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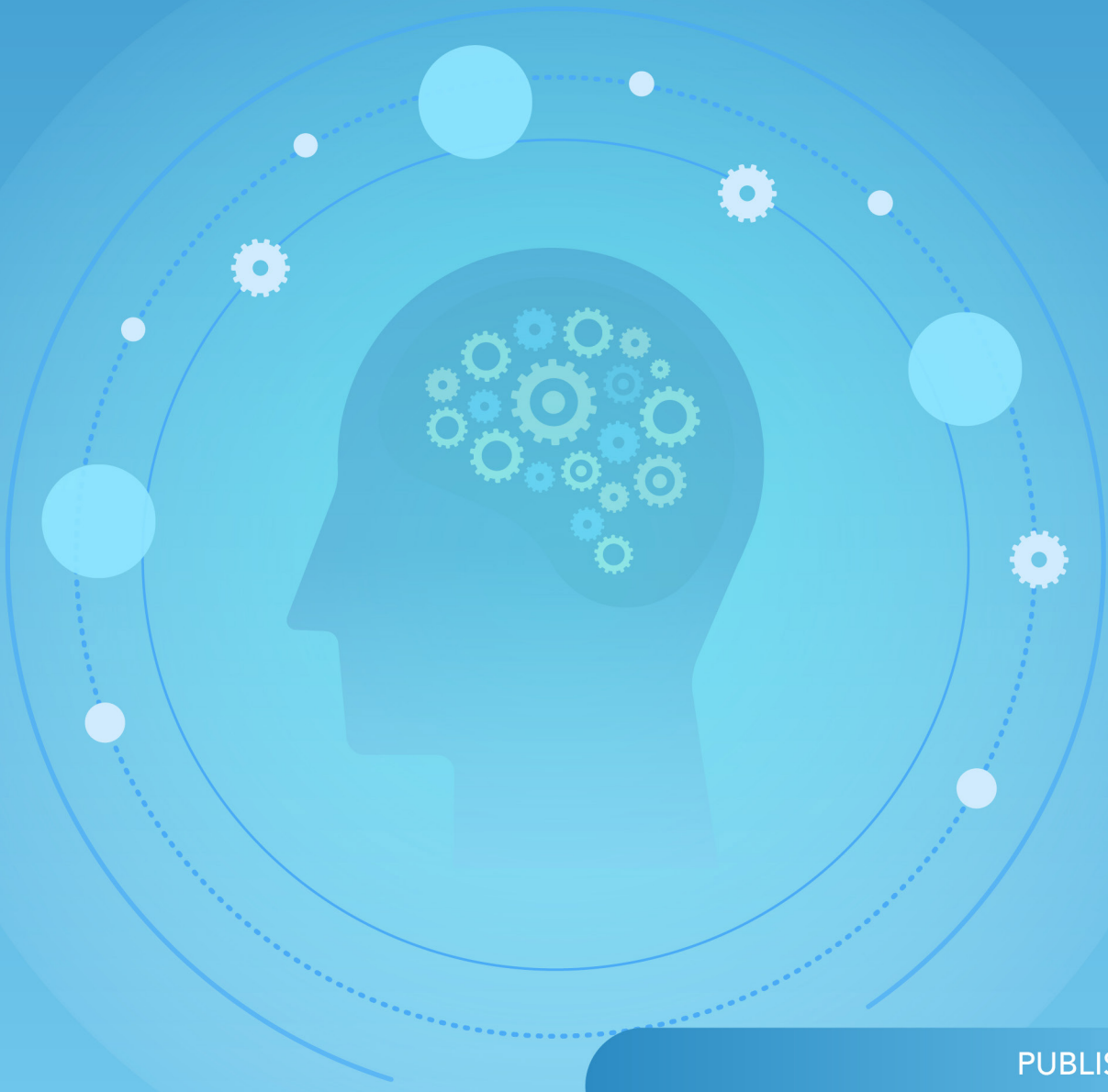

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From Harlem to Gaza: Resisting Necropolitics and Orientalist Violence in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*

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ABSTRACT

This article compares Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) to demonstrate how racial capitalism and settler colonialism converge in necropolitical and Orientalist regimes that mark Black and Palestinian lives as expendable. Ellison's narrator becomes both hypervisible and invisible in Jim Crow America, forced into spectacles such as the Battle Royal and erased in the Liberty Paints factory. Kanafani's Said and Safiyya return to a home renamed and reoccupied, where they discover their lost child has become an Israeli soldier, a scene that enacts the settler logic of "destroy to replace". Methodologically, the article employs close reading and comparative analysis, drawing on necropolitics, racial capitalism to situate state violence, while engaging Black radical thought and Palestinian memory studies to interpret resistance. The study finds that while Ellison develops fugitivity and opacity in an underground space of narration, Kanafani affirms *sumud* through embodied memory and testimony that reclaims erased space. Together, these texts show that literature not only reflects oppression but also generates counter-archives and counter-geographies that sustain transnational solidarities and imagine decolonial futures.

