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Michal Vlk

Israeli Reality as Seen Through the Eyes of Sayed Kashua

Izraelská realita očima Sajjida Kašuy

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Vedoucí práce: Doc. PhDr. Daniel Boušek, Ph.D.

Poděkování

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Prohlášení

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Podpis

Klíčová slova

Sajjid Kašua, Arabové, hebrejská literatura, arabsko-izraelské spisovatele, arabsko-židovské vztahy, Palestinci, Izraelsko-arabský konflikt, sociálně-politické podmínky, hebrejščina

Keywords

Sayed Kashua, Arabs, Hebrew literature, Israeli-Arab writers, Jewish-Arab relations, Palestinian Arabs, Israeli-Arab conflict, Socio-political conditions, Hebrew language

Abstrakt

Cílem práce je popsat a analyzovat vnímání izraelsko-palestinské reality v románové tvorbě Sajjida Kašua. Sajjid Kašua, izraelsko-arabský spisovatel a publicista píšící hebrejsky, je v Izraeli kulturním fenoménem. Páteř jeho tvorby tvoří zkušenost dvojití identity Arabů s izraelských občanstvím a také ambivalentní vztah této menšiny k židovskému obyvatelstvu. Kašua se pohybuje na rozhraní dvou světů, z nichž ani jeden jej není s to přijmout: židovská většina v Izraeli jej obviňuje z anti-sionismu, a naopak Arabové mu mají za zlé, že píše výhradně hebrejsky, je kritický k arabské kultuře a vyjadřuje proizraelské názory. Bakalářská práce bude analyzovat na románové tvorbě Sajjida Kašua opakující se motiv soužití Arabů a Židů v Izraeli a problematiku identity izraelských Arabů. Současně Kašuaovu tvorbu zasadí do kontextu tvorby dalších izraelsko-arabských spisovatelů píšících hebrejsky a bude se snažit nalézt odpověď na otázku, jaké místo zaujímá v izraelské kultuře a jaký v ní má ohlas.

Abstract

This study aims to illuminate and analyze the Israeli-Arab reality as it is reflected in the novelistic works of Sayed Kashua. Sayed Kashua, an Israeli-Arab writer and journalist, who writes in Hebrew, has become a cultural phenomenon in the modern Israel. He opts to write and describe the hyphenated identity of Israeli-Arabs and their ambivalent perceptions of the Jewish majority. Kashua is torn between the Arab and Jewish worlds and he does not feel satisfied with either of them: the Jewish-majority society accuses him of anti-Zionism, while the Arab society considers his choice of language as a treachery and denial of the Palestinian rich cultural, linguistic, and literary heritage and accuses him of being highly critical of Palestinian culture and society and of expressing pro-Israeli attitudes. The thesis presents an analysis of the recurrent theme of co-existence of Arabs and Jews in Israel and of the identity crisis of Israeli-Arabs in Kashua's novelistic production. At the same time, the study contextualizes Kashua's literary writings within the writings of other prominent Israeli-Arab authors, who published their works in Hebrew, while seeking an answer to the question of how these writings are perceived in the Israeli society and abroad.

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1. Introduction

Israeli-born Arab novelist, essayist, and screenwriter Sayed Kashua is an original, who has become one of the most prominent and prolific contemporary Hebrew writers. He is unusual not only for his exceptional literary and creative talent, but also because he is an Israeli-Arab who, unlike the veteran Israeli-Arab writers, achieved all his success in Hebrew. His personal essays for *Haaretz*, the Israeli daily leading newspaper, are often humorous, incisive, and at times painful, and over the last decade they were among the most widely read columns in Israel. He also co-created and wrote *Arab Labor*, the satirical television sitcom, which won top prizes and devoted audiences. His latest novel, *Second Person Singular*, was chosen by Israel's Ministry of Education as a set text in the school curriculum. His weekly column, television sitcom and his novels all explore the contradictions of modern multicultural Israel while also capturing the nuances of everyday family life.¹

I should like to emphasize at the onset that, despite being theoretically influenced by a wider range of academic disciplines, the thesis is first and foremost a literary study, which focuses on Kashua's novelistic literary works and offers an analysis of cultural imagination. Consequently, Kashua's latest book, *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life*², will not be discussed in this study, mainly because the book is a collection of his columns published in the newspaper *Haaretz*, and therefore represents primarily his journalistic writing, which falls beyond the scope of this study.

Why and how is the quotidian Israeli reality reflected in the Kashua's literary oeuvre? How does the hyphenated Israeli-Arab identity find expression in the literary works of Sayed Kashua and his predecessors? Why have these authors, whose native language is Arabic and who are not part of the majority, opted to write in the language of the majority? And how is this literature received in Israeli society and in Arab world? These are the principal questions explored in this thesis.

The Hebrew transliteration system used in this thesis is based on the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* "General" transliteration rules (Vol. 1 p. 197). The usage established by the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* has become standard in publications in English³, which necessitate the use of Hebrew words and names. Only exceptions to these rules are proper names, which appear in this study in their Anglicized forms.

¹ <http://bit.ly/1Khzlcf> (last visited on 25 July 2017).

² Kashua, *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life*, trans. Ralph Mandel, 2016.

³ Barnavi, 2003, p. 298.

