

Manifestations of Silence in Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*

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Received: July 30, 2024

Accepted: December 12, 2024

Online Published: February 7, 2025

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n4p39

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n4p39>

Abstract

This study aims to highlight the instances of silence in discourse and its meanings within the narrative context. Silence, a core element of verbal expression, fosters openness to diverse meanings and enriches narrative discourse. It is also a facet of speech, conveying and establishing meaning. The study is focused on the novel *Returning to Haifa* because silence is a crucial element of the narrative discourse and contributes to its formation. Silence permeates various elements of the novel, including characters, time, and place. The study also seeks to demonstrate the role of silence in conveying meaning and establishing significance, as it has a clear impact on changing the direction of the narrative and enhancing the suspense between the reader and the text. This makes the reader a co-creator of the text within the boundaries of both the spoken and unspoken elements.

Keywords: silence, returning to haifa, kanafani, novel, narrative discourse

1. Introduction

Silence is considered a fundamental issue in verbal expression within the text and constitutes an important aspect of openness to various meanings and transformations within narrative discourse. It is also a facet of speech and the conveyance and establishment of meaning. "The silent is speaking from the perspective of meaning... and when something signifies a meaning, it has informed about it, even if it is silent, and pointed to it, even if it is quiet" (Al-Jahiz, 2002, 51). We can regard silence as a dynamic and fertile state that provides openness to all possibilities and "an unshakeable force, and an inexhaustible enigmatic hypothesis" (Busset, 1957, p. 1).

Thus, silence becomes a sign similar to speech because it performs a fundamental function in the process of communication. Just as the reader interprets the explicit speech, they also interpret the unspoken words (Al-Amiri, 2018, p. 5). Consequently, we are faced with a new writing style aimed at directing the reader to perceive what the writer has not spoken or verbalised, rather than merely the absence of sound, which is meaningless in the presence of meaning and understanding. This approach aligns with post-narrative techniques, which prioritise the reader's role over the narrative itself. In this phase, the reader actively interprets and engages with the text, creating meaning and embracing the narrative. As the story concludes, with tensions easing and characters' fates becoming clear, the reader is left to interpret the final textual cues, leading to an open space for diverse interpretations (Alshamsi et al., 2024, p. 108).

In the novel *Returning to Haifa*, silence plays a more significant role than the written or spoken word in terms of the event's value and meaning. This leads us to say that Kanafani was fully aware of crafting the achievement of silence in his novel with an eloquent language that requires someone to decipher its codes within the bounds of the spoken or written alike.

Silence in the novel also appears as a dialogue and is employed in a way that contributes to deepening literary awareness and shaping the features of the narrative text. This is what we found unified with the other narrative elements, forming an overall intellectual depth entrusted to the novelist and reflecting the necessity of establishing a discourse on both the story and the discourse levels. This is particularly significant as he documents the aspects of the Nakba; Kanafani places the issue of language and writing as the cornerstone of his novel.

The researchers chose to focus on the theme of silence due to its clear importance in language; it precedes and follows speech, and it exists outside the realm of spoken or written language. The study is specifically centred on Ghassan Kanafani's novel *Returning to Haifa* because the novel is fundamentally a pure linguistic achievement. Silence is present in its narrative structure, and the novel is a milestone in the narrative works discussing Palestine and the Nakba through the duality of writing and silence, or departure and return. From this, the central question of the research emerges: what is the relationship between the Nakba and the writing of silence? Is it possible to express the Nakba that befell the Palestinian people through spoken words, or can silence, with its poetic nature and various forms, better convey the experience of the Nakba?

2. Methodology

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and semiotics to explore the role of silence in *Returning to Haifa*. By integrating these methodologies, the research seeks to uncover the multifaceted ways in which silence contributes to the novel's narrative structure, character development, and thematic resonance.

CDA examines the relationship between language, power, and societal structures. This methodology is particularly suitable for analyzing *Returning to Haifa*, where silence functions not only as a narrative device but also as a reflection of the socio-political realities of displacement and exile. Through CDA, the study investigates how silence serves as a mode of resistance, a marker of trauma, and an implicit commentary on power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the unspoken elements within the text, revealing how they contribute to the broader discourse on identity, loss, and resilience.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, provides a complementary framework for decoding the narrative significance of silence in the novel. Silence is treated as a semiotic element that carries profound symbolic weight, representing themes of absence, memory, and unarticulated pain. By analyzing the silent interactions between characters, the gaps in dialogue, and the pauses within the narrative, the study uncovers how silence operates as a communicative tool that enriches the reader's interpretive experience.

The combined use of CDA and semiotics is particularly effective for analyzing *Returning to Haifa* due to the novel's complex engagement with silence. While CDA offers a critical lens to examine the socio-political underpinnings of silence, semiotics unravels its symbolic and interpretive dimensions. Together, these methodologies enable a holistic understanding of how silence functions as a narrative strategy and a reflection of the characters' inner worlds and external realities.

The study includes an introduction, prelude, literature review, a three-part discussion, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a general overview of the study's topic, the importance of silence, and its features in the novel. The prelude is dedicated to discussing silence, its linguistic and terminological definitions, and its presence in the art of the novel, as well as a brief overview of the novel. The literature review presents the highlight of what was previously written about Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* and a review of how silence was approached as a literary tool.