INTRODUCTION

The systematic erasure of marginalized communities by state power through racial domination, colonial dispossession, and suppression of subaltern knowledge has long been central to debates in postcolonial and critical race theory. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) present two contexts that appear distant but are deeply interconnected. Both texts dramatize how oppressed peoples navigate erasure and dispossession. They exemplify what Achille Mbembe defines as necropolitics, the sovereign decision over who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2019), and what Edward Said critiques as Orientalism, the systematic rewriting of colonized lives as inferior and disposable (Said, 1978). Ellison's unnamed Black narrator struggles with the paradox of being hypervisible as a body of surveillance and spectacle but invisible as a human subject in Jim Crow America (Yaszek, 2018; Moten, 2017). Kanafani's Said and Safiyya confront the annihilation of Palestinian memory and home under Zionist settler colonialism, a structure that continues to define Palestinian life after the 1948 Nakba (Pappé, 2006; Veracini, 2021).

Ellison's novel has been widely studied as a critique of American racism and racial capitalism. The Battle Royal scene has been read as a violent spectacle that exemplifies Saidiya Hartman's analysis of racial subjection, where Black suffering becomes both a commodity and a pedagogy of domination (Hartman, 1997). The Liberty Paints episode has been examined as an allegory of how whiteness is sustained materially through the invisibilized contributions of Black labor, echoing W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of the "wages of whiteness" and Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism (Du Bois, 1998; Robinson, 2000). Scholars such as Fred Moten (2003, 2018) and Christina Sharpe (2016) extend this reading by situating Ellison's narrator within theorizations of fugitivity, opacity, and the afterlives of slavery. In these frameworks, Ellison's underground retreat is not defeat but a strategy of survival, a form of wake work that insists on Black life within death-dealing structures (Sharpe, 2016; McKittrick, 2006).

Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* has also attracted critical attention as one of the most powerful literary accounts of Palestinian displacement. Scholars read the novella as a testament and a political allegory of the Nakba. The renaming of Haifa's streets and the denial of Palestinian memory align with Edward Said's description of Orientalism as a discourse that erases indigenous presence (Said, 1993). Ann Laura Stoler's concept of "colonial aphasia," or structured forgetting, helps explain Miriam's claim that Said and Safiyya's home "had no memories before we came" (Stoler, 2016; Kanafani, 2000). Critics such as Gil Hochberg (2007) and Julie Peteet (2017) argue that Kanafani demonstrates how settler colonialism transforms geography into a weapon of domination, while Nur Masalha (2012) and Lena Jayyusi (2007) stress that Palestinian survival depends on memory practices that resist erasure. The most striking element of the novella, the transformation of Khaldun into the Israeli soldier Dov, has been analyzed as the literal enactment of Patrick Wolfe's dictum that settler colonialism destroys to replace (Wolfe, 2016). It shows how colonialism seizes not only land but also lineage, converting Palestinian

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absence into militarized presence.

Comparative studies of Ellison and Kanafani remain rare. Abdul JanMohamed (1983) and Barbara Harlow (1987) initiated the practice of placing African American and Palestinian texts in dialogue, emphasizing the politics of literature in colonial contexts. More recent scholarship underscores the urgency of comparative frameworks that highlight shared terrains of struggle without collapsing their differences. Abdulhadi (2016), Erakat (2019), and Naber (2020) argue that African American and Palestinian histories of racial and colonial violence should be read together in order to uncover global logics of domination. Kelley (2017) insists that solidarity emerges from recognizing interconnected but distinct histories, a position that resonates with Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" theory of diaspora as a shared grammar of resistance (Gilroy, 1993). Davis (2016) extends this connection by linking Ferguson and Palestine as part of the same global struggle against state violence.

Yet, despite this growing scholarship, there is still a gap in comparative literary criticism. Most studies of Ellison and Kanafani remain confined to their own traditions, and when connections are made, they tend to emphasize political solidarity or activist discourse rather than sustained textual analysis (Abdulhadi, 2016; Erakat, 2019). This article addresses that gap by offering a close comparative reading that brings together Ellison's exploration of racial capitalism and fugitivity with Kanafani's portrayal of settler colonialism and *sumud*. The methodology combines close reading with comparative analysis, drawing on Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, Edward Said's Orientalism, and Cedric Robinson's racial capitalism to explain structures of domination (Mbembe, 2019; Said, 1978; Robinson, 2000). It also engages critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1995), Black radical thought (Hartman, 1997; Moten, 2003), and Palestinian memory studies (Jayyusi, 2007; Masalha, 2012; Nora, 1989) to interpret resistance through opacity, memory, and spatial testimony.