2. Israeli-Arab Hebrew Literature: Literary Context

Israeli literature was originally meant to represent Israeli culture, which would be distinct from the Jewish Diaspora culture as well as from Palestinian culture. Israeli literature, according to Zionist ideology, should have represented the ideal of Jewish people speaking their reborn Hebrew language in their own re-established country. However as it evolved, it has deviated from this prescribed path. Even though the phenomenon of Israeli-Arab⁴ writers writing in Hebrew language⁵ is limited, it has undermined the imagined concept of Israeli literature as Jewish national literature, remaking it into bi-ethnic literature.⁶

The fact that these authors published their works in Hebrew or had them translated to Hebrew, thus targeting the Jewish majority readership, defines their literature as a part of Israeli literary canon. Also, the preoccupation of these writers with the tragedy of Palestinian defeat, suffering and degradation expresses a close link with Israeli-Jewish writers who also wrote extensively on the theme of Arab. While there is no doubt that the works of Israeli-Arabs are highly critical of Zionist enterprise, it has to be also noted, that paradoxically, they are the products of Zionist discourse against which they react so harshly. Their Israeli citizenship and choice of Hebrew demonstrates their connection with the Zionist ideological establishment.⁷ As mentioned above, Israeli-Arab writers' choice of Hebrew is a way of targeting the Jewish hegemony. Since most of the Israeli-Jews cannot read Arabic, only writing in Hebrew, as Maoz claims, can liberate Israeli-Arabs from the reification imposed by the hegemony. It also presents the Israeli-Jewish readership with a twofold challenge. First, it presents the majority readership with the Arab's perception of the moral failings of Zionist project. Second, by writing in Hebrew, Israeli-Arab writers undermine the Zionist exclusionary claim to Hebrew culture.⁸

Despite the harsh criticism of the Zionist enterprise, it would be a misapprehension to view these literary texts as a mere expression of rebellious resistance. As Brenner and Hochberg propose, these texts rather emphasize the mutual affiliation, connectedness, and

⁴ The question of nomenclature is particularly problematic. The most common name used in Israeli public discourse is Israeli-Arabs (aravim yisra'elim). Some prefer terms such as Israeli-Palestinians (both "Palestinian" and "Israeli" are nationalities, therefore there is a logical contradiction), Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinians, Israelis etc. I shall use the term Israeli-Arabs, which emphasizes Israeli citizenship of the Arabs, as a distinctive ethnic group, who live in the State of Israel as oppose to Palestinians who do not.

⁵ The phenomenon of Hebrew literature produced by Israeli-Arab writers did not exist until 1960's when Atallah Mansour published his first Hebrew novel. He was followed by others, among most prominent were Anton Shammas and from the youngest generation Sayed Kashua (1975 -).

⁶ Brenner, 2003, p. 4.

⁷ Idem, pp. 5 – 6.

⁸ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 25.

inseparability of Israeli-Arabs and Israeli-Jews, contrary to common perception of irreconcilable animosity between the two. Nevertheless, reading through this minority canon it stands out that there is a very little, if any, optimism present. Even though these texts stress the need of peaceful co-existence between the Arabs and Jews, by the same token they show the very impossibility of achieving such a reality at the current state of affairs. Undoubtedly the complexity of the situation is troubling, yet this bond leaves us with some hope for a shared future, which is beyond the imagination of inevitable dichotomy⁹.

Mahmoud Darwish, an eminent Palestinian poet, expresses his standpoint in a similar fashion. Despite being a harsh critic of Zionist state, he maintains that the Zionist enterprise created a connection, maybe even a bond, between the two peoples. He claims “It’s impossible to ignore the place of the Israeli in my identity ... Israelis have changed the Palestinians and vice versa. The Israelis are not the same as they were when they came, and the Palestinians are not the same people either. Each dwells inside the other ... The other is a responsibility and a test ... Will a third emerge out of two? This is a test.”¹⁰ This emergence of the “third” is inevitably connected with the Hebrew language, which Arabs and Jews share. As Brenner points out, Mahmoud Darwish sees the interpretation of the two identities as a potential for a „third“ – a new *modus vivendi* which would include both Arabs and Jews.¹¹

Darwish was not first to realize the need to find a *modus vivendi* between the Palestinians and the state. Edward Said, a Palestinian American professor, maintains that sovereignty of the State of Israel is historically given and cannot be eliminated, either by nostalgic fantasies about the past or by unrealistic hopes for Israel’s disappearance.¹² Thus the reaffirmation of Israeli Arab identity must come from the consciousness of the historical and political reality and at the same time from the regained sense of national belonging. That is to say, it is of primary importance to avoid mindless imitation of Israeli Jewish mainstream culture in the reality of hegemonic domination and suppression. The Zionist ideology created a “public transcript” that undermined the distinctiveness of the Israeli-Arab culture, imposing its hegemonic culture that triggers an imitative adaptation to the mainstream. As Brenner maintains, Israeli-Arabs have developed a culture of “hidden transcripts”, that is, a culture of resistance that aims at maintaining their historical connection to the land alive. These hidden transcripts of both subordinate and dominant need to emerge in the public sphere of art. That way, the Israeli-Arab self-affirmation can take place. The interpenetration that Darwish

⁹ Hochberg, 2007, p. 19; Brenner, 2003, pp. 3 – 14.

¹⁰ Darwish, 1996, pp. 194 – 195; (translated by Brenner, 2001, p. 91).

¹¹ Brenner, 2001, p. 91.

¹² Said, 1985, p. 57.

speaks about needs to be publicly acknowledged to actualize the hope for a co-existence between Arabs and Jews. In this regard, the Israeli-Arab writers are involved in a complex process of the recovery of that which has been suppressed.¹³

The writings of Israeli-Arabs, its language, form, and genre, all attest to the various extent of interaction between the self and the “other”. This dialogical discourse may be beneficial for both parties; it may even point toward recognition of interconnectedness between the two national and ethnic groups.¹⁴

2.1. Hebrew as Territory

In their prominent essay “What Is a Minor Literature?” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari maintain that one of the three main characteristics of the minor literature is “the deterritorialization of the language”. They developed their theory in relation to Kafka, who was Czech Jew writing in German. Kafka chose to deterritorialize German language rather than territorialize other language, by writing, for example, in his Czech language or using Yiddish. For Deleuze and Guattari writing in a hegemonic language is a precondition for minority literature.¹⁵

