

The Literary Representation of the Jew in Postmodern Arabic Fiction

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"We aforetime grant to the children of Israel the Book (Torah)

the power of command, and prophet-hood,

We gave them for sustenance, things good and pure, and we favored them above the nations ."

The Holy Quran / Al-Jathiyah: Surah / Section xlv-37v , p.738

Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

Abstract

*For decades, the historical and political ramifications of the Palestinian / Israeli dispute not only created hostility between the Arabs and the Jews but also undermined the possibility of initiating a mutual dialogue between the two peoples. This paper aims to re-historicize the literary representation of the Jew in postmodern Arabic / Palestinian fiction dealing with the Palestinian question to illuminate controversial issues integral to both sides of the conflict. The paper argues that Palestinian authors particularly the great Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani, provided counter-narratives deploying positive Jewish images in his literary works –in the post-1948 era- challenging orthodox and conservative Arabic discourse and paving the way for a new era of sympathetic Jewish literary images in Arabic literature. In *Returning to Haifa: Palestine's Children*, the writer not only incorporates Palestinian suffering and displacement - as in traditional Arabic literature - but also engages the Jewish history of diaspora and genocide. In other words, Kanafani in *Returning to Haifa: Palestine's Children* attempts to underline human issues of common interest for the two partners in the conflict foreshadowing the political agenda of his literary works.*

Keywords: Jews –Arabs – Holocaust – Conflict – reconciliation – re-historicization.

Introduction

In one of his poems, the well-known Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai expresses his hope for an era of peace and love between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the land of Palestine:

An Arab shepherd searches for a lamb on Mount Zion,
And on the hill across I search for my little son,
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
In their temporary failure.
Our voices meet above
the Sultan's pool in the middle of the valley.
We both want the son and the lamb
to never enter the process
of the terrible machine of '*Chad Gadya*'.
Later we found them in the bushes,
and our voices returned to us crying and laughing inside.
The search for a lamb and for a son
was always the beginning of a new religion
in these hills. (Cited in Coffin 1982: 341).

According to the preceding lines, the Israeli poet's dreams have not been fulfilled due to dubious political policies imposed by colonial hegemonic powers. Historically, the British colonial strategy of division and rule prior to the WWII era intensifies the conflict in Palestine widening the gap between the Arabs and the Jews. Due to British colonial policy, the Jews and the Palestinians were not able to come to an agreement about their attitude toward the British occupation. They were not able to drive the British colonizers out of Palestine and consequently they were obliged to confront the possibility of either dividing the country or living in a multi-national state of double nationality.

Apparently, there were main currents and trends within the Middle East on the eve of the Second World War that had a great impact on the geo-political history of the entire region in general and on the situation in Palestine in particular. Just as the First World War had been a dramatic historical event that had stimulated competing visions about the political future of the Middle East, so was the Second World War had equally momentous consequences. First, the demands of the war provoked the intrusion of the European powers into the states or the region as they sought to mobilize the political, social and economic resources required to secure their respective strategic positions. Although in the short term, this policy appeared to redouble the assertion of European control, on the pattern of the First World War, in the longer term it signaled the end of European Imperial power. In the aftermath of the war, the exhausted states of Europe particularly England and France lacked both the means and the will to maintain the kind of hegemony over the Middle East that had once seemed vital to the security of their interests (Tripp 1991: 88).

In a related context, the great Israeli novelist, Amos OZ argues: «the encounter between the Arab residents and the Jewish settlers does not resemble an epic or a Western, but is perhaps

close to a Greek tragedy. That is to say, the clash between justice and justice, and like ancient tragedies, there is no hope for happy reconciliation on the basis of some magic formula" (cited in Coffin 1982: 319). In an interview with Amos Oz, he attempts to come to terms with the essence of the Arab-Israeli dispute. He argues that the Arab - Israeli conflict is greatly influenced by prior confrontations between the Arabs and the European invaders during the colonial era as well as by the traumatic Jewish experiences and the genocide of European Jews during the holocaust. Amos Oz points out: I feel that it is fundamentally a struggle not over territories or over symbols and the emotions they raise. I think that both sides of the conflict overlook the actual enemy. Now for the Palestinian Arab, "Jews are considered a mere extension of the arrogant, white European oppressor. Both parties regard their enemy as an extension of their traumatic experience. Both Israelis and Arabs are fighting against the shadows of their own past" (cited in Coffin 1982: 332).