The significance of this research lies in showing that African American and Palestinian literary traditions, when read together, provide fresh insight into the shared logics of racial capitalism and settler colonialism while also affirming distinct cultural strategies of survival. In highlighting both convergences and divergences, the study contributes to broader conversations in postcolonial and comparative literature about how oppressed communities generate narratives that resist erasure and imagine alternative futures. This rationale is especially urgent today as movements like Black Lives Matter and global campaigns for Palestinian liberation reveal how literature not only reflects oppression but also equips readers and activists with vocabularies of resistance that remain vital for confronting state violence in the present (Taylor, 2016; Davis, 2016; Kelley, 2017).

Research Questions

1. How do Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* represent necropolitics and Orientalist violence in their respective contexts?
2. What strategies of resistance are articulated in the two texts, and how do they reflect the specific historical and cultural conditions of African American and Palestinian struggles?
3. How can a comparative reading of Ellison and Kanafani contribute to postcolonial and comparative literary studies by illuminating both convergences and divergences in their approaches to oppression and survival?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the representation of necropolitics and Orientalist violence in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*.
2. To examine the strategies of resistance depicted in the two texts, with attention to their rootedness in African American and Palestinian contexts.
3. To contribute to postcolonial and comparative literature by situating Ellison and Kanafani in dialogue, thereby highlighting shared logics of domination as well as distinct cultural grammars of resistance.

Theoretical Framework

The entanglement of violence, representation, and survival in literature demands a theoretical foundation that engages both material realities and discursive constructions. This study grounds its analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) in three interrelated paradigms: Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, and broader theories of resistance in postcolonial, Black radical, and decolonial thought. Taken together, these frameworks expose how state power reduces communities to expendability, how hegemonic discourse legitimates that reduction, and how subaltern voices resist erasure through memory, space, and narrative.

Necropolitics

Achille Mbembe's formulation of necropolitics, first articulated in Necropolitics (2003), defines sovereignty as the capacity to decide "who may live and who must die" (Mbembe, 2019). Where Michel Foucault's biopolitics highlights the regulation of life, necropolitics draws attention to the deliberate production of "death-worlds" in which entire populations are reduced to disposability (Mbembe, 2019). The concept has since been widely applied: scholars show how it explains police violence against African Americans in the United States (Weheliye, 2014; Vargas, 2020) and the militarized management of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005; Tawil-Souri, 2019).

Necropolitics is not only about the spectacular act of killing but also about structuring entire social orders where certain groups live permanently at the threshold of death (Agamben, 1998; Shakhsari, 2020). Ellison's Battle Royal, in which Black youths are forced into violent spectacle

for white entertainment, dramatizes this condition: Black existence is marked by humiliation, spectacle, and expendability (Ellison, 1995). Similarly, Kanafani's portrayal of Palestinians returning to a renamed and occupied Haifa illustrates how settler colonialism transforms homeland into a necropolitical landscape where memory, belonging, and lineage are systematically erased (Kanafani, 2000). Sharpe (2016) deepens this framework by describing Black existence as lived "in the wake" of slavery, where premature death is constitutive rather than exceptional. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015) and Feldman (2018) extend this analysis to Palestine, showing how occupation enforces slow death through bureaucratic management of movement, identity, and survival. Puar (2017) adds that settler colonial necropolitics not only eliminates life but also produces "debilitated futures," as seen in *Returning to Haifa* when Khaldun is transformed into Dov, an Israeli soldier.

Orientalism

If necropolitics illuminates sovereign violence, Orientalism (1978) clarifies how discourse normalizes and sustains it. Orientalism is not merely a body of knowledge about the "East" but a system of representation that casts colonized peoples as irrational, backward, and inferior (Said, 1978). Later critics expand this analysis to contexts within the West itself. Byrd (2011) calls this "internal colonization," where racialized populations are subjected to imperial logics inside metropolitan centers. Chuh (2003) and Melamed (2015) similarly show how American racial formations depend on Orientalist discourses.

In Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator is repeatedly reduced to stereotypes that strip him of individuality, from the humiliations of the Battle Royal to his reduction as a political symbol by the Brotherhood (Ellison, 1995). Such discursive violence mirrors what Byrd terms internal colonization. Kanafani's novella makes Orientalism explicit. The Zionist claim that Palestine was "a land without a people" functions as an Orientalist myth that legitimates settler appropriation while erasing indigenous presence (Shohat, 1989; Khalili, 2020). Miriam's insistence that "this house had no memories before we came" (Kanafani, 2000) exemplifies Stoler's (2016) concept of colonial aphasia, the willful forgetting that allows dispossession. Patrick Wolfe's dictum that settler colonialism is a "structure, not an event" (Wolfe, 2016) underscores the continuity of this erasure, while Butler (2009) reminds us that Orientalist discourses also render certain lives "ungrievable," stripping them of human recognition.