As Hochberg points out, other scholars have already criticized this and other assertions made by Guattari and Deleuze in their endeavour to define minor literature. At any rate, in his essay, Hochberg is interested in the association of language with territory and of political resistance with deterritorialization of language. He uses the terms deterritorialization and territorialization in connection with metaphorical imagination of language as a territory rather than the confinement of languages to any particular given space. Therefore, if land is the immediate place over which national conflicts take place, the language, imagined as a cultural territory is similarly treated as a matter of exclusive ownership, as if it needs to be protected from invasions as well.¹⁶

As in many other cases, the creation of Israeli nation-state was accompanied by nationalization of language. Uniqueness of the Israeli case lies in that the nationalization of Hebrew further reinforced the older perception of Hebrew as an ethnic, religious language. This double status of Hebrew makes it clear that, while Hebrew is considered “an Israeli language”, it does not belong equally to all citizens of Israel, for it is viewed primarily as “a Jewish language.” Israeli scholar and critic Hannan Hever observes similarly, “Hebrew

¹³ Brenner, 2001, pp. 92 – 95.

¹⁴ Idem, p. 95.

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, pp. 16 – 89. “The connection of the individual to a political immediacy” and “the collective assemblage of enunciation” are the two other main characteristics of minor literature mentioned in their essay (see: Hochberg, 2007, p. 73; p. 155).

¹⁶ Hochberg, 2007, pp. 73 – 74.

functions as both the language of the majority in the state of Israel and as the language of a minority compelled to fight for cultural and political recognition.”¹⁷

The tensions which arise from this dual status of Hebrew (Israeli or Jewish?) is at the centre of the writings of Israeli-Arab authors. The cultural and political implications in the works of Israeli-Arabs such as Attalah Mansour, Anton Shamma, and Sayed Kashua seem to be extremely complex, more than, for example, in that of past colonized Arabs writing in French or English. The political situation in the Middle East, which has involved an extended conflict between the Israeli and Arab communities and an existing conflict between Israel and some Arab countries, gives special significance to the fact that these authors write in Hebrew.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hever, 1987, p. 48.

¹⁸ Hochberg, 2007, pp. 74 – 77.

3. Beginnings of Israeli-Arab Hebrew Literature: A Review

There are numerous novels that have been written in Hebrew by Arab authors living in the state of Israel. A recent article published by Adel Shakour, a professor at Bar-Ilan University, reports that there are some ten Arab authors in Israel who are currently writing in Hebrew.¹⁹ In this chapter, one pivotal author of first and second generation²⁰ of Arab writers as well as one author whose works have been translated from Arabic to Hebrew will be briefly discussed: Atallah Mansour (1934 -), Anton Shammas (1950 -), and Emile Habiby (1922 - 1996). Two of them, Mansour's *In a New Light* (Be-or Hadash, 1966)²¹ and Shammas's *Arabesques* (Arabeskot, 1986) were originally published in Hebrew. The works of these two writers are fictional autobiographies. Habiby's three novels *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (Ha-opsimist; 1984), *Ikhtayyeh* (1988), and *Sarayah, Daughter of the Ghoul* (Sarayah bat ha-shed ha-ra) were originally published in Arabic and translated to Hebrew by Anton Shammas with the author's approval and under his supervision.²² Most of the Israeli-Arab writers writing in Hebrew were Christian or Druze. They managed to integrate to Israeli society faster both in formal frameworks, e.g. the army – which was for the Druze obligatory – the universities, the media and press as well as less formal ones.²³ In recent years, however, with the emergence of a new generation of Israeli-Arab authors, born in the 1980s and 1990s, who are Arab-Muslims²⁴, the decision to write their novels in Hebrew demonstrates a new level of integration into the prevailing social norms of Israeli society.²⁵

The first Israeli-Arab writer who published a narrative text in Hebrew was Atallah Mansour. To better understand his Hebrew mode of writing a brief sketch of his life would be helpful. Mansour was born in 1934 in a small village of Jish in Upper Galilee and after graduating lived one year in a kibbutz. He became prominent journalist and reporter and wrote for the left-wing weekly newspaper *Ha-olam Ha-ze* as well as for the prestigious *Haaretz* Israeli daily. He published his novel *In a New Light* (*Be-or Hadash*) in 1966 in Hebrew. He explains that his decision to write in Hebrew came from his desire to obtain vengeance by writing a highly critical novel. Mansour's comment about writing in Hebrew as

¹⁹ Shakour, 2013, pp. 1 – 17.

²⁰ The common classification posits Atallah Mansour as a representative of the first generation, Anton Shammas as a representatives of the second generation, and Sayed Kashua as a representative of the third. See Kayyal (2008) and Mendelson-Maoz (2014).

²¹ All dates correspond to the publication date either in Hebrew original or in Hebrew translation, which marks their entrance to the Israeli literature.

²² Brenner, 2001, p. 95.

²³ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 27.

²⁴ Among the most eminent Israeli writers with Arab-Muslim background are Sayed Kashua and Ayman Sikseck.