Regardless of occasional periods witnessing a growing sense of frustration and pessimism, both Israeli and Arabic literature, prior to 1948, expressed a great yearning for coexistence between the Jews and the Palestinians. Early Israeli fiction dealt with Arabs as romantic exotic oriental figures, however, less sentimental Arab images are to be found in the socialist / realist literature of the late forties and the fifties. In both Arabic and Israeli literature, mutually hostile representation of each other dominates the works written between 1948 and 1973. But, the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, in the mid-seventies, marks the beginning of a new era of more understanding and tolerance between the two sides of the conflict which is reflected in literary production.

However, there is no doubt that the existence of militant organizations and regimes which advocate violence on both sides in addition to the rise of political Islam and the Jihad movements in Palestine - under the sweeping impact of the Islamic Revolution in Iran since the eighties – has complicated the situation in the Middle East. Regardless of violence and bloodshed, there are positive solutions underway in the political arena and many promising developments in the field of civil society activities on both sides that would bring about a better future of more understanding and tolerance at least between the two peoples.

The Myth of Arab Anti-Semitism

In the Arab world, the aphorism "the Jews are our cousins" used to be a recurring motif in Arabic folklore and everyday language prior to the rise of the nationalist movement after the 1967 war followed by the emergence of fundamental political Islam in the 1980's. The above-cited aphorism is still used in Arabic discourse though it gains punning and ironic connotations shaped by the radical developments and political complexities in the Middle East conflict. The notion of the so-called blood ties between the Arabs and the Jews is deeply inherent in Arab popular culture and local religious traditions, particularly in countries where Jewish communities used to take root like Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Iraq and Palestine. According to Islamic traditions and popular culture narratives, both Arabs and Jews descended from the same Semitic roots, therefore, they are originally cousins and relatives. Regardless of these anthropological narratives, which contradict with their counterparts in Western theology, the

Jews, like other Middle Eastern minorities such as the Christians, the Kurds and the Druze were able to live in a state of coexistence with the mainstream Arab-Muslim population.

Like all minorities and non-conformist groups in the region, the Jews have been marginalized, ghettoized and deprived of some basic rights as Arab citizens; however, they were not physically annihilated or mass-murdered due to their religious doctrine. After the massive immigration of western Jews to Palestine during the Nazi holocaust and the emergence of Zionism as an independence movement, the armed struggle erupted in Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. The conflict between the two sides reached its culmination during the 1948 war which paved the way for the establishment of the state of Israel and the exodus of Palestinian refugees. The dramatic consequences of the Palestinian tragedy in 1948, the equation between Zionism as a neo-colonial movement and Judaism as a sacred scripture as well as the lack of knowledge on the part of the Arabs of the Nazi holocaust, and the Jewish history of genocide and victimization intensified Arab hostility toward the Jews. Nevertheless, the Arab antagonism toward the Jews, in Palestine or elsewhere, has never taken the form of anti-Semitism in the European sense. In other words, the Palestinians dealt with the immigrant European Jews as western colonial invaders the same way the Algerians did with the French or the Egyptians with the British during the era of colonization.

Nevertheless, in several fictional and nonfictional texts, Western writers claim that both Arabs and Palestinians are hostile to the Jewish people which is a distortion of history. In English literature, the negative Jewish image epitomized by Shylock, Barabas (*The Jew of Malta*) and others, has a wide effect on Arabic literature particularly after the 1948 war. However, there are Arab fictions that reveal a counterattack upon the Shylock image. While the artistic superiority of the bad over the good Jew is dominant in English literature, the positive image of the Jew in several Arab novels fits the changing imaginative interests of a changing generation. The fictional Jew (the wandering Jew) and other images which display stereotypical rigidity are altered by several liberal Arab writers. Incorporating Eastern and Western myths and recalling archetypal figures from the Bible and Islamic history, these writers attempt to be objective in their treatment of the Jew as a historical victim.