Orientalism, then, operates in tandem with necropolitics: discourse precedes material violence by establishing the colonized or racialized subject as disposable, illegible, or forgettable. In both Ellison and Kanafani, Orientalist frameworks not only legitimize erasure but also silence the histories and subjectivities of those they mark as inferior.

Resistance

If necropolitics and Orientalism describe domination, theories of resistance emphasize how the oppressed persist and fight back. Fanon (1961) insisted that colonial violence generates counter-violence, while Spivak (1988) asked whether the subaltern can speak within structures that systematically mute them. More recent work emphasizes refusal and opacity. Coulthard (2014) stresses Indigenous practices of refusal that reject colonial recognition. Moten (2003, 2018) describes fugitivity as a mode of life that resists capture by dominant categories. Sharpe (2016) theorizes "wake work" as practices of survival amid catastrophe.

Ellison's narrator embodies resistance through fugitivity. His retreat underground, often read as withdrawal, is reinterpreted here as a survival strategy that transforms invisibility into a form of opacity and refusal (Moten, 2018; McKittrick, 2006). Kanafani's Safiyya performs resistance through memory and testimony. Her insistence on narrating the life of her house and reclaiming its erased history illustrates what Taylor (2003, 2020) calls the repertoire, embodied performance that resists archival erasure. Masalha (2012) and Jayyusi (2007) similarly emphasize how Palestinian identity is preserved through memory practices that counter Orientalist narratives. McKittrick (2006) adds that marginalized groups produce alternative geographies of survival, an insight that connects Black and Palestinian struggles for spatial reclamation.

Resistance, then, is conceptualized not as a single act but as a range of strategies shaped by history and context: fugitivity and opacity in Ellison's Harlem, *sumud* and memory in Kanafani's Haifa. Both represent survival in the face of necropolitical and Orientalist violence, yet they remain distinct responses shaped by different conditions - racial slavery and segregation in one case, settler colonial elimination in the other.

Synthesis

By synthesizing necropolitics, Orientalism, and resistance, this theoretical framework positions Ellison and Kanafani within a shared horizon that illuminates state violence while foregrounding subaltern agency. Necropolitics exposes how sovereign power produces death-worlds in which Black and Palestinian lives are rendered disposable (Mbembe, 2019; Sharpe, 2016; Puar, 2017). Orientalism clarifies how discourse sustains such violence by erasing subjectivity and history, rendering lives ungrievable and legitimating dispossession (Said, 1978; Stoler, 2016; Butler, 2009). Resistance highlights how marginalized voices counter erasure through opacity, memory, and spatial testimony (Moten, 2018; McKittrick, 2006; Taylor, 2020). These theoretical insights are not employed abstractly but are translated into the conceptual categories that guide the analysis: necropolitics functions as a lens for examining expendability, Orientalism serves as a framework for reading discursive erasure, and resistance is treated as a

spectrum of survival strategies ranging from fugitivity in *Invisible Man* to *sumud* in *Returning to Haifa*. Taken together, these categories form the conceptual foundation for the comparative reading that follows, ensuring that the study remains attentive to both convergence and divergence across African American and Palestinian literatures.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design based on close reading and comparative literary analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969). These texts were chosen because they vividly represent African American and Palestinian experiences of racial domination, dispossession, and survival, allowing for an exploration of how racial capitalism and settler colonialism intersect through necropolitics and Orientalist erasure. The analysis relies on primary textual evidence supported by secondary theoretical frameworks, including Mbembe's (2019) Necropolitics, Said's (1978, 1993) Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism, and Robinson's (2000) Black Marxism, along with insights from Hartman (1997, 2019), Moten (2003, 2018), Sharpe (2016), Masalha (2012), and Sayigh (1987). Key episodes such as the Battle Royal and Liberty Paints in *Invisible Man* and the homecoming and confrontation with Dov in *Returning to Haifa* are examined to trace patterns of domination and resistance. The analysis proceeds in three stages: identifying significant scenes, interpreting them through theoretical frameworks, and synthesizing the findings to highlight both convergences and divergences across the two texts.

Discussion

Writing in the Shadows: Rethinking *Invisible Man*

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is one of the most penetrating critiques of racial domination in the United States, dramatizing how African Americans navigate the paradox of being hypervisible as objects of surveillance and spectacle yet invisible as subjects of humanity. This double bind reflects what Achille Mbembe defines as necropolitics: sovereignty expressed in the power to determine who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2019). Ellison's unnamed narrator is compelled to exist within a system that marks his body as a site of consumption and violence while erasing his individuality. In exposing this paradox, the novel also engages with Edward Said's Orientalism, here applied to the internal racial order of America, where Black life is rewritten as inferior and disposable (Said, 1978). Ellison not only critiques these systems but also imagines survival strategies through opacity, narrative fragmentation, and fugitivity.