²⁵ Harris, 2014, p. 42.

a form of vengeance was made whole twenty years after the work was published. This might have been a justification for his decision to write in Hebrew, because of the guilt that some Israeli-Arab writers writing in Hebrew feel.²⁶

The novel, however, was not received with anger or harsh criticism by Israeli-Jewish critics, quite the contrary. It received many positive reviews despite the highly critical and satiric representation of Israeli society as well as its integral institution – kibbutz.²⁷ Mansour suggested two reasons for the positive reviews that the novel received. The first was that the literary critics that reviewed his work were mainly Israelis with liberal views, which led them to have positive reaction to it. The second reason was that his Jewish readers were impressed that a non-Jew could use Hebrew as a literary medium.²⁸

Mansour's Hebrew novel, *In a New Light*, follows the life story of Yossi (Yusuf) who spends his youth living in a kibbutz, falling in love with a Jewish girl, he successfully passes himself as a Jew here. Gradually as the plot of the novel unrolls we find out about Yossi's split personality. When Yossi is just a child he witnesses his father being killed by people whose identity, whether British, Jewish, or Arab, remains unknown. Because of this tragic experience Yossi estranges himself from his Arab identity. He is adopted by a Jewish friend of his father, Baruch Mizrahi, who takes care of him. Baruch has also a daughter, Ruth, who Yossi befriends and together they run to the kibbutz Bet Or. Father takes his daughter back home, but leaves Yossi in the kibbutz. The kibbutz which is part of the left-wing socialist segment of the Israeli society, Ha-shomer Ha-zair, is considered to be an unbiased and egalitarian society. The tolerance of the kibbutz's members is however put to test when Yossi decides to apply for a membership and it turns out that he is an Arab. Despite the kibbutz members' egalitarian ideology, they see him "in a new light" and become suspicious of him. Eventually, they do accept his application for membership providing that his Arab identity will be ignored. As we read through the text, we can observe that the protagonist of the story, Yossi, is utterly detached from his Arab identity. He does not speak Arabic and doesn't have any Arab friends. As Maoz notes, in the Mansour's story Israeli identity is clearly preferred to Palestinian/Arab identity.²⁹

Another prominent Israeli-Arab writer is Emil Habiby. Habiby, a Christian Arab, was born in 1922 in Haifa and lived most of his life in Nazareth. He became one of the leaders of Communist party during the period of Mandate Palestine. After the creation of the State of

²⁶ Brenner, 2001, p. 100.

²⁷ Elad-Bouskila, 1999, pp. 141 – 142.

²⁸ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, pp. 27 – 28.

²⁹ Idem, p. 28.

Israel in 1948, Habiby was granted Israeli citizenship, became a long-term Knesset member and a founding member of the Communist party of Israel. He was also a co-founder of the Israel's leading Arab weekly *Al-Ittihad*. Habiby claims that his writing activity started with a challenge posed by the Yigal Alon, the Israeli Minister of Education at that time. Alon asserted that if there had been Palestinian people in Israel, it would have had a literary heritage.³⁰

Habiby was a highly controversial figure both in Arab and Jewish milieus. He wrote in Arabic and his first novel, *The Pessoptimist*, published in 1974 became his best-known work and made him famous throughout the Arab world. The work is marked by dark humor and satire, and depicts a tragic-comic hero who lost all he had as well as his ability to distinguish between optimistic and pessimistic situations. Saeed, the main character, tries to appease the Jewish state that he became a part of. His loyalty is so vigorous, that after the Six-Day War of 1967, when the Israeli radio calls on Arabs in the defeated territories to raise a white flag of surrender, Saeed raises a white flag on his roof – not in the conquered territories, but in the heart of Haifa. His surrender is misread, he is imprisoned, brutalized, and later employed by the Israeli Secret Service and lives his life almost automatically. Later, he tries, but ultimately fails to join the Palestinian resistance. The only solution is to disappear. The story ends with science fiction element, with Saeed in outer space only with extraterrestrials for company.³¹ In this novel, Habiby describes a character, which, like Good Soldier Schweik or Voltaire's *Candide*, is grateful when the very worst happens.³²

In 1990 Habiby was awarded the State of Palestine Certificate of Merit in Egypt's Cairo and the Medal of Jerusalem for Culture, Literature, and Art.³³ As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Habiby's three highly critical novels – *The Pessoptimist*, *Ikhtiyaa*, and *Sarayah, Daughter of the Ghoul* – were also translated to Hebrew by Anton Shammass. The Hebrew translations were all published by well-respected publishers in Israel – Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuḥad and Am Oved. Thanks to Shammass's masterful translations, Habiby's works were able to penetrate the Zionist-Hebrew shell. Consequently in 1992, on Israel's Independence Day, Habiby received the Israel Prize for Literature, Israel's highest prize, from Prime Minister and Minister of Education. This bestowal of Israel Prize on Habiby by the

³⁰ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, pp. 37 – 40.

³¹ <http://bit.ly/1CplZWU> (last visited on 2 July 2017).

³² Brenner, 2001, p. 96.

³³ Brenner, 2003, p. 112.

Government of Israel indeed recognizes the Israeli identity of his works and makes Habiby an Israeli writer.³⁴ On conferring the prize the judges noted:

*Emile Habiby's style is innovative and sophisticated. The author has developed a distinctive genre by merging the classical Arabic forms and styles (such as the maqama) with the best of Western satirical literature ... The works of Emile Habiby are received as part of contemporary Arabic literature, and at the same time they have been received, in the original Arabic and in Hebrew translation, as substantive contributions to present-day Israeli literature.*³⁵

Habiby's acceptance of Israel Prize certainly did not help his reputation in the Arab world. On the contrary, it gained him unanimous condemnation from Arab intellectuals who called him a traitor of the Palestinian cause. Why then would he endanger his reputation and readership in the Arab world to enter the Jewish majority readership by way of translation? Given that his satiric and critical representation of the State of Israel and its Jewish citizens does not show any redeeming features, we may safely assume that Habiby did not intend to ingratiate himself with the Israeli public.³⁶ One possible answer could be, as Habiby argued, "the strategy of forbearance." Habiby defends those Arabs who decided to remain in Israel after its creation and build their lives under its rule. He tells his critics, among whom there were also Palestinians who left Israel, that the merit does not lie in running away, but in staying and coping with the situation. Habiby rejects the accusation of betrayal and affirms his choice to remain in Israel and seek an Israeli-Arab modus vivendi under Israeli rule.³⁷

Before seeking an answer to the question why Israeli audience did receive Habiby works so favourably, we shall look at the approving reception of another Israeli-Arab author who was mentioned in connection with Habiby. Anton Shammas, an Israeli Christian Arab, was born in 1950 in the Upper Galilee village of Fassuta. He studied in several Israeli Schools, including school in Haifa, where classes were taught in Hebrew. He published in Hebrew periodicals, such as Keshet, Moznayyim, and Iton 77. In 1980's he started to translate Hebrew poetry and, as mentioned earlier, he was also translator of Habiby.³⁸ His acclaimed novel, Arabesques, was published in 1986 and is a deserving milestone in the second

³⁴ Brenner, 2001, p. 96.