In the same context, Trevor Le Gassik points out that in Arab culture, Judaism is dealt with “as a divinely-inspired religion as the Quran teaches” (Le Gassik 1982: 250). According to Le Gassick “even armed resistance groups” in Palestine distinguish between Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a political and colonial movement aiming to dismiss the Palestinians from their homeland. The wide difference between the attitude of the Palestinians toward the Jewish people and the Zionists is “a fundamental motif in the ideology of the Palestinian Liberation Organization as many of their publications show” (Le Gassick 1982:250). Many Western authors equate Zionism with Judaism the same way they equate Islam with terrorism to fulfill dubious ideological ends. Critics also claim that Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism, is a dedicated Jew, however, Herzl in *The Diaries* confesses that “he does not believe in the Jewish religion” (Herzl 1960:54).

Moreover, in his discussion of the image of the Jew in Arabic literature, Trevor , Le Gassick argues that “Arabic political writings frequently express negative comments on the greed and duplicity of Zionists but reiterate that “there should not be any quarrel with Judaism or its adherents. In general, they emphasize their respect for Judaism as a divinely inspired religion” according to Islamic traditions and insist on the idea that “Zionism is an aberration supported by fanatics in the service of Western imperialism” (Le Gassick 1982: 250). There is no doubt that the deliberate distinction between Zionism and Judaism in Arabic political discourse is reflected in Arabic literature about the Arab-Israeli conflict. This difference becomes a fundamental motif in the ideology of Arab writers dealing with the Palestinian question. Thus, many of the fictional works incorporating Jews and Zionists are extensions of political polemics. Most of these works aim to express the anger of the writers and incite the Arab masses against the Zionists in Israel. However, "few words in Arabic of recent years involve a major character who is Jewish and the portrayal is rarely sympathetic" (Le Gassick 1982: 251). In this connection, it is significant to argue that for centuries Arab culture totally has lacked any information about the historical suffering of the Jews particularly the holocaust. This cultural gap in addition to other elements participated in what Le Gassick calls “the rare sympathy” (Le Gassick 1982: 252) toward the Jews in Arabic literature.

Apart from Le Gassick’s perspective, the image of the Jew in Arabic literature is shaped by a variety of national and international elements including internal social and political transformations and external pressures and interventions. Some of these images are directly inspired by negative stereotypes assimilated from western literature particularly the works of Shakespeare who demonizes Shylock, the famous Jewish character in *The Merchant of Venice*. Likewise Christopher Marlowe, in *The Jew of Malta*, introduced a biased image of the Jew throughout the character of Barabas. In *Oliver Twist* Charles Dickens unfortunately attempts to dehumanize the Jews by emphasizing the inhumanity of Fagin. In *The Cantos*, Ezra Pound associates usury with Jewish bankers. Moreover, many of T.S. Eliot’s well-known poems reveal a sense of anti-Semitism.

In a related context, it is noteworthy to point out that after the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1948 war, negative images of the Jews, adapted from western literary sources, are transformed and recycled in Arabic literature to serve political and ideological aims integral to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In other words, western stereotypes of the Jews reflecting European anti-Semitism are extensively duplicated by Arab writers in the aftermath of the 1948 war to underline Jewish aggression and violence against the Palestinian people. Several Arab versions of Shylock, Barabas, Fagin and others are aesthetically articulated by state-side writers to reinforce the image of the Jew as a fearful and hypocritical colonizer and a sadist who wants to slaughter all the Palestinians and drive them out of their land.

On this basis, it is apparent that many Arab writers, supported by tyrannical/local regimes depicted the entire Jewish community in Israel as Haganah militia fighters determined to annihilate the Palestinian people. This simplistic image of the Jew is encountered by other Arab writers who introduced a balanced vision of the Middle East conflict. Deploying positive portraits

of the Jew and foregrounding the human dimensions of the Jewish character as a defender of the oppressed and the humiliated and as a victim of a history of persecution and genocide, these writers aim to bridge the gap between the two conflicting parties in Palestine.

For example in Samih al-Qasim's novel *al-Sura al-Akhira fi al-Album / The Last Picture in the Album*, the protagonist is a sympathetic Jewish girl who became acquainted with the suffering of the Palestinian people after her visit to an Arab village. The girl, who lives in Tel Aviv, changes her attitude toward the Palestinian tragedy due to her journey to the Arab community. Consequently, she becomes convinced of the right of the Palestinians to have an independent state of their own (cited in Zalum 1982:46). In confrontations with her father, a militant Zionist who keeps an album including the pictures of the Palestinians he murders, the Jewish girl asks him to put her picture in the same album as a sign of sympathy, with the Palestinian victims.