The novel's infamous Battle Royal scene exemplifies necropolitical reduction in stark form. Invited to deliver his graduation speech before a gathering of the town's white elites, the narrator is instead forced into a brutal fight against other young Black men, blindfolded and humiliated while the white audience laughs. The narrator recalls: "I was fighting automatically when suddenly I noticed the one remaining fighter had gone down… The laughter hung smokelike in the sudden stillness. I was gasping… The voice cried, 'Get the money!'… I crawled over and began picking up coins" (Ellison, 1995). This grotesque spectacle renders Black bodies expendable, aligning with Saidiya Hartman's account of how racial domination is taught through spectacular violence, what she calls "scenes of subjection" (Hartman, 1997). Here, sovereignty manifests not only in the capacity to kill but in the orchestration of humiliation as a pedagogy of power. The electrified rug on which coins are scattered literalizes Cedric Robinson's concept of racial capitalism, where Black life is made to suffer for scraps while sustaining white enjoyment (Robinson, 2000).

The Liberty Paints factory episode extends this logic to industrial capitalism. The factory's proud slogan, "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints," depends paradoxically on a formula requiring the narrator to mix drops of black substance into white paint to produce its so-called purity: "The purest white that can be found… You just stir ten drops of this black dope into each bucket" (Ellison, 1995). The symbolism is clear: whiteness defines itself through purity while simultaneously depending on the invisibilized contributions of Blackness. W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of the "wages of whiteness" clarifies how white identity secures value through the denial of Black labor (Du Bois, 1998). Sharpe (2016) interprets this paradox as part of the afterlives of slavery, where Black life is essential yet erased within modern economies. The figure of Lucius Brockway, the Black foreman working underground, shows how racial capitalism recruits intermediaries to enforce domination. His suspicion of the narrator "You trying to sabotage the paint?" (Ellison, 1995) echoes colonial tropes of the racialized worker as inherently threatening. When the boiler explodes, the narrator is blamed, echoing how Black communities are scapegoated for systemic crises (Muhammad, 2019).

The narrator's subsequent hospitalization deepens Ellison's critique by showing how institutions pathologize Black subjectivity. The narrator undergoes electroshock therapy, an attempt to erase memory and individuality. Fanon's insight that colonialism inscribes domination onto the body resonates here, where medical violence enforces obedience (Fanon, 2004). Ann Laura Stoler's concept of "colonial aphasia" clarifies how structured forgetting is central to domination, as the narrator's mind is deliberately emptied of resistant memory (Stoler, 2016). This institutional violence mirrors what Mbembe identifies as "death-worlds," spaces where sovereignty reduces individuals to a state of social death (Mbembe, 2019).

The narrator's experience with the Brotherhood exemplifies how Orientalist logics function internally within the United States. Initially embraced as a representative of "the Black masses," he is quickly reduced to a token stripped of individuality, serving as a political instrument for the organization's agenda (Ellison, 1995). Edward Said's account of Orientalism as the denial

of subaltern agency applies here, where the narrator is confined to a role designed by others (Said, 1978). Jodi Byrd (2011) terms this process "internal colonization," showing how minority voices are appropriated by hegemonic discourses while being denied authentic subjecthood. The Brotherhood's betrayal demonstrates how even movements claiming liberation can reproduce structures of silencing.

Faced with these intersecting violences, the narrator turns to invisibility as a survival strategy. His retreat into the underground has often been interpreted as withdrawal, but scholars such as Moten (2003, 2018) and Christina Sharpe (2016) argue that fugitivity and opacity constitute forms of resistance. Moten (2003) describes fugitivity as a refusal of capture, a practice of living outside the logics of domination. Sharpe (2016) describes Black survival as "wake work," practices of care and remembrance within conditions of catastrophe. By embracing invisibility, the narrator transforms negation into strategy, asserting the right not to be legible to structures that deny his humanity. Édouard Glissant's call for the "right to opacity" resonates strongly here, as invisibility becomes a shield against capture and commodification (Glissant, 1997).

Ellison's strategies of resistance align with broader currents in Black radical thought. Spillers (1987) emphasizes how narrative and language can be repurposed to articulate Black subjectivity against imposed grammars of domination. Gilroy (1993) situates such practices within a diasporic "counterculture of modernity," where Black cultural production resists through fragmentation, memory, and performance. Ellison's fragmented narrative, filled with digressions and contradictions, enacts what Michel Foucault calls "counter-memory," disrupting the coherence of official historiographies (Foucault, 1977). The underground retreat, illuminated by stolen electricity, becomes what Katherine McKittrick (2006) describes as a Black geography, where marginal space is reclaimed as a site of agency.