The discussion's three sections aim to uncover the instances of silence and its role in shaping the structure of the novel and its essential elements. The first section focuses on silence and the dimensions of the characters, the second on silence and the dialectics of place, and the third and final section on silence and the manifestations of narrative time.

3. Prelude

3.1 In the Presence of Silence

In Arabic lexicons, silence (*ṣ-Ṣ-M-T*) signifies prolonged quiet or restraint from speech (Ibn Manzur, 2005). When someone is said to be "ṣāmit," it means their tongue is restrained, and they do not speak. In the *Lexicon of Language*, the meaning of silence is associated with the concepts of ambiguity and closure (Ibn Faris, 1979, p. 308). Thus, the linguistic meaning of silence involves refraining from speech, but it is, in reality, a form of communication and connection.

Some distinguish between "ṣamt" (silence) and "sukūt" (quietness). "Ṣamt" is considered more profound than "sukūt" because it can be used to describe both those who cannot speak and those who can, hence the terms "ṣāmit" and "muṣmit" are used for the inanimate and the animate alike. "Sukūt," however, specifically refers to those who can speak but choose not to (Al-Mubarakfour, 1990, p. 204). This suggests that "ṣamt" is a broader term than "sukūt," and often encompasses the latter. The specific meaning of each term depends on its context in a text and what the author intends to convey by using it.

In the researchers' view, silence is more eloquent than speech or words because it "breaks the constraints of expression, reaching the limitless realms of meaning that the recipient infers. You may be most expressive when you do not state the matter explicitly" (Al-Jurjani, 1987, p. 112). This highlights the role of the recipient in interacting with the silent text and the breadth of interpretations that can be suggested compared to a text that is explicitly stated or read by the recipient.

"And we should not overlook the significance of silence in the text and what it suggests. Silence has dimensions and connotations in discourse that appear when the tongue is unable to express; it serves as an alternative for the writer, poet, narrator, or describer when the language of speech fails. It is a hallmark of eloquence when there is much trivial talk and a means of persuasion when language fails to establish meaning. Thus, silence has become an active element, a given, and a present pattern in every discourse" (Rahaimi, 2018, p. 81). This highlights that while the language of speech is disabled in silence, it remains an important and interactive means of communication, and it carries implicit dimensions and connotations that are no less significant than the living and direct language of speech within the text, regardless of its type.

We conclude by saying that although silence may be a cessation of verbal speech, it does not necessarily mean a complete stoppage of psychological communication, which manifests through the language of contact and interaction between parties. Silence is a clear indication of many suggestions and symbols that require careful consideration to uncover their true and psychological meaning for both the writer and the receiver. It can be more effective and powerful than spoken words, especially when discussing themes of catastrophe, displacement, suffering, and the ensuing pain and bitterness, as will become apparent in the novel.

3.2 In the Presence of the Novel (*Returning to Haifa*)

This is the fourth novel by Kanafani, spanning only 70 pages in a small format. In it, Kanafani embodies the symbolism of love for the homeland and the issue of returning to the land, where the homeland is vividly present in its fine details. Most of the novel's events unfold on the road to Haifa, as the protagonist, Said, and his wife, Safiyya, decide to go there when they get the opportunity to return to their usurped homeland after twenty years of displacement and being away from it, following the June War of 1967. Their decision is to return

to their homeland and search for their son, whom they had left behind because of the 1948 war.

During their journey to Haifa, silence marked many aspects of their conversations; they did not once discuss the reason for their return to Haifa throughout the entire trip. On the road, which covered most of the novel's events, they spoke about the painful memories of the war, their displacement, and what happened to them during their long absence. They reflected on how the war was a plague and disaster for every Palestinian who was forced to leave Haifa at that time.

4. Literature Review

Studies on Returning to Haifa explore its structure, characters, themes, and style. One such study is Samraa Qafi's 2015 thesis, *The Narrative Structure in Returning to Haifa*, which examines core narrative elements like time, place, character, and events. Qafi's work illuminates the aesthetic value of the novel's structure and how these components contribute to its overall artistic impact. Similarly, Nasser Baraka's 2016 article offers an in-depth analysis of the characters, examining their intellectual, psychological, and social dimensions. Baraka's focus is on the novel's socio-cultural context, investigating how Kanafani's character construction reflects broader societal issues. This attention to character formation complements Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Adwani's 2016 study on the endings of Kanafani's novels. Al-Adwani's research explores the relationship between narrative closure and initial scenes, emphasising how endings contribute to the novel's progression and thematic resonance.

Another major study, by Samir Hammad in 2012, examines the duality of departure and return in *Returning to Haifa*, situating the novel within the broader Palestinian experience of displacement. Hammad's work focuses on the protagonist's journey and its symbolic representation of exile and resilience, touching on the political and military undertones embedded within the narrative. This focus on setting and theme is further explored by Mohammed Joudi in his 2012 thesis, *The Poetics of Character and Setting in Returning to Haifa*. Joudi's study considers the connection between character and setting, analysing how Kanafani's blending of fictional and realistic elements enhances the novel's authenticity. Additionally, Asif Ahmad Sadiq (2018) takes a structuralist approach, focusing on the novel's internal and external components to reveal Kanafani's worldview, as reflected in his narrative style. Each of these studies explores crucial aspects of the novel, though none examine the role of silence within the narrative, an area that this study addresses specifically.