Moreover, in al-Qasim's novel *Orange Fruits* Miriam, a Jewish girl, identifies herself with the Palestinians. She even refused to cooperate with the Zionist Agency in Germany. When members of the Jewish Agency attempted to urge Miriam to immigrate to Palestine she told them: "I will not cooperate with you. You are criminals. You want to use us to implement your hateful Zionist agenda. Palestine is not my homeland. My homeland is Germany and I will stay here. I will not help you to use our misery as a means of achieving your aims" (cited in Abu-Matar 1980: 410). Apparently, the Palestinian novelist, Samih al-Qasim aims to draw a distinction between the Jews and the Zionists acknowledging the holocaust "our misery" as a painful catastrophe experienced by the Jewish people in Europe.

Moreover, the Palestinian writer, Hanna Ibrahim depicts a sympathetic Jewish character in his novel *al-Mutasalelun / The Infiltrators*. The novel's events go around the encounter between Sara, a Jewish girl and a Palestinian family consisting of an old man, his daughter and her baby who came to the doorsteps of Sara's house inside a Jewish Kibbutz. At the beginning of the confrontation, Sara carried her gun and went toward the door where she heard strange voices and mild knocks. She screamed in Hebrew "who is there?" and a female voice replied in Arabic "for God's sake, open the door". Hearing the cries of a baby, Sara became confident that the strangers were not Palestinian rebels because the rebels did not carry babies. When Sara opened the door, she found an old man in a state of fatigue coughing and groaning. His daughter Hind was also exhausted due to the cold weather outside while the cries of her body were breaking the silence of the night. Immediately Sara threw her gun away and brought clothes for the woman and her baby while attempting to help the cold man who fainted and fell on the floor out of hunger and exhaustion.

Afterwards, the old man told Sara that they should leave her house "because our presence will cause trouble for you" (cited in Abu-Matar 1980: 110), but Sara refused to let them go at night in the rainy weather. They left Sara's house at day-break but she discovered later that the Palestinian family was killed by the Israeli soldiers in the Kibbutz. In conversation with an ex-Israeli soldier Sara became aware that Hind and her father were killed in an olive tree field near

the house. The soldier happily told Sara that two Palestinian rebels were killed while attempting to infiltrate into the Jewish community. Sara became very angry and she insisted on reaching the spot where the assassination took place. Inside the olive field, she found a crowd of people and only two dead bodies lying in the mud. She asked the crowd about the little baby and they asked her in return whether she saw them before.

In her embarrassment, Sara told them, she became confident that the dead mother carried a baby after watching “the milk coming out of her breasts” (cited in Abu-Matar 1980:112). Sara feels sympathetic toward the Palestinian family particularly when she remembers that Hind’s husband, detained in an Israeli prison, will not be able to see his baby anymore. In addition to Sara, Hannah Ibrahim introduces Shlomo, another sympathetic Jewish character who takes care of the cows in the Kibbutz. Shlomo decides to help Said, a Palestinian villager, to bury the dead bodies of his two brothers, killed by Israeli soldiers for no apparent reason. While the two brothers were carrying furniture from their own house, the soldiers killed them assuming that they were thieves. Shlomo decided to dig the grave insisting on helping Said to bury his brothers though it was a Sabbath. Explicitly, the novel reveals the bright side of the Jewish character because “Shlomo, the Jew, preferred to offer help to a Palestinian Muslim even if he disobeyed God” (Cited in Abu-Matar 1980 : 113).

The Humanization of the Jew in Palestinian Literature

The literary humanization of the Jew is a process which was originated in the Eighteenth century, accelerated in the Nineteenth century and continued to the present time. Western writers deal with the two great antipodes of the fictional Jewish stereotype, the Jew as a saint and the Jew as a devil, emphasizing the latter image. The fear and the basic impulse of animus surrounding evil Jewish characters such as Shylock, Fagin and others go back ultimately to the fabled role of the Jew in the Christian myth of God-killing. This nucleus served as a lodestone which unfortunately associated the Jew with ritual murder, necromancy, greed, duplicity and lust. In the Arab world, the historical and political ramifications of the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine not only created long-term hostility between the Arabs and the Jews but also undermined the possibility of initiating a mutual dialogue between both sides.