These strategies also anticipate contemporary critiques of racial surveillance and state violence. The paradox of hypervisibility and invisibility resonates with the Black Lives Matter movement, which confronts the spectacle of Black death alongside the denial of Black humanity (Taylor, 2016). Scholars like Browne (2015) and Benjamin (2019) connect Ellison's insights to modern technologies of surveillance, showing how visibility remains a site of danger for Black communities. Ellison's narrator insists that invisibility can be transformed into power, a lesson with enduring significance in resisting necropolitical regimes.

When read comparatively, Ellison's text anticipates transnational solidarities. His critique of racial capitalism and Orientalist erasure mirrors the struggles of colonized peoples elsewhere, including Palestinians under Zionist settler colonialism. Whereas Ellison's narrator resists by retreating underground into opacity, Kanafani's characters in *Returning to Haifa* resist by asserting memory and presence. Both, however, weaponize narrative against erasure. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* helps to connect these strategies: Ellison's underground chamber and Kanafani's family home both serve as sites of memory where counter-histories are anchored (Nora, 1989). By staging survival in "death-worlds," Ellison offers a fugitive grammar of resistance that prepares the ground for understanding Kanafani's Palestinian steadfastness.

In sum, *Invisible Man* dramatizes how necropolitics and Orientalism shape African American life while also foregrounding strategies of resistance. The Battle Royal reduces Black life to spectacle, the Liberty Paints factory erases Black labor, the Brotherhood silences individuality, and the underground retreat reclaims invisibility as survival. Ellison's narrator thus models fugitivity and opacity as practices of defiance. These strategies illuminate not only the specific conditions of Jim Crow America but also the broader logics of racial capitalism and colonial domination. Ellison's novel, therefore, is not a closed narrative of despair but an enduring text of resistance, one that resonates deeply when read alongside Kanafani's Palestinian narrative of memory and dispossession.

Haifa as a Site of Memory and Erasure in *Returning to Haifa*

Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) remains one of the most searing literary testimonies of Palestinian dispossession, dramatizing how settler colonialism transforms both geography and lineage while attempting to annihilate memory. Centered on Said and Safiyya, a Palestinian couple revisiting their home twenty years after being expelled during the Nakba of 1948, the novella stages the entanglement of space, memory, and identity under Zionist colonization. Kanafani demonstrates how necropolitical violence and Orientalist erasure define Palestinian life while also insisting that memory and steadfastness (*sumud*) remain powerful tools of resistance. In this sense, the text articulates a distinctly Palestinian grammar of defiance that resonates with Ellison's but arises from different historical and geopolitical conditions. The couple's return to Haifa immediately establishes the city as what Mbembe calls a "death-world," a zone where Palestinian existence is spectral and subordinated (Mbembe, 2019). As they drive through streets that have been renamed and renumbered, the text emphasizes the colonial restructuring of space: "The streets had names now that he didn't recognize… The numbers on the houses had changed. Everything had changed except the sea" (Kanafani, 2000). This transformation reflects what Edward Said (1993) describes as the imperial prerogative to reorder landscapes in order to sever indigenous connections to place (Culture and Imperialism). Rashid Khalidi (1997) identifies such practices as part of the Zionist project of "historical engineering," the deliberate production of amnesia regarding Palestinian presence (Palestinian Identity). Yet Kanafani insists on natural constancy through the sea, a symbol of unerasable geography that resists colonial inscription. Laleh Khalili

(2007) calls such elements "counter-topographies," natural anchors that bear witness against official narratives (Heroes & Martyrs).

The couple's confrontation with Miriam, the Jewish woman now living in their home, epitomizes colonial denial and Orientalist erasure. Miriam's claim that "this house had no memories before we came" (Kanafani, 2000) enacts what Laura Stoler (2016) terms "colonial aphasia," a structured forgetting necessary to legitimize dispossession. Shohat (1989) identifies this as part of the Zionist "myth of an empty land," a discourse that renders Palestine as a tabula rasa awaiting European settlement. Peteet (2017) argues that such erasures turn geography itself into a weapon of domination, where even walls and streets are repurposed to erase Palestinian belonging. Against this denial, Safiyya performs what Lena Jayyusi (2007) calls "forensic memory," pointing out where furniture once stood and narrating the erased life of the house. Masalha (2012) similarly highlights how oral and embodied memory practices sustain Palestinian survival, countering erasure with testimony. In this sense, memory is not nostalgia but resistance, transforming private recollection into public defiance.