Research on the concept of silence in literary texts provides a foundation for this study's unique focus. Recent scholarly works have further illuminated the multifaceted role of silence in postcolonial literature, emphasizing its function as a form of resistance and a means of articulating marginalized experiences. El Idrissi and El Falih (2024) examine J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, highlighting how the novel employs silence to subvert colonial narratives and reimagine postcolonial subjecthood, suggesting that unspeakability can serve as a potent form of expression and resistance. Similarly, Nandanam (2023) analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, demonstrating how the narrative utilizes silence to convey the complexities of personal and cultural identity during the Nigerian Civil War, thereby challenging dominant historical discourses.

Dr. Rasool Blawi's 2021 study analyses the thematic role of silence in the poetry of Hassan Ali Najjar, suggesting that silence can convey layers of meaning beyond words. Dr. Ibrahim Ramadan's 2020 article, "When Silence is Rhetoric" examines the communicative potential of silence and explores when silence functions as a rhetorical device. Further, Dr. Abdulghani bin Solah's 2020 study in *Journal of Issues in Language and Literature* discusses silence within communicative systems and narrative texts, emphasising the ways in which silence can reveal hidden meanings. Zaid Shihab Al-Amri's 2018 study, *Silence and Novelistic Form*, also sheds light on silence as a narrative technique, specifically in Elias Khoury's novel *The Compound of Secrets*. Al-Amri's analysis identifies textual markers of silence and explores its narrative depth. Similarly, Mohammed El-Bardi's 2013 article, "Silence and the Open Text", investigates how silence creates open interpretive spaces, allowing readers to uncover unexpressed layers of meaning.

While the studies mentioned above establish silence as an important rhetorical and narrative element, they do not specifically apply these insights to *Returning to Haifa*. This study builds on these theoretical frameworks by examining how silence functions within Kanafani's novel to convey the unspoken traumas of displacement and loss. By analysing how silence shapes the plot and deepens character interactions, this research provides a novel perspective on *Returning to Haifa* and contributes to the growing understanding of silence as an expressive tool within narrative discourse. Through this unique focus, the study addresses a gap in existing literature on Kanafani's work, showing how silence in the novel opens interpretive possibilities for readers, inviting them to engage deeply with the narrative's underlying themes of memory, identity, and resistance.

5. Discussion

5.1 Silence and the Dimensions of the Characters

The character is the backbone of the narrative work, whether it is a short story or a novel. It serves as the peg on which other elements are hung (Shaban, 2011, p. 172). The character is the individual around whom the events of the story or novel revolve. This is perhaps why scholars have asserted that the character is the focal point of the events in a novel (Salama 2007, p. 11).

Characters in a novel are central, depicted through detailed internal and external features and their relationships. Through the character, the events of the novel become clearer as a whole. The importance of the character in a novel is also reflected through its ideological implications and meanings. The novelist carefully selects the characters in their work because they represent the ideas and vision the author wants to convey to the reader through those characters.

In reading the characters of the novel *Returning to Haifa*, one finds that Kanafani has placed most of the novel's events on the shoulders

of the main characters, especially the protagonist, Said, and his wife, Safiyya. He skillfully created a narrative circle in which his characters revolve, laden with the concepts of beginning and end, departure and return, or silence and speech. This means that they move within the duality of the narrative event, either by speaking and expressing themselves or by resorting to silence and leaving gaps. These gaps, in turn, engage the reader in actively altering the course of events in the novel.

If we closely examine the characters and the storyline, we find that the novel begins with an extended dialogue between the protagonist, Said, and his wife, Safiyya. The starting point is their conversation about returning to Haifa: "A week ago, Safiyya said to him while they were in their home in Ramallah: 'They go everywhere; shouldn't we go to Haifa?'" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 23). Here, Kanafani places the reader at the heart of the main event in the novel by going back twenty years to the Jewish colonial invasion of Haifa. Said left his home before the invasion, leaving his wife, Safiyya, and their son, Khaldoun, behind. During the invasion, he could not return home. Meanwhile, Safiyya had to leave the house to search for Said, leaving their son Khaldoun behind in the chaos and devastation. At that time, Said found his wife, but they could not return to their home to retrieve their son, who was less than five months old. As a result, they had to flee to the city of Ramallah, where they settled for twenty years. Their memories remained filled with images of the invasion and destruction that befell Haifa, where their home and infant son were.

Silence and the inability to express themselves deepened even before the idea of returning to Haifa. For twenty years, silence overshadowed the personalities of Said and his wife, Safiyya. They never spoke about their city or their lost child during that entire period. "So why did you come? He looked at her angrily, and she fell silent. She knew, so why ask? She was the one who told him to go. For twenty years, they avoided talking about it, twenty years, then the past erupted like a volcano" (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 12-13).