One of the main elements of tension that increasingly plague Arab writers who engage the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in their literary works is their recurrent foci on hostilities between Palestinian militants and hawkish Zionists or stone-throwing Palestinians and gun-wielding Israelis. Further, in several Arabic narratives, the Jew is viewed not only as a senseless murderer of children but also as a downright sadist. The invisibility of moderate Jewish characters in contemporary Arabic literature contributes to the anti-Israeli discourse prevalent in Arabic writing and valorizes the Arabic fanatic perspective toward the Hebrew state. In the absence of Jewish counter-narrative, in Arabic literature on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Palestinian militancy becomes a suitable alternative to the rhetoric about the suffering of the Palestinian people whereas the Jews emerge as the violent aggressors in the Middle East.

In traditional Arabic literature where the issues of nationalism and Arabism are one of the central foci of contemporary literary discourse, the question of representing the Jew, the cultural other, remains problematic and critical to any serious attempt to engage the Arab-Israeli issue from an objective perspective. In most of the Arabic literature written prior to the 1948 war, resulting in the foundation of Israel, the Oriental Jews were positively represented, even romanticized, as part and parcel of the social structure of their countries, in the Arab world. But the post-1948 war literature unfortunately witnessed the rebirth of a web of cultural stereotypes where the Jews are either systematically expunged from the narrative texts or when acknowledged, are associated with a status of ontological otherness, evil and inferiority.

Nevertheless, Ghassan ¹Kanafani's famous novel *Returning to Haifa* (1969) marks a turning point in Arabic literature after the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel because the author deploys positive images of the Jews challenging orthodox Arabic narratives. Unlike writers who either romanticize or demonize the Jew, Kanafani underlines human issues of common interest between the two sides of the conflict - the Israelis and the Palestinians - foreshadowing the political agenda of the novel. In *Returning to Haifa*, Kanafani introduces the Arab-Israeli conflict not only by incorporating Palestinian suffering and displacement, as in traditional Arabic literature, but also through an engagement with the Jewish history of Diaspora and genocide. The Jewish motif, in the novel, has precipitated the emergence of a new pattern of Jewish characters in Arabic literature associated with the nature of the cultural other. For decades, the awareness of such a motif which resulted from an encounter between the Palestinians and the Jews emerged as an outburst of literary consciousness characterizing major Palestinian literature on the conflict.

Returning to Haifa is "the story of a Palestinian couple's return to the flat from which they were forced to flee twenty years before" (Campbell 2001:53). The main events of Kanafani's novel cover the period that extends from the beginning of the armed clashes between fighting

¹ Ghassan Kanafani, a leading Palestinian critic, novelist, short story writer, journalist and political activist, was born in Acre and lived in Jaffa before the establishment of the State of Israel. When the city of Jaffa was captured in 1948 by the Israeli militias, he and his family fled toward Syria where they lived in Diaspora. In 1972 he was assassinated - together with his niece - in the explosion of his booby trapped car in Beirut. There was controversy about the identity of those who were involved in the assassination operation. The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) sources claimed that Israeli agents were responsible for his murder. According to other sources, he was killed by rival Palestinian or Lebanese factions. Among his famous works are *Rejal fil Shams / Men In The Sun* 1963, *Matabaqqa Lakum / All That's Left to You* 1966, *Umm Sa'ad* 1969, *Aid Ela Haifa / Returning to Haifa* 1970. As an activist and politician he participated in the foundation of the PFLP (The Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine). He was the guru of the movement and its spokesman.

factions in Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel until the post-1967 war era. After the 1967 war and due to permission from Israel, Said S. and his wife, Safiyya returned to their house in the Halisa area in Haifa looking for their son, Khaldun, abandoned behind during the occupation of the city in the 1948 war. When they entered the house, they were warmly received by a kind woman, Miriam Iphrat, who did not identify them in the beginning: «She was short and rather plump and was dressed in a blue dress with white polka dots. As Said began to translate into English, the lines on her face came together questioning. She stepped aside, allowing Said and Safiyya to enter, and then led them into the living room (Kanafani 2000: 162).

Miriam lost her family in the Nazi holocaust and immigrated to Israel. During the carnage perpetrated against the Jews in Europe, she escaped and hid in a neighbor's house. When she came to Palestine, she settled in the house of Said which was given to her by the Jewish agency. She found Said's abandoned baby son Khaldun / Dov in the empty house and brought him up as her own child. Obviously, Miriam felt sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinian people. This emigrant woman, a holocaust survivor witnessed a massacre where Palestinians, not Jews were slaughtered. She saw two Haganah soldiers (an Israeli militia) throwing the dead body of a Palestinian boy in a truck. The incident reminded her of the murder of her brother at the hands of German soldiers during the holocaust. To her, the Haganah violence against the Palestinian refugees is reminiscent of the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Germany and Poland where she comes from.