The novella's most devastating revelation arrives when Said and Safiyya discover that their infant son Khaldun, left behind during the chaos of 1948, has been raised as Dov, a Zionist soldier. This transformation enacts Patrick Wolfe's dictum that settler colonialism "destroys to replace" (Wolfe, 2016). The colonizer not only seizes territory but also appropriates lineage, converting Palestinian absence into militarized presence. Hochberg (2007) interprets this as the ultimate violence of settler colonialism: the conversion of Palestinian futures into embodiments of the settler project. Said's anguished recognition of his son's new identity echoes Jasbir Puar's notion of "debilitated futures," where colonial regimes do not merely kill but incapacitate the capacity to imagine continuation (Puar, 2017). The biological dimension of this violence distinguishes Kanafani's text from Ellison's, for it shows how settler colonialism attacks generational continuity itself.

Despite the devastation, Safiyya refuses despair. Her climactic declaration "Now I know that we have another homeland… one we can create with our hands" (Kanafani, 2000) shifts the narrative from mourning to futurity. This gesture aligns with Mahmoud Darwish's poetic insistence that loss can become a promise rather than an endpoint (Darwish, 1995). It also resonates with Diana Taylor's concept of the "repertoire," embodied practices that resist archival erasure by insisting on performance and testimony (Taylor, 2003). Unlike Ellison's narrator, who resists through opacity and withdrawal, Safiyya resists through presence and insistence on continuity. Her defiance exemplifies *sumud*, the Palestinian ethos of steadfastness described by Rosemary Sayigh (1987) as the refusal to relinquish belonging even under occupation.

Kanafani also dramatizes the intergenerational stakes of resistance. The couple realizes that the future cannot be reclaimed through Khaldun/Dov but must instead be fought for through new forms of collective struggle. Critics such as Harlow (1987) and Abu-Manneh (2016) emphasize that Kanafani's fiction links personal trauma to collective resistance, turning family narratives into revolutionary allegories. In *Returning to Haifa*, the private loss of a son becomes an allegory for the national struggle to reclaim Palestine. The novella thus connects intimate memory to political futurity, showing that resistance requires both remembering the past and reimagining the future.

Kanafani's strategies of resistance differ significantly from Ellison's but remain equally powerful. Ellison's narrator embraces invisibility and opacity to evade capture, whereas Kanafani's Safiyya asserts visibility and testimony against erasure. Both, however, mobilize memory as a weapon. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* illuminates how both the underground chamber in *Invisible Man* and the contested Haifa home function as sites where counter-histories crystallize (Nora, 1989). Kanafani insists that Palestinian memory, even when fractured, is not extinguished but embodied in testimony, performance, and continued presence.

In this way, *Returning to Haifa* articulates a Palestinian mode of resistance that is rooted in space, memory, and futurity. The renaming of Haifa, the erasure of the house's past, and the transformation of Khaldun into Dov all dramatize how settler colonialism seeks to annihilate Palestinian presence. Yet Safiyya's insistence that "the house is ours, even if they live in it" (Kanafani, 2000) reclaims both geography and history as tools of survival. Kanafani shows that even in conditions of displacement, Palestinians resist by performing memory and imagining new futures. When read alongside Ellison, this strategy complements but also contrasts with African American fugitivity, highlighting how different histories produce distinct yet resonant grammars of defiance.

Transnational Resonance

Placing Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) alongside Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) reveals how racial domination and settler colonial violence operate through comparable structures of erasure, dispossession, and control, even as each context produces distinct strategies of resistance. Reading Harlem and Haifa together demonstrates what Gilroy (1993) terms a "shared grammar of diaspora", where the experiences of African Americans under Jim Crow and Palestinians under Zionist occupation illuminate overlapping logics of power. Both texts foreground the necropolitical sovereignty that Mbembe (2019) describes as "the capacity to decide who may live and who must die", exposing how modern states create death-worlds for populations deemed expendable.

One of the clearest convergences between the two works lies in their treatment of spatial domination. In *Invisible Man*, the protagonist is confined to segregated and surveilled environments, from the claustrophobic Battle Royal to the ideological straitjacket of the Brotherhood. McKittrick (2006) identifies this as "cartographic

violence," the disciplining of Black bodies through geography. In *Returning to Haifa*, the renaming of streets and the appropriation of Palestinian homes enact what Abu Sitta (2004) terms "toponymic erasure," erasing Palestinian presence from the map. Eyal Weizman (2007) shows how Israeli architecture turns occupied space into a tool of domination, just as American racial geography restricted Black mobility. In both cases, geography becomes a weapon of power, shaping subjectivity and enforcing erasure.

The texts also converge in their depiction of biological and epistemic violence. In Ellison's Liberty Paints factory, Black labor sustains whiteness but remains invisible, echoing W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of the "wages of whiteness" (Du Bois, 1935/1998). In Kanafani's novella, settler colonialism goes further by appropriating lineage: the transformation of Khaldun into the Zionist soldier Dov dramatizes Patrick Wolfe's dictum that settler colonialism "destroys to replace" (Wolfe, 2016). Both narratives reveal how necropolitical regimes target not only bodies but also futures, producing what Jasbir Puar (2017) describes as "debilitated futures," where oppressed communities are denied continuity.