³⁵ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 37.

³⁶ Idem, p. 38.

³⁷ Brenner, 2001, p. 97.

³⁸ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 29.

generation's writers in Hebrew. It received much attention from Israeli scholars and literary critics and it became immensely successful. It was also translated to many languages, except for Arabic. Anton Shammas now lives in the US and barely publishes in Hebrew or Arabic.³⁹

Arabesques is divided into two main parts separating the narrator from his narrative – the first part is entitled “The Tale” and the second part “The Teller”. The first section tells us about the history of the narrator’s family, beginning with their move in the early nineteenth century from Syria to Galilee, continuing with Shammas’s childhood in the village of Fassuta, and ending with the Six Day war in 1967. The second part, “The Teller”, is a story of the narrator, who is an accomplished author participating in the annual international writing program held in the US. The connection between the narrator and the narrative remains purposely enigmatic. The enigma grows even bigger as the narrator becomes a character in others’ texts. He becomes a “typical Arab” for the Israeli-Jewish writer Bar-On, hinting at the figure of A. B. Yehoshua, with whom Shammas has debated.⁴⁰ He also becomes the hero of a fictional autobiography written by the “other Anton Shammas,” known also as the journalist Michael Abayyad. The novel seems like an autobiography, but the narrator’s authority and unity is constantly undermined.⁴¹ The author’s style – with its plethora of inter-textual references, allegorical allusions, combination of historical and imaginary elements, and sudden shifts between the different stories, narrators, times, and places – also makes it difficult for the reader to understand the novel.⁴²

Many scholars and critics have written about the novel’s complexity. Yael Feldman considers the text to be a type of postmodern writing. The obscurity regarding the question of narrators, the arabesque structure, the mixture of modern and non-modern, and the lack of linear progress are all typical of post-modern writings.⁴³ Another Hebrew critic, Avraham Balaban observes similarly:

One of the salient features of Modern Hebrew literature is the shattering of accepted literary and cultural dichotomies, and the challenging of the principles of hegemony

³⁹ Brenner, 2001, p. 98.

⁴⁰ A.B. Yehoshua, a prominent Israeli-Jewish author, pronounced in a response to Shammas’s accusations of Israel that it marginalized Arab population’s collective identity following: “I am suggesting to you ... that if you want to exercise your full identity, if you want to live in a state that has a Palestinian character with a genuine Palestinian culture, arise, take your chattels, and move yourself one hundred yards eastward, into the independent Palestinian state, that will be established alongside Israel”. To this Shammas responded: “I have no intention to leave my motherland and my father’s home, for the country Yehoshua will show me,” and continues to describe his political (and personal) endeavors, “What I’m trying to do – mulishly, it seems – is to un-Jew the Hebrew language, to make it more Israeli and less Jewish, thus bringing it back to its Semitic origins, to its place. This is a parallel to what I think the state should be”. (Shourideh, 2013, p. 147).

⁴¹ Hochberg, 2007, p. 79.

⁴² Kayyal, 2008, p. 42.

⁴³ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, pp. 30 – 31.

that accompany it. Arabesque is typical of this new writing direction in this as well. What could be more postmodernist than the text of an Arab-Palestinian-Christian that describes the conquest of his village by the "Jewish army", a text written in spit-and-polish Hebrew and constructed like a mask upon a mask upon a mask.⁴⁴

Scholarly criticism has often dealt with the question of language and why the novel was never translated to Arabic. Even though Shammas is an excellent translator from Hebrew to Arabic, he rejected the notion of having his novel translated to Arabic or translating it himself. In *Arabesques*, Shammas presents a harsh criticism not only of Jewish society in Israel, but also of the Arab society inside and outside of Israel, and he was not willing to level such criticism at his society in its own language.⁴⁵

Despite the critical tone of Shammas's work and works of other Israeli-Arab writers, they became all acclaimed by the Hebrew reading community. This brings us to the question we posed before. Why would this critical literature be so well-perceived by the society it criticizes? Brenner argues that the empathic attention that this literature received is partly because of the "shock therapy" of exposure to the hidden texts of oppression. The confrontation of (mostly liberal) Israeli-Jews with their image presented from the perspective of Arabs causes shock and guilt, which eliminates the possibility of denial. Remembering the suppressed parts of history signifies the realization of the extent of suffering inflicted on others by victory. Inclusion of this realisation into the public historical memory brings a change in the sense of the identity of the victor. The victor's exclusive triumphalist narrative of victory is forced to admit and thus include the narrative of the defeated.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Elad-Bouskila, 1999, pp. 147 – 148.

⁴⁵ Idem, pp. 149 – 150.

⁴⁶ Brenner, 2001, pp. 105-109.