In a flashback , Said S. the Palestinian refugee and main character in the novel recalls the bitter memories of the 1948 war when he was forced on 21 April to leave Haifa “on a British boat” and “to be cast off an hour later on the empty shore of Acre” (Kanafani 2000: 166). On April 29, 1948 , Miriam and her husband , Iphrat Koshen , accompanied by a Haganah member entered “what from them on became their house , rented from the Bureau of Absentee property in Haifa” (Kanafani 2000 : 166). Escaping from the Nazi holocaust Iphrat Koshen's family “reached Haifa via Milan in the month of March under the auspices of the Jewish Agency” (Kanafani 2000: 166). In the beginning, the family had to live in a small room at Hadar, the Jewish quarter in Haifa. After the initial confrontation between Said S. together with his wife Safiyya and Iphrat's family, it seems that the Jewish woman has expected the visit of the Palestinian family: “I have been expecting you for a long time”, says the woman, “the truth is, ever since the war ended many people have come here, looking at the houses and going into them. Every day I said surely you would come” (Kanafani 2000: 163). The woman told them that she came from Poland in 1948 to settle in their house which she rents from the Israeli authorities.

In *Returning to Haifa* Kanafani takes the readers back to Iphrat Koshen's experience as a holocaust survivor in Europe: “He'd read *Thieves in the Night* by Arthur Koestler while in Milan , a man who came from England to oversee the emigration operation had lent it to him. This man had lived for a while on the very hill in Galilee that Koestler used as the background for his novel (Kanafani 2000: 166). The allusion to Arthur Koestler's novel is significant because it recalls a highly romanticized account of a group of Jews who fled the Nazi holocaust and came to

Palestine to build a little settlement in the late thirties. The characters in the novel aim to challenge the surrounding hostilities in order to establish a promising community constructing “houses and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruits of them” (Koestler 1967: 357) . The novel, like American frontier literature, depicts an image of an isolated country conquered by young pioneers who stayed in the Jewish ghetto, in Haifa, in” a building choked with people”. Kanafani describes the life of Iphrat Koshen’s family in the “Emigres’ Lodge” where emigrants spend the night together, eating dinner together and “waiting for eventual transfer to some other place” (Kanafani 2000:166). Like the characters in Koestler’s novel prior to their adventure, Iphrat Koshen was not fully aware of the nature of Palestine.

Attempting to counter misconceptions and stereotypes that impede the cultural dialogue between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine, Kanafani, in *Returning to Haifa*, does not acquiesce to literary traditions which view the Jew as a militant Zionist. Instead, he deploys a reconciliatory discourse creating positive Jewish characters such as Miriam and Iphrat , two holocaust survivors , in an attempt to carve out a morally viable narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By locating Miriam, Iphrat - and their adopted child, Dov - at the center of his novel, Kanafani aims to dismantle local traditional conceptions about the Jews as Zionist invaders parallel to other European colonialists. Further, the holocaust motif is unequivocally and passionately introduced in an Arabic novel about the Palestinian tragedy to foreground parallel human calamities and suffering. Convinced that the Arabs were not able to distinguish between the white settlers in South Africa and the Jews who escape from European anti-Semitism and Nazi holocaust, Kanafani, in *Returning to Haifa*, reveals a desire to build a new future, a desire that reveals identification with the other victim and the humiliated. The idealized portrayal of the Jewish characters in the novel and the representation of the Jew as an individual and a human being signifies a sympathetic understanding that would hopefully develop into more understanding and tolerance between the two partners in the conflict in Palestine.