If we closely examine the trajectory of the characters in the novel, we find that they revolve around the duality of silence or speech. Silence occupies a large part of the events, significantly impacting the characters and their role in changing the course of the narrative. This is evident from the very beginning of the story. It says: "When 'Said S.' reached the outskirts of Haifa, driving there from Jerusalem, he felt as if something had tied his tongue, so he remained silent" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 9). Here, the protagonist's silence delineates the main event in the novel: the search for his son, whom he lost twenty years ago. The expression through silence conveys the enormity of the event. Silence also portrays the miserable psychological state Said endures due to the guilt of leaving his son and homeland. Additionally, the silence in the previous passage may indicate the immense shock experienced by Said and his wife, stemming from the enduring wound of the past twenty years and the consequences of displacement, which leave them unable to express their feelings.

Silence becomes evident in the dialogue between the characters Said and Safiyya throughout their journey from Ramallah to Haifa. "All the way from Ramallah to Jerusalem to Haifa, he talked about everything, not stopping for a moment. But when they reached the first 'Beit Galim,' silence tied his tongue..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 23). And, "Now, when they reached the entrance to Haifa, they both fell silent, and at that moment, they realised they hadn't spoken a single word about the reason they came!" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 10). We notice that Kanafani skillfully conveys the catastrophe, the invasion, and the pain of loss and bitterness he and his wife experience through silence. The language of spoken words and dialogue fails to describe the tragedy or their psychological state.

Silence also manifests through the language of crying in the character, expressing the inevitable return—a silent return filled with pain and suffering, and an inability to speak or even cry. It is said: "For a single moment, he had the thought of turning back, and without looking at her, he knew she was silently crying" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 9).

The character's suffering intensifies as they inevitably retreat into silence. Kanafani skillfully uses the silence of his characters to depict the central event—the return or re-entry to the starting point, where he left his son alone and was forced to leave Haifa during those events. He writes: "Now, when they reached the entrance to Haifa, they both fell silent, and at that moment, they realised they hadn't spoken a single word about the reason they came!" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 10). The reader may find a significant space in this character's silence to imagine the depth of deprivation experienced due to the weight of absence and leaving one's birthplace. This occurred after being forced to flee their city under bombardment, leaving behind their home and infant son, who was only a few months old. The suffering is compounded by the unspoken anguish, as Kanafani never explicitly mentions their search for their son and lost homeland, except through the intense silence within them.

The silence of the characters also reveals the guilt felt by the protagonist, Said, and his wife, Safiyya. How could they leave their son alone? How could they leave their birthplace? Why had they not spoken about what happened twenty years ago and their departure due to displacement? These questions linger in the mind of the main character in the novel, contributing to the development and intensification of the narrative's internal struggles. Through these unresolved questions and retrospection, Kanafani uses silence as a way to avoid answering them, leaving space for the reader to find answers as the story unfolds with these characters. He writes: "So why did you come? He looked at her angrily, and she fell silent... For twenty years, they avoided talking about it, twenty years..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 13).

The silence of the characters also reflects their psychological state and the overwhelming circumstances they suffer due to being displaced from their homeland for twenty years and being separated from their son, who is a central figure in the novel's events and development. Kanafani writes, "But she remained silent, and he heard her faint voice crying in what seemed like silence..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 13). This indicates that the characters' silence is closely tied to their inability to speak about the issue of returning and going back to search for their lost homeland and son. This is further illustrated when Kanafani writes, "He suddenly realised that name had not been uttered in that room for a very long time" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 24).

The concept of the characters' silence, as evident in the previous texts, is closely linked to the dual themes of shock and rejection. The

shock and its resulting anxiety, pain, and suffering are expressed through their inability to speak while returning to their homeland and reflecting on the events of twenty years ago. This period was marked by uncertainty and a search for the unknown. The idea of rejection is reflected in their determination to return and search for the unknown that awaits them, as well as their unwillingness to wait once fate allows them the chance to return and seek what they desire.

Silence in the characters also functions similarly to speech, as it serves a fundamental role in the process of communication and interaction. This is evident in the novel: "They simply remained silent, and now they look silently at the roads they know well, ingrained in their minds like pieces of their flesh and bones" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 13). We observe that both characters have embraced silence, which serves as a sign of communication between them, allowing them to connect without the need for words.

Kanafani portrays the character's silence as being linked to an unsettled state of mind, which is clearly evident in the protagonist, especially during the long-awaited meeting with their son after twenty years. He writes: "She remained silent, biting her lip slightly and looking towards Said, who felt his body tremble for a moment as if an electric current had touched him" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 47). Additionally, he notes: "But he said nothing. He remained silent as if he hadn't heard a word" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 48).

5.2 *Silence and the Dialectic of Place*

Place serves as "the background where the events of the novel unfold" (Qasim, 2016, p. 74) and acts as a driving force for both the events and the characters. It provides a setting in which characters move and shape their attributes, actions, and stillness. Moreover, it "often establishes the narrative because it gives the imagined story an appearance similar to reality" (Lahmidani, 2000, p. 65). Whether the place is real or imaginary, it forms the focal point of the events within its context, shaping the character as they navigate through it and reflecting its influences on them.