4. Sayed Kashua

4.1. Life and Career

Sayed Kashua is an acclaimed Israeli-Arab novelist, screenwriter and columnist, who writes – and had all the success – in Hebrew. Born in 1975 in the Arab village of Tira, in central Israel, in the area known as the “Arab Triangle”, Kashua grew up in a secular non-practicing Sunni Muslim family.⁴⁷ His father was a member of an extreme left-wing socialist group Matzpen and was imprisoned for two years after an explosion in the cafeteria of Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1969.⁴⁸ In 1990, the boy won a scholarship to attend the country’s prestigious Jewish boarding school – the Israel Arts and Science Academy in Jerusalem, where most of the time he was the only Arab in class. After completing his high school education, he studied sociology and philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Upon graduation, he was hired as a journalist for the Jerusalem weekly *Kol Ha-ir* and later became a television critic and a regular columnist for the Israel’s most prestigious daily newspaper *Haaretz*. The columns, which are published weekly, are his personal essays and became among the most popular pieces in the paper.⁴⁹

Kashua is also the principal writer of Israel’s Channel 2 highly successful satiric sitcom *Arab Labor* (Avodah Aravit), which follows a young Israeli-Arab couple living outside Jerusalem and their friends through adventures in work, school, family, and failed attempts at belonging. Arab Labor premiered in 2007 and it is the first program to present Israeli-Arab characters speaking Arabic on Israeli prime time.⁵⁰ In a multilingual mixture of colloquial Arabic and Hebrew, with other languages sprinkled in (English, literary Arabic and even Yiddish), the program deals with Jewish-Arab relations and mocks the stereotypes of Jews and Arabs in Israel and the way they see each other. Amjad, the protagonist, much like Kashua, is a middle-class journalist in his mid 30s who tries to fit into the Jewish-Israeli elite, but is torn between the Jewish and the Arab worlds. The show’s popularity among Israeli viewers is attributed mostly to the humor and satirical representation of the Israeli society. Kashua, during his guest lecture at NYU in 2016, talks about influencing culture through humor and satire:

“I always thought it was very important, yes, to influence the majority, the people with the power. Because in a way our lives are in their hands. So it was some kind of self-protection. I

⁴⁷ <http://bit.ly/2t5romd> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁴⁸ Keren, 2014, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Grumberg, 2011, pp. 128 – 129.

⁵⁰ Shimony, 2013, p. 148; Kayyal, 2008, p. 45; Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 32.

always use the sentence of, “Please don’t shoot me, I can tell you a joke.” But it’s not only that. It doesn’t end there with please don’t shoot me, I want to tell you a joke. It’s more: “I will tell you a joke, and maybe it will make you laugh, and then I tell you another joke and maybe we can laugh together and you will listen to me, then maybe I can tell you a little bit of a sad story.”⁵¹

In 2014, amidst anti-Arab violence in Jerusalem following the kidnapping and murder of Jewish students in the West Bank and the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip, Kashua decided that his family needed to leave Israel.⁵² He has moved from the Middle East to the Midwest, to Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, with his wife and three children, but continues to publish his weekly columns for Haaretz.⁵³ He has accepted teaching position as a clinical professor in the Israeli Studies program at the University of Illinois and also teaches creative writing and Hebrew.⁵⁴

The four books Kashua has published to date – *Dancing Arabs* (Aravim Rokdim, 2002), *Let It Be Morning* (Va-yehi Boker, 2004), *Second Person Singular* (Guf Sheni Yahid, 2010), and *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life* (Ben Ha-aretz: Sefer Hatirim, 2015) – were all written in Hebrew and have been translated and published internationally.⁵⁵ Kashua’s writings have been praised by Israeli press and scholars, and he was awarded many prizes for his works, including the Prime Minister’s prize for Hebrew writers. He was, nevertheless, harshly criticizes in the Arab world.⁵⁶

Unlike the previously discussed Israeli-Arab authors, Atallah Mansour and Anton Shammas, who began their career by writing in Arabic and continued to do so even after adopting Hebrew, Sayed Kashua began his literary and journalistic career by writing in Hebrew and even publicly admits that he’s unable to write in Arabic. There are other few differences between Kashua and his predecessors: first, he is a Muslim; in addition, while the veteran Israeli-Arab writers could choose and shift between languages and identities, Kashua writes exclusively in Hebrew, thus expressing a more extreme stance when it comes to the identity rift experienced by Israeli Arabs. Another difference is the choice of genre. The first Arab authors writing in Hebrew whose works were autobiographical confessions also

⁵¹ <http://bit.ly/2tfBNKf> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁵² Before leaving Israel, Kashua was living with his family in Beit Safafa, a Palestinian neighborhood of Jerusalem, and later moved from the eastern to the western part of the city, to a Jewish neighbourhood. Kashua, 2014, p.5.

⁵³ <http://bit.ly/1CplZWU>; <http://bit.ly/1Khzlcf> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁵⁴ <http://bit.ly/2t5romd> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁵⁵ Kayyal, 2016, p. 149.

⁵⁶ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 32.

published poetry. Kashua too has started with an autobiographical novel, but his later works, especially *Second Person Singular* and *Let It Be Morning*, are written in a realistic style taken to an absurd extreme.⁵⁷

4.2. Literary Texts

Kashua's writing focuses primarily on issues of identity – his characters are in an ongoing and mostly futile search for identity. These characters are of Arab origin trying to integrate or to assimilate into the Western-Israeli culture, which however, rejects them on account of their background. Each of Kashua's novels is written in a different style, genre and form and the writing blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, autobiography and fiction, and even literary and journalistic writing.⁵⁸

Kashua's debut, *Dancing Arabs*, is a semi-autobiographical anthology of stories, describing the childhood and adolescence of the unnamed protagonist/writer who is conflicted between his Arab culture and Jewish culture that he aspires to belong to. In 2014, it was made into a movie adapted from his own screenplay. *Let It Be morning*, his second novel, published in the wake of the Second Intifada, is a dark apocalyptic and dystopian novel. It reflects the author's sense of the worsening situation of Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians within the majority Israeli-Jewish society. The autobiographical element in the book is the character of the narrator/protagonist, an Israeli-Arab journalist, whose status becomes increasingly unstable and is forced to move to his native Arab village. In his third book, *Second Person Singular*, Kashua revisits the identity crisis of Israeli-Arabs from a different angle, through two closely intertwined stories with two protagonists: the first is a lawyer from East Jerusalem who tries to integrate into a society that leaves him on the margins, and the second is a recently graduated young social worker from Tira, who starts working as a caregiver of a young Jewish man who is in a vegetative state, and eventually takes on his patient's identity.⁵⁹

Kashua's latest book, a personal journal, titled in English "Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life" is a collection of columns published in the supplement of the Haaretz newspaper between the years 2006 and 2014. In these columns, Kashua has provided an honest and personal perspective on various topics, including his children's upbringing, encounters with discrimination in Israeli society, fatherhood and married life, his professional

⁵⁷ Shimony, 2013, p. 150.