In a related context, *Returning to Haifa* is a testimony that undermines claims about anti-Semitism in Arabic literature on the Palestinian- Israeli issue. Zionist scholars like Neville Mandel and others argue that the Palestinian hostility toward the Israelis is not the result of anti-Semitic sentiments but because the former considered the latter as colonizers settling Palestinian territories. Obviously, in Palestinian literature and culture, there is no anti-Semitism in the western sense simply because the issue of race is totally excluded from the Arab-Israeli conflict which is deeply rooted in political basis. The hostile attitude toward the Israelis in Palestinian literature initiates historically from the false conception at all the citizens of the Hebrew state, without exception, are militant Zionists who insist on transferring the Palestinians out of their land. This claim was introduced into the school curriculum and was propagated by state-side media in the Arab world after the 1948 war and the establishment of Israel. Since the Palestinian-Israeli dispute lies in politics rather than race, the Palestinians approach the Israelis the same way the Algerians approached the French colonizers during the era of imperialism.

As a Marxist-oriented scholar, Kanafani, in *Returning to Haifa*, creates thoughtful voices openly skeptical of traditional Arab views toward the Israeli survivors of the holocaust. In

Arabic literature, it is easy to fall back on the negative stereotypes of the Jew, originally assimilated from western culture and built on models like Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and other European fictional works. In an attempt to purge Arabic literature on the Palestinian / Israeli issue from the realm of the political propaganda, advocated by totalitarian Arab regimes, that views the Jews - in Israel- as sadistic Zionists and brutal invaders, Kanafani introduces a balanced vision of the conflict incorporating the holocaust motif as a subplot serving his aesthetic intentions. Refusing to look at the genesis of the conflict with a myopic eye, blinded by feverish militancy and religious attachment to institutions like al-Aqsa Mosque, Kanafani engages the perspective of the cultural other dismantling virulent stereotypes of the Jews assimilated in Arabic literature from western sources. Unlike writers who disseminate Jewish stereotypes to achieve ideological agenda, Kanafani weaves the holocaust motif into the Palestinian issue narrowing the gap between two histories of pain and exile.

Although Kanafani's fiction is ultimately harnessed to the Palestinian national cause promoting native culture and identity, *Returning to Haifa* explores new horizons confronting Jewish stereotypes in Arabic literature. The novel simultaneously introduces two narratives reflecting the viewpoints of the partners in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time in Arabic literature after the humiliating defeats in the 1948 and 1967 wars between the Arabs and Israel, the holocaust motif is aesthetically articulated from a sympathetic perspective that honors the memory of the Shoah. Though, it is difficult to study Kanafani's fiction in isolation from the discourse of Palestinian nationalism, Palestine is depicted in *Returning to Haifa* as the native land of both Palestinians and Jews. In this context, the novel is not only a challenge to the Arab official master narrative but also a deconstructive critique of the Arabic version of the conflict.

Though Kanafani's fiction is frequently dominated by what critics call "the discourse of resistance", *Returning to Haifa* breaks new ground in Arabic literature dealing with the armed conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. In the novel, Kanafani unabashedly introduces Jewish images which undermine previous stereotypes about the Jews as antagonists to everything Arabic or Islamic. Through the narrow lens of an Islamic fundamentalist perspective, the Jew, in traditional Arabic literature on the issue of Palestine, emerges as an inimitable and inexorable counterforce to an ideologically pure Palestine. In *Returning to Haifa*, Kanafani indicates that the categorization of all Israeli Jews as hard-core Zionists is completely out of touch with the exigencies of contemporary geopolitical realities. Explicitly, the argument and events in the novel consider the principle behind Jewish hatred as corrupt and self-serving.

The incidents of the novel which take place in the aftermath of the 1967 war narrate the story of a Palestinian couple, Said and his wife, Saffiya who return to their former house in the coastal city of Haifa. During the 1948 war, they were forced to evacuate the house leaving behind them their five-year-old son Khaldun. Afterwards, the house was occupied by an elderly and sympathetic childless Jewish couple, Miriam and Iphrat, two survivors of the holocaust. The Jewish family emigrated to Israel from Poland in 1948 and settled in Said's house which was given to them by the Israeli authorities. They adopted the Palestinian boy raising him as Dov, as a Jew and as an Israeli. After the 1967 war, the Israeli government allowed the Palestinians to

return to their houses and flats in the occupied territory. In 1967, when Said and Safiyya returned to Haifa, their former house was only inhabited by Miriam and Dov after the death of Iphrat. During the visit of the Palestinian couple to their house and in a conversation with Miriam, she told them that Khaldun / Dov becomes an officer in the Israeli army and he is supposed to come back home within a few hours.