To explore the manifestations of silence in relation to place and its direct connection to both events and characters, we can see this in the first few pages of the novel: "When Said S. arrived at the outskirts of Haifa, coming via Jerusalem, he felt as though something had tied his tongue, so he remained silent and felt sorrow rising within him" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 9). Here, silence establishes an important relationship with both the place and the character. As the protagonist reaches the outskirts of Haifa, the focal point of the story and the characters, the place becomes a setting filled with painful memories that prompted his return. The character falls silent because the place is laden with memories of suffering, which were a primary reason for his return—to find liberation and release from the anxiety and shock formed during the invasion and displacement.

He further describes, "When he got close to the city, he felt something gag his tongue" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 9). Here, the encounter with the place brings forth a pain that weighs heavily on the heart and silences the tongue, due to its unbearable nature. This drives them to seek refuge in silence.

Kanafani emphasises the same idea of silence associated with the place, Haifa, upon entering it. This silence reflects a psychological response, embodying the emotions and feelings towards that place experienced throughout their absence. The intensity peaks when the place evokes painful memories and significant events and characters in their lives. "Now, when they reached the entrance to Haifa, they both fell silent, and at that moment, they realised they hadn't spoken a single word about the reason they came!" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 10).

Kanafani deeply explores the silence through the place from which he was displaced, having left behind his home and infant. This highlights the psychological connection he has with the city, yet words cannot express what he feels inside. As a result, he resorts to silence, allowing his memories to speak in unspoken reflections. He writes, "He felt the steering wheel grow heavy in his sweaty hands and considered saying to his wife, 'I know it, this Haifa, but it does not recognize me,' but changed his mind" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 11).

The silence intensifies and takes over the place as they get closer to the main event. This is evident when describing Halisa, the area where their home is located. Kanafani skillfully traces his return to the place, highlighting its detailed significance. He left it with its painful memories and shocking trauma, unable to speak or express it. He writes, "But when they reached the first 'Beit Galim,' silence tied his tongue, and now in Halisa, he could hear the sound of his car's wheels just as they always had. The difficult pulse of his racing heart intermittently obscured his senses. Twenty years of absence had diminished, and now, things suddenly returned in an unbelievable way, beyond logic and reason... What was he searching for?" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 23). Here, we see that silence was present in the presence of the place, reflecting the enduring suffering and pain in his memory.

Kanafani continues his journey back to Haifa, the place associated with deep-seated anguish, bitterness, and significant loss in his memory. The memories begin to surface, but he remains silent, suppressing his emotions. It is as if the memory has been revived by the proximity to the place he has been searching for over the past twenty years without any explicit expression or explanation. He writes, "And he now remembered exactly that it was there, and there alone, that the memory struck him as if hit by a stone. It was precisely there that he remembered Khalid and his heart sank that day, twenty years ago..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 28).

Silence deepens and intensifies in the presence of the place closest to Said and his wife, without any active dialogue between them. The weight becomes heavier as they approach their apartment on the upper floor of the building. Kanafani writes, "They started to climb, without giving themselves or each other the opportunity to look at the small things that he knew would shake him and cause him to lose his balance..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 29). It is noticeable that the language of dialogue and speech between them completely ceases as they get closer to entering. The suffering and the dominant presence grow beyond effective silence, to a state of covert glances, with no language allowed to express their feelings. The researchers believe that Kanafani succeeded in utilising the language of silence, gestures,

and glances because no spoken language can fully describe the specific moment and its marginalised memory, just like any spoken language between two people.

Kanafani, in his discussion of the place, goes into minute details as he approaches his abandoned home, highlighting the connection with memory and how the years have not changed anything inside him except that he sought refuge in a terrifying silence from the shock and catastrophe that befell them. He talks about his house and its details, both from the outside and inside: "And suddenly the house appeared, the same house they lived in..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 28). He continues, "He put his finger on the doorbell and said softly to Safiyya: 'They changed the bell,' and after a moment of silence, he added: 'And of course the name!'" (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 29-30). It is noticeable that Kanafani wanted to express the shock, longing, and deprivation he felt upon entering their home. However, this expression came with a sense of fear and anxiety about what was to come, which led to silence and fragmented dialogue, placing the reader in the midst of the heavy emotions he and his wife were experiencing.

After providing detailed descriptions of the inside of their home, and experiencing a state of bewilderment and fragmented, unfinished conversations between Said, his wife, and Miriam, the current owner of their house, silence permeated every aspect of the situation. Even Miriam was enveloped in the heavy silence, unable to speak due to the gravity of the moment and the inability to engage in a conversation that would clarify the reason for their return to their home. "A heavy silence fell over them, and they all looked at places that did not matter to look at..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 34). It is noticeable that Said and his wife could not bring themselves to talk about their son or their search for him. Safiyya even tried to encourage Said through touch rather than words to approach the subject of why they had come back. "Safiyya squeezed his hand, signalling him to not continue with the conversation. He realised and tried to speak, getting closer to the subject: 'I mean, your presence here, in this house, our house, the house of Safiyya and me, is another matter. We just came to look at the things, these things that are ours...'" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 34).