⁵⁸ Kayyal, 2016, pp. 149 – 150.

⁵⁹ Mendelson-Maoz and Steir-Livny, 2013, p. 82.

ambitions, love for literature, the Jewish-Palestinian conflict, Tira and Jerusalem, and his business trips around the world as an Arab writer writing in Hebrew.⁶⁰

In addition to his novelistic production, Kashua also produced short fictional stories that appeared in his weekly column in Haaretz. In his most prominent story *Herzl Disappears at Midnight* (Herzl Ne'elam Ba-ḥatsot, 2005)⁶¹ Kashua creates a fantastical realization of the metaphor of the Kafkaesque metamorphosis, when every night the Jewish protagonist, Herzl Ḥaliwa, turns into an Arab. The story moves its protagonist back and forth across ethnic lines to embody a non-Jew and a Jew, thereby posing the question what those boundaries separate.⁶²

4.2.1. Dancing Arabs

Dancing Arabs first appeared in 2002 and was published by Modan. It is a kind of autobiographical coming-of-age story, with clear parallels between Kashua's life story and the plot of the novel. The novel is told in the first person singular as the unnamed narrator/protagonist unfolds the story of his life from childhood, through the adolescence he spent studying at the Jewish boarding school in Jerusalem, including his marriage and return to the village of Tira with his wife and daughter.⁶³

The novel is divided into five chapters, each recording a segment of the narrator's life. The first two sections recount the narrator's childhood and early adolescence in the village of Tira, a homogenous Arab entity within the Israeli state. In one of her articles, Catherine Rottenberg⁶⁴ proposes that in the Arab villages inside of Israel, as opposed to the villages in the West Bank and Gaza strip, the children have been initiated to the society as Arab rather than Palestinian. In one of the scenes in the book, the children are asked in school by their teacher if they know what Palestine is:

Once, our history teacher in Tira asked if anyone in the class knew what Palestine was, and nobody did, including me. Then he asked contemptuously if any of us had ever seen a Palestinian, and Mohammed the Fatso, who was afraid of having his knuckles rapped, said he'd once been driving with his father in the dark and they'd seen two Palestinians. That day, the history teacher rapped every single one of us on the knuckles, launching his attack with Mohammed the Fatso. He whacked us with his ruler, ranting, "We are Palestinians, you are

⁶⁰ <http://bit.ly/2ufEc7S> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁶¹ <http://bit.ly/2ukvLKZ>. An English translation titled "Cinderella" subsequently appeared in the English edition of the newspaper: <http://bit.ly/2tOlqR> (last visited on 3 July 2017).

⁶² Sokoloff, 2010, p. 43.

⁶³ Kayyal, 2016, p. 151.

⁶⁴ Rottenberg, 2008a, pp. 102-103.

*Palestinians, I'm a Palestinian! You nincompoops, you animals, I'll teach you who you are!"*⁶⁵

The narrator's childhood is marked by his close relationship with his grandmother, whose stories and secrets she told, revealed the Palestinian narrative of love for the land, the struggle against the Zionist movement, and the Palestinian "Nakba".⁶⁶ In one of the stories, the grandmother puts him in charge of a key, the key to a blue suitcase that she keeps on the top shelf in a cupboard, and which, she says, should be opened only after her death. One afternoon, when the grandmother leaves the house, his curiosity leads him to open the suitcase, inside which he discovers some towels, a shroud to be used for her burial and also a few old newspaper clippings and faded pictures dating back to the late 1960s. From these, he later learns that his father was suspected of blowing up a cafeteria at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and was imprisoned for several years without a trial. This broke the grandmother's heart as she had high hopes that her son, who was by far the best student in class, would one day become a scientist. These unfulfilled expectations are also projected onto the family of the narrator that hoped he would become a rocket scientist or a pilot. While at Jewish boarding school, he realizes the impossibility of these parental expectations:

*Sometimes soldiers in uniform came to our school to talk with the students, and I wasn't allowed to take part. Our teacher always apologized. He was embarrassed to have to tell me it wasn't for me. In twelfth grade I understood I wouldn't be a pilot even if I wanted to be, not only because I wasn't fit and my grades weren't good enough. There was no way they would even call me up for the screening tests. I sure had a good laugh at my father.*⁶⁷

Despite the fact that, in the first two chapters, the narrator describes himself as an odd child who has not many friends in the village, he neither dis-identifies with being an Arab nor expresses any desires of becoming a Jew at this stage of his life. He is rather focusing on living up to the dominant norms prevailing in Tira. These norms being a strong, brave, and fearless Arab hero⁶⁸ or an alternative: a well-educated, assiduous, and successful man.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Kashua, 2004, p. 104.

⁶⁶ Kayyal, 2016, p. 151.

⁶⁷ Kashua, 2004, p. 117 – 118.

⁶⁸ Kashua, 2004, pp. 27 – 28.

⁶⁹ Rottenberg, 2008a, pp. 103 – 104.

