shows the other side of the oil-centric life. The failed dreams, the precarious labor, fatality, loss of culture and uncertainty of life are the flip sides of the coin reflected by Kanafani in his novella. The negative shift is portrayed by the change in the course of the lorry from the asphalt road made of bitumen, which is a hydrocarbon product from crude oil. Khaizuran’s lorry exited the asphalt road and drove through the sandy track of the desert to bury the three men and their dreams, “He turned his lorry off the asphalt road and drove along a sandy track that led into the desert. He made up his mind at noon to bury them, one by one, in three graves” (Kanafani, 1999, p. 72). Thus, the risk and uncertainty that accompanies the infrastructure where the oil resources occupy the center is expounded through the death of the three men, the lorry exiting the road and the grief of Khaizuran. Thus, in effectively recording the role of oil in the life of Palestine refugees, Kanafani’s novella *Men in the Sun* becomes an impactful narrative of petrofiction because, “Most oil fiction, for example,

contains certain thematic preoccupations: volatile labor relations and ethnic tensions, war and violence, ecological despoliation, and political corruption” (Macdonald, 2012, p. 31).

Conclusion

The negative and sad ending of the story does not seem to overpower the optimism and hope that the three men carried with them throughout the journey from Iraq to Kuwait. This thirst is governed by the oil wealth and the new life it promised. Thus, the novella of Kanafani shows how oil, the new-found wealth, directs the course of the “push”, “pressure” and “stay” of the refugees, becomes the symbol of hope for progression and finer life, and facilitates movement. As a cultural phenomenon oil wealth adds further to the study of its presence and effect on society, geography, politics, economy and art. Hence the reinterpretation of history from fossil fuel point of view becomes mandatory in understanding the works of the contemporary times and international relationships that contribute to global economy, peace and stability because,

Energy use has been central to the development of human civilization, society, and economy. As a first approximation, we can say that the story of human development has been the story of increased use of energy. Indeed, we can even think of human history as falling into epochs marked by the human ability to exploit various sources of energy (Jamieson, 2011, p. 16).

Oil narratives play a crucial role in understanding of life in the 20th and 21st centuries. The production, consumption, migration of people, precarious labor and several other stories surround the event of the discovery of oil from around the world. As such they provide testimonies of oil centric life that has transformed the social, political, economic, environmental and energy outlook of the present-day world. In the current Anthropocene age, in the matters pertaining to urgency surrounding the climate conversations around the globe, the relevance of oil narratives is heightened by their contribution to ecocriticism. While the environmental perspective often portrays the ramification of environment and culture that accompanies the monstrous exploration process and exploitation of the resources in the hands of the capitalist, speculative aspect of petrofiction depicts the ruined environment where fossil fuels have exhausted in order to produce a post-oil setting that is representative of the catastrophe that surrounds the oil dependent social order. In analyzing the novels, *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, *The Windup Girl* (2009) by Pablo Bacigalupi and *Dune* (1965) by Frank Herbert as post-oil narratives, Heather I. Sullivan in her article “Petro-texts, Plants, and People in the Anthropocene: The Dark Green” (2019), writes “Oil becomes an impossible dream of the past”, and their absence shapes the dystopian setting and the lifestyle (p. 163).

Petrofiction provides a literary medium and voice to the reality after oil encounter. Amitav Ghosh in his work, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) highlights the importance of understanding and representing the oil aesthetics and their contemporary relevance in literature and it is necessary because, “For the arts, oil is inscrutable in a way that coal never was: the energy that petrol generates is easy to aestheticize—as in images and narratives of roads and cars—but the substance itself is not” (p.100). Hence, one cannot understand contemporary life without mapping the role of oil that is embedded into the day-to-day lives of everyone across the globe.

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