The observer of the previous and subsequent dialogues will find that the language of silence and the impossible or unfinished conversation cast a shadow over all their interactions. This suggests a state of fear of the unknown and discussions about a dark and uncertain future. However, it is a conversation that tries to establish a contradictory or oppositional relationship between a painful past with all its details and an unclear, uncertain future. "He fell silent under the weight of his wife's gaze, feeling that he would never succeed in reaching his goal. There was an incredible, unavoidable collision of fate, and what was happening was merely an impossible dialogue" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 35).

The silence deepens in the unfinished conversation between Said, Safiyya, and Miriam, the current homeowner. The assumption of unspoken language increases as Said and Safiyya explore the details of the house and the things still lingering in their memories. Silence also creeps into Miriam's language, who could not manage to complete the conversation that started with Said's inquiry about the vase and the feathers it contained, which he knew the exact number of. "The old woman looked where he pointed, then looked back at him questioningly. He still extended his arm towards the vase, staring at it, demanding an answer. The entire universe seemed to be perched on the tip of her tongue" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 35).

Kanafani continues in describing the interior of the house and the unequal dialogue achievements from both sides, where silence prevails, and the language of dialogue breaks down. This occurs when Khaldoun, now known as Dov, arrives. "The moments stretched on, their silence almost roaring with an unbearable, mad buzzing. Then, they heard the sound of a key turning in the door. Only then did he look toward Miriam and realised—for the first time—that she was sitting there, pale-faced and trembling. He didn't have enough courage to look at Safiyya. So he fixed his eyes on the door, feeling the sweat..." (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 59-60).

The observant reader will notice the manifestations of silence and its connection to places, both in general and specific. Kanafani observes that the journey began with silence from Ramallah to Haifa, where silent places are laden with memories of pain, longing, and the hardships of exile that lasted for about twenty years. We also note that the departure from Haifa to Ramallah was marked by a sense of failure, shock, and an intensified silence. The journey ended from Haifa to Ramallah with a more troubling silence than at the beginning, "He remained silent throughout the journey and did not say anything until he reached the outskirts of Ramallah..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 76). Here, we point to the duality of beginning and end, or entry and exit, and the pervasive silence in all the details and circumstances, creating a duality of dialogue and silence throughout their journey, whether at the start or the end.

Silence is also associated with fear in the presence of a place, especially when it involves mentioning the name Khaldoun, whom they left behind. The place itself could not bear to mention the name that was present in all the details, as it says: "He immediately realised that the name had not been spoken in that room for a very long time" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 24). This indicates that the place was not just a structure; it held memories with the characters, and thus, silence prevailed due to the fear of the unknown.

The narrator continues to mention places and roads that hold present and painful memories in their collective memory, as they imbue these places with their intense silence and the anxiety that surrounds them throughout the journey to the city of Haifa. He says: "They simply remained silent, and now they look silently at the roads they know well, ingrained in their minds like pieces of their flesh and bones" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 27). Here, Kanafani refers to the senses of sight and hearing, placing them in a crucible of constrained emotions, feelings, and endless perceptions, connected to sadness, oppression, and the inability to speak, resorting to silence as a means of escape and fear of what lies ahead.

The presence of the place becomes more pronounced when it is connected to both the character and the event. The place becomes the primary trigger for the inability to speak, leaving only a silence that intensifies his memory with those painful details. He says: "He passed

by that building while rushing toward the port... The memory hit him as if struck by a stone, and there, exactly, he remembered Khaldoun, and his heart tightened that day..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 28).

The place can become an objective correlative for the characters, reflecting their emotions and feelings. Kanafani skillfully paints detailed pictures of the place, suggesting a state of stillness, weakness, and internal decay. It is silent, like the character's silence, afraid to speak about what was and how things turned out. He writes: "Said got up from his seat and began pacing around the room. Then he stopped in front of the table inlaid with mother-of-pearl in the middle of the room and, once again, started counting the peacock feathers in the wooden vase there. But he said nothing. He remained silent as if he hadn't heard a word" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 48). We notice that the place has become a major trigger for silence and the inability to speak. The place's dominance becomes more pronounced when it creates a situation of non-communication between itself and the character, leading to silence as a form of escape from that bitter reality.

The scene of the lost place can also contribute to a state of silence, panic, fear, and the inability to complete the scene; a fear of the troubled past and the unknown, danger-laden present. "Now, as they were on the outskirts of Haifa, they fell silent and realised that they hadn't even mentioned what had brought them here!" (Kanafani 2010, 10).

In conclusion, the place has been present in the fabric of the novel with an endless relationship to the characters and events in general. Kanafani skillfully imbues both open and closed spaces with his psychological state, painful memories, and anxiety and fear of the unknown as he searches for the truth or seeks to memorialise the painful memories for himself and his wife Safiyya. This fear and anxiety are translated into a solemn silence that pervades every place with a memory in his imagination.

5.3 Silence and Manifestations of Narrative Time

Time is a fundamental element in any novel, as no narrative can be devoid of time. The "narrative structure is defined by the rhythm of time within the spatial context, as well as by the features of its events, the nature of its characters, the logic of relationships and values within it, and the texture of its linguistic narrative, and finally, by its general meanings derived from the interconnection and synergy of these elements" (Qasim, 1984, p. 76). This leads us to assert that time is a fundamental structure of the novel alongside other structures such as place, events, and characters, all forming a line that follows the time axis determined by the narrator.