Waiting for the return of Khaldun / Dov, Said told his wife the story of a Palestinian friend, Faris al-Labda - when Faris came back to his flat in Haifa he found it occupied by another Palestinian family who convinced him to join the Palestinian resistance forces. The novel moves toward its climax after the arrival of Dov and the final chapters witnessed the confrontation between Dov and his Palestinian / biological parents. Castigating Said and Saffiya for abandoning him Dov denounces his Palestinian origins affirming his identity as a Jew and an officer in the Israeli army: "I didn't know that Miriam and Iphrat weren't my parents until about three or four years ago. From the time I was small, I was a Jew. I went to a Jewish school, I studied Hebrew, I go to Temple, and I eat kosher food. When they told me I wasn't their own child, it didn't change anything. Even when they told me - later on - that my original parents were Arabs, it didn't change anything. No, nothing changed, that's certain. After all, in the final analysis, man is a cause" (Kanafani 2000:181).

The young man continues his address to Said, his biological father: "You should not have left Haifa. If that wasn't possible, then no matter what it took, you should not have left an infant in its crib. And if that was also impossible, then you should never have stopped trying to return. Do you say that too was impossible? Twenty years have passed, sir! Twenty years! What did you do during that time to reclaim your son? If I were you I would've borne arms for that. Is there any stronger motive? You're all weak! Weak! You're bound by heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! Don't tell me you spent twenty years crying! Tears won't bring back the missing or the lost. Tears won't work miracles! All the tears in the world won't carry a small boat holding two parents searching for their lost child. So you spent twenty years crying. That's what you tell me now? Is this your dull, worn-out weapon?" (Kanafani 2000:185). Expressing his gratitude to his Jewish foster parents Dov remains in Haifa as an Israeli citizen. As Said and Safiyya drive back to Ramallah Said thinks seriously about allowing his elder son, Khalid, to join the Palestinian fighters. At the beginning of the novel, Said prevented Khalid from joining the resistance movement in Palestine but his meeting with Dov changes his attitude regardless of his fear of a potential confrontation between Khalid and Dov on the battlefield.

Moreover, Said and Safiyya started to see the Palestinian-Israeli question from a new perspective not only because of Dov's response but also as a result of the confrontation with Miriam. As a holocaust survivor, Miriam expresses sympathy toward a Palestinian boy brutally treated by some Israeli soldiers in Haifa. Drawing an analogy between the Palestinian boy and her brother who was killed by the Nazis in a Polish concentration camp, Mariam is able to change the hostile attitude of the Palestinian couple toward the Jews as a whole. The new awareness on

the part of the Palestinian couple of the painful holocaust experience opened their eyes to new realities that should be taken into consideration in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Conclusion

Returning to Haifa was written during a period in Arabic literature that prioritized a work's social function as well as literary merit. Sabri Hafez argues that the novel's socio-economic and political aspects interweave somewhat with the national cause and contribute to its development" (cited in Harlow 1996: 163). This sense of commitment, in Harlow's view gives way to a deeper sense of alienation as the 1960s wore on and it became apparent that grand socialist experiments like Nasser's or grand political dreams like the idea of Palestinian reunification were going to fall short of their goals. In the dark days after the 1967 war, many Palestinians felt that the defeat of the Arab armies (the United Arab Forces) by the Israelis had also defeated "the very ideals of Pan-Arabism for deliverance and a victorious return to their homeland had largely been based" (Harlow 1996: 72). This defeat of ideals led to a period of self-criticism, wherein one function of the literature of commitment was to posit which changes of ideals might result in a better future. *Returning to Haifa* embodies this principle by depicting two similar versions of what ensues when Palestinians who have held onto these defeated ideals are forced to face the reality of their defeat.

Discussing the impact of the 1948 War of independence on the relationship between the Palestinians and the Jews, Edna Amir Coffin argues that the war intensified feelings of guilt on the part of the Jewish community in Israel: "the military victory put the Jewish community in the new position of perceiving itself not only as intended victims but also as potential victimizers defending itself but also expelling civilian populations from villages and homesteads" (Coffin 1982: 326). The reference to the dispersion of the Palestinian refugees as a result of the 1948 war triggers an interrogative move toward a re-reading of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israel. In parallel lines with Coffin's argument, the incorporation of the holocaust motif in Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* opens new horizons about the possibility of a revision of Arabic literature on the Palestinian-Israeli question that takes into consideration the painful history of the two partners in conflict.

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