Spectacles of expendability also unify the two works. Ellison's Battle Royal turns young Black men into objects of grotesque amusement for white elites, their pain commodified as entertainment (Ellison, 1952; Hartman, 1997). Kanafani, in contrast, exposes the Zionist myth of "a land without a people," a discourse that erases Palestinian existence while legitimizing their displacement (Shohat, 1989; Said, 1979). Butler's (2009) notion of "ungrievable lives" helps connect these representations, as both African Americans and Palestinians are figured as lives that do not count in the calculus of sovereignty.

The divergences between Ellison and Kanafani are equally instructive. Ellison's narrator resists by retreating into opacity, embracing invisibility as a fugitive strategy. Fred Moten (2003) defines fugitivity as a refusal of capture, a practice of life outside the terms of legibility. His underground retreat exemplifies Édouard Glissant's (1997) call for the "right to opacity". Kanafani's characters, by contrast, resist through steadfastness and memory, insisting on presence even in displacement. Safiyya's declaration that "the house is ours, even if they live in it" (Kanafani, 2000) embodies *sumud*, the Palestinian ethos of unyielding presence described by Rosemary Sayigh (1997). These differences reflect distinct histories: African American fugitivity arises from slavery and segregation, where invisibility could mean survival, whereas Palestinian resistance demands visible presence to counter settler colonial narratives of absence.

Despite these differences, both texts articulate a transnational grammar of resistance. Ellison transforms invisibility into agency, while Kanafani reclaims memory and space as defiance. Together, they enact what Nora (1989) terms *lieux de mémoire*: the underground chamber and the Haifa home become sites where counter-histories crystallize. Both works weaponize narrative itself against erasure, aligning with Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2014) call to resist "epistemicide," the destruction of subaltern knowledge.

The resonance between Harlem and Haifa also anticipates real-world solidarities. The Black Panther Party in the 1970s openly supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization, with Huey Newton theorizing "intercommunalism" as a global struggle against imperial violence (Newton, 1974). Angela Davis (2016) explicitly links Ferguson and Palestine as sites where militarized policing and occupation reproduce necropolitical control. More recently, the Black Lives Matter movement has affirmed solidarity with Palestinian liberation, declaring "our struggles are intertwined" (BLM, 2020). June Jordan's poem *Moving Towards Home* (1989) and Emily Jacir's *Memorial to 418 Villages* (2001) similarly bridge African American and Palestinian cultural memory. As Kelley (2017) argues, solidarity does not collapse differences but emerges from recognizing shared terrains of struggle.

Reading Ellison and Kanafani together challenges Eurocentric frameworks of postcolonial studies that often sideline race or settler colonialism. Both texts show how racial capitalism and colonial elimination are co-constitutive forces of modernity. Ellison ends in ambivalence, asking "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison, 1952), while Kanafani ends with defiance, asserting "another homeland… one we can create with our hands" (Kanafani, 2000). These closing gestures exemplify Saidiya Hartman's (2007) concept of the "radical imagination", where oppressed communities refuse erasure and envision liberation across borders.

CONCLUSION

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* show how necropolitics and Orientalism attempt to erase subjecthood, yet both texts insist on resistance. Ellison's narrator, subjected to racial capitalism and necropolitical control, finds survival in opacity and fugitivity, transforming invisibility into strategy. Kanafani's Safiyya, confronting settler colonial erasure, reclaims space and lineage through memory and *sumud*. These divergences reflect different historical conditions, since anti-Blackness in Jim Crow America demanded retreat from the gaze, while Zionist colonialism in Palestine necessitated the assertion of presence. At the same time, both texts converge in exposing how sovereignty reduces marginalized lives to expendability. Together, they illuminate a transnational grammar of resistance that transforms sites of negation, from the underground chamber to the contested Haifa home, into *lieux de mémoire* that preserve counter-histories.

The significance of reading these texts together lies in showing how African American and Palestinian literatures resist what Santos (2014) calls "epistemicide," while offering vocabularies for survival that remain urgent in the present. This study is limited by its focus on only two

texts. Future research could extend the analysis to other works, such as Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* (1976), and apply lenses from queer theory, disability studies, or ecocriticism. Comparative scholarship might also incorporate Arabic-language criticism and African American oral traditions in order to ensure cultural specificity. Despite these limitations, Ellison's image of a "raft of hope" (Ellison, 1952) and Safiyya's vision of "another homeland, one we can create with our hands" (Kanafani, 2000) exemplify Saidiya Hartman's (2007) "radical imagination", which refuses erasure and envisions liberation across borders. Their legacies endure as acts of resistance that remain relevant to movements from Black Lives Matter to Palestinian liberation.

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