In modern novels, time does not adhere to a linear trajectory. As Abdelmalek Mortad explains: "The temporal course does not follow its usual sequential path; it may revert to the past while being narrated from the present, or it may start from the future while being directed from the past. Time may not even manifest at all except within the context, disregarding the use of temporal tools" (Mortad, 1998, p. 11).

Through the movement of time, the rhythm of the novel is shaped, which concerns both events and characters. This involves the occurrence, formation, and organisation of events in a specific sequence that aligns with and complements the overall structure of the novel, as well as with the characters in terms of the formation of their internal and external worlds according to the dynamics of action and reaction between the two realms (Zoubi, 1995, p. 9).

Indeed, the reader of the novel will find that Kanafani plays with the rhythm of time in his narrative. The duality of time and silence is present from the early pages of the novel, through the journey from Haifa to Ramallah and then back from Ramallah to Haifa. The temporal scene during this journey—the road to Haifa—reverts back to the year 1984 using flashback techniques, and then returns once again to the present narrative, and so on.

It is noteworthy that Kanafani, through the rhythm of his narrative time and its relationship with place, characters, and events, managed to imbue his narrative text with a significant degree of aesthetic rhythm. He skillfully transported the reader between three intertwined times, from the present to the past and from the present to the future, through a large number of descriptive passages, dialogue scenes, flashbacks, and foreshadowings.

Kanafani relied on flashbacks in his novel, which involve returning to the past. These flashbacks formed significant semantic components in the life of the main character and the events. The relationship between time and silence in the novel becomes apparent through Kanafani's use of silence to express the characters' stances on the events and to capture the transformations that occurred in the character over the twenty years specified in the novel. This also demonstrates his ability to manipulate the narration of events using silent time, similar to the nature of other elements.

It is notable that the flashbacks present in the novel have created a significant space in terms of the temporal contrasts used as a means of silence, becoming a mask for it. For example, in the early pages of the novel, it says: "When Said S. arrived at the outskirts of Haifa, coming via Jerusalem, he felt as though something had tied his tongue, so he remained silent" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 9). We observe that the narrative is in the present tense after arriving in Haifa, leading the reader to question the place of origin, the reason for the journey, and the duration spent at the place of origin. These are all questions lingering in the reader's mind. The surprise and search for answers are heightened by the silence that seems to characterise Said and his relationship with these questions present in both the reader's and Said's memory.

The dramatic tension is formed by the accompanying silence in the dialogue between Said and Safiyya after their journey and arrival in Haifa. "Now, when they reached the entrance to Haifa, they both fell silent, and at that moment, they realised they hadn't spoken a single word about the reason they came!" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 10). After this temporal scene, Kanafani goes back to reveal the reason for their departure from Haifa, taking the reader twenty years into the past: "So this is Haifa, then, after twenty years" (Kanafani 2010, p. 10). Through a series of descriptive passages and flashbacks, Kanafani reveals to his readers the reality of the silence and its implicit

meaning—a silence that accompanied them throughout the long period they spent estranged from their homeland and their son due to displacement.

Similarly, the flashback in the novel reveals the transformation experienced by the character, all due to the extended time in its unending narrative. "Now, after two hours of fragmented conversation, things can be revisited anew. What happened in those few days..." (Kanafani, 2010, p. 37). Through this previous flashback, the narrator places the reader in a true illumination of the character, reflecting the past and its relationship to the present. All of this is only possible due to the passage of time and the changes it brings.

Among the transformations observed in the event and character due to time, Kanafani used time as a means to express the past and connect it with the present. He says: "They go everywhere, why don't we go to Haifa? At that moment, he was having dinner and saw his hand automatically stopping between the plate and his mouth" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 23). We observe that Kanafani employed the technique of flashback and linked it to the present event. However, he did not discuss the event or the connection between what was recalled and the character he is searching for, instead remaining silent. This silence serves as a tactic to avoid talking about the past and a fear of the present.

We reaffirm what we previously discussed through the dialogue between Said and his wife Safiyya as they search for their missing son of twenty years. Despite this, they do not mention him. The predominant language between them is silence, gestures, and hints without any explicit statements. "We go to Haifa... Why? Her voice came softly: We'll see our house there... Just see it... Safiyya, what are you thinking? She shook her head in agreement without saying anything" (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 23-24). This includes Safiyya's attempt to break the silence with her husband Said, but she quickly returns to it: "They go everywhere, why don't we go to Haifa?" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 23).

Time may have a harsh impact on the main character in the novel, as observed in the narrative. When the protagonist refers to that specific period and its relation to the character, he uses silence as a means to escape discussing that period: "She knew, so why ask? She was the one who told him to go. For twenty years, he avoided talking about it. Twenty years, and then the past erupts like a volcano" (Kanafani 2010, p. 13).

Time in the novel may also carry a negative connotation due to its painful rhythm and the painful memories in the collective memory of the characters present in the novel. "For months afterward, she carried in her mouth a hoarse, wounded sound that was barely audible. The name "Khalidoun" remained as a single point, lost amid that endless flood of voices and names" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 21). We observe that the novelist used the technique of flashback through the character of Safiyya, who retraces a series of images, sounds, and names. Yet the present sound is that of the lost Khalidoun, gone for more than twenty years. All this flow did not enable her to speak; instead, she resorted to silence as a means to escape from the painful memory and the fear of the unknown future.

Among the flashbacks that carry a negative and painful connotation is when Miriam remembers her younger brother, who was killed by Nazi soldiers: "Didn't you see how they threw him into the truck like firewood? If he had been a Jew, they wouldn't have done that.' He wanted to ask her why, but then he saw her face and fell silent" (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 42-43). Here we notice that Said and Miriam share the same concern and sorrow; both have lost someone dear and precious. Both Said and Miriam chose silence as a way to escape discussing a painful and sorrowful memory. Miriam lost her younger brother, while Said lost both his homeland and his son.

Time can also express the psychological state of the character, as evident in the moments when the protagonist goes to Haifa and searches for his home and son, whom he lost due to displacement from the war. "The long moments stretched, and their silence seemed to throb with an unbearable, maddening buzz" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 59). It is noticeable that the narrator expresses the essence of the main character and his psychological state through a declared period of time, using intense silence that surpasses speech. Here, the acceleration of time is demonstrated by how silence can encapsulate much of the characters' inner feelings and psychological states.

An example of this is Safiyya's expression of her psychological state through her inability to speak, as she resorts to silence as a means to escape the bitter reality and the memories present in her mind: "The silence stretched for a long time, but Safiyya, who had calmed herself, asked in a low voice: 'Don't you feel that we are your parents?'" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 64). Here, the silence suggests to the reader the intensity of the pain, suffering, and weakness that were present for Said and his wife both in the past and in the present.

Silence can also be a means to accelerate time in order to reveal the suffering that Said experiences with his wife Safiyya. Kanafani resorts to condensing the story of the past twenty years into just a few lines, as discussing it in detail would be laden with the agony of guilt and enduring hardship: "But she remained silent, and he heard her faint voice crying in what resembled silence. He could only estimate the suffering she endured and knew that he could not grasp the pain precisely, but he understood it was great suffering that lasted for twenty years" (Kanafani, 2010, pp. 13-14).

An example of this is their discussion about returning to Haifa, where Kanafani and his wife resorted to intense silence in their hearts. They did not speak at all about the main reason for their return to Haifa after the borders were opened: "And the whole matter remained suspended over their heads and nights throughout the week. They consumed it with their meals and chewed on it, and slept with it, yet they never spoke about it. One night, during a moment of intimacy, he simply said to her: 'Let's go to Haifa tomorrow...'" (Kanafani, 2010, p. 26).

Notably, Kanafani begins his novel in the present time, surrounded by a peculiar and ominous silence regarding the condensed temporal period, which carries psychological dimensions and implications for both the event and the character. Similarly, he concludes his novel with a future-oriented perspective, moving from the present to tomorrow with a silence tinged with some hope: "He remained silent

throughout the journey and did not say anything until he reached the outskirts of Ramallah. At that moment, he looked at his wife and said: "I hope Khalid has left... during our absence!" " (Kanafani 2010, p. 76).

In conclusion, Kanafani has combined the techniques of flashback and foreshadowing. The flashback was present in their search for their son from twenty years ago, without a direct reference to it. Foreshadowing, on the other hand, was used to prompt the reader about what will happen to them after their return to Haifa. Both techniques were conveyed through a language of silence due to the intensity of the burden, suffering, and the inability to speak about the pain, struggle, and bitterness of the past twenty years.

6. Conclusion

In *Returning to Haifa*, Ghassan Kanafani uses silence as a powerful narrative tool, woven throughout the elements of character, time, place, and events. This exploration reveals several key findings. Silence serves as an active layer of the narrative discourse, engaging readers deeply as they interpret unspoken meanings embedded within the text. It functions as a form of communication—whether intentional or instinctive—holding equal significance to spoken or written words. This demands a careful examination of silence's role in shaping the narrative's themes.

Through silence, Kanafani creates a participatory discourse, inviting readers to grasp his ideological perspectives and the complexities of the events he portrays. His dualistic approach juxtaposes silence with speech, memory with forgetfulness, and return with departure, all of which resonate through the unfolding narrative. Notably, the prevalence of silence in the novel surpasses that of spoken or written text, crafting a narrative style rich with aesthetic, cultural, and ideological depth. Silence emerges in various explicit and implicit forms, revealing different layers of meaning. Furthermore, silence plays a vital role in developing the characters of Said and Safiyya, enhancing their depth and exposing the weight of their experiences. It interconnects with other narrative elements, allowing readers to better understand the burden these characters and the novel as a whole carry.

Acknowledgments

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the members of our community advisory committee for their insightful contributions and unwavering support throughout this study. We are also deeply thankful to the University of Jordan for its institutional support and to all the team members whose dedication and active participation made this research possible.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed significantly to this study, demonstrating exceptional collaboration and dedication. Each played an integral role in drafting the manuscript and ensuring the quality and integrity of the work. Their collective effort has been pivotal to the success of this project.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

Not applicable

Data sharing statement

Not applicable

Open access

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