The narrator's relations with his father, who wholeheartedly believes in communism and Arab nationalism, are precarious. At the onset of the third part of the book, titled "I Wanted to Be a Jew", the protagonist suddenly expresses his desire to become a Jew:

I look more Israeli than the average Israeli. I'm always pleased when Jews tell me this. "You don't look like an Arab at all," they say. Some people claim it's a racist thing to say, but I've always taken it as a compliment, a sign of success. That's what I've always wanted to be, after all: a Jew. I've worked hard at it, and I've finally pulled it off. There was one time when they picked up on the fact that I was an Arab and recognized me. So right after that I became an expert at assuming false identities.⁷⁰

This transformation occurs right after he transfers to the Jewish boarding school, where he experiences a few incidents, which have a profound impact on him and spur him to attempt to integrate into the Jewish society and to conceal his Arab identity:

That first week, I didn't know what to do with my tray in the dining room. I didn't know how to eat with a knife and fork. I didn't know the Jews put the gravy on top of their rice, instead of putting it in a separate bowl. I cried when my roommates found out I'd never heard of the Beatles and laughed at me. They laughed when I said bob music instead of pop music. They laughed when I threatened to complain to Principal Binhas—instead of Pinhas. "What did you say his name was?" they asked, and like an idiot I repeated it: "Binhas." They laughed at the pink sheets Mother had bought me specially.⁷¹

Two more distressing incidents happen on his first way back home from school on Rosh Hashanah holiday. He and Adel, another Arab student, take the bus toward the central bus station. On the way, the bus stops at the Polanski Vocational School, where a group of students get on and start to mock the two boys. The tense atmosphere along with ridicule and humiliation overwhelms the narrator, and he gets off the bus. The second incident happens the same day, when he travels in the intercity bus that goes from Jerusalem to Kfar Saba. The bus also stops at the Ben Gurion airport to drop and pick up the passengers. There is a roadblock

⁷⁰ Kashua, 2004, p. 91.

⁷¹ Idem, p. 92.

at the airport's entrance and the inspector orders the narrator and Adel to get off. The humiliation of being singled out in public causes a breakdown for the narrator:⁷²

*The soldier asked us to open our bags, and the bus went into the airport without us. The soldier searched through our books, our sheets, and our clothes and said we should wait for the bus to return and pick us up on the way out of the airport. I'm not getting back on that bus, I decided. I'm not willing to be stared at like I-don't-know-what. I've had it. I can't take this anymore. I'd survived the roommates, the dining room, and the Polanski kids, but this was the last straw. I cried like a baby. I broke down. Even the soldier felt uneasy. He said it was just routine. He brought me some water. "What's the matter?" he asked.*⁷³

The impact of these incidents is immense, the narrator is determined to pass as a Jew and successfully begins to emulate Jewish norms – he buys new pants in a Jewish store, wears a Walkman listening to Hebrew music, and carries a Hebrew book whenever he goes through the airport. His endeavors to approximate Jewish norms and to integrate into the majority society result in many emotional crises. The gravest of these crises being the breakup with Naomi, his Jewish girlfriend, at the end of his studies at boarding school, who succumbs to her mother's pressure:

*Last week, I put my head against her chest, and she ran her fingers through my hair and said, "We shouldn't get too attached, you know. Do you understand? We shouldn't. Enough. We're breaking up, and that's that. Otherwise, Mother will throw me out of the house." She told me her mother had said she'd rather have a lesbian for a daughter than one who hangs out with Arabs.*⁷⁴

The breakup with Naomi is one of the most traumatic consequences of the narrator's inability to fully integrate to the Jewish society. No matter how hard the protagonist tries to approximate Jewish norms, there are borders which the majority society will never let him cross.⁷⁵ This is poignantly expressed in the following excerpt:

⁷² Rottenberg, 2008a, pp. 105 – 106.

⁷³ Kashua, 2004, pp. 99 – 100.

⁷⁴ Idem, p. 124.

⁷⁵ Rottenberg, 2008a, pp. 107 – 108.

*My father says, Once an Arab, always an Arab. And he's got a point. He says the Jews can give you the feeling that you're one of them, and you can really like them and think they're the nicest people you've ever known, but sooner or later you realize you don't stand a chance. For them you'll always be an Arab... There are some things an Arab can never become (in Israel).*⁷⁶

After the protagonist recovers from the breakup with his Jewish girlfriend, he completes his studies at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and falls in love with Samia, an Arab girl from his native village, who is at the beginning of her academic studies. Following their sexual liaisons and her loss of virginity, they are subjected to social pressures, which are described ironically, and as a consequence they are forced to go through two marriage ceremonies.⁷⁷ The novel's last two chapters recount the protagonist's inability to mediate between his Arab identity and the Jewish identity that he strives to approximate. His attempts to conceal his Arab identity within the intolerant Jewish society and his dissatisfaction with the Arab society itself, its customs and problems bring about his mental breakdowns and anxieties. The narrator also admits discomfort with his wife inability to pass as a Jew in several places in the novel:

*The soldiers at the entrance to the village asked me to stop by the side of the road. Me they're stopping? The youngest Arab ever to learn to pronounce a p? I have almost no accent. You can't tell by looking at me. I've got sideburns and Coke-bottle sunglasses. Even the Arabs mistake me for a Jew. I even speak Hebrew with the housekeeping staff. It must be my wife, I think to myself. She's somewhat Arab. Sometimes, when we go to a shopping mall or places like that, I hope people will assume she's Moroccan or Iraqi, and that I'm a western Jew who likes eastern women.*⁷⁸

Kayyal in his study aptly observes that the novel's objective is to describe the divided world of the narrator, who is estranged from his native culture and seeks to integrate to the Jewish society, which ultimately rejects him. His familiarity with both cultures and societies allows him to scrutinize both of them like an outsider. The narrator thus directs his criticism towards both the Arab society, which he deems conservative and violent, and the Jewish society, which is arrogant, intolerant, and distrustful towards Arabs. He is stuck between the two

⁷⁶ Kashua, 2004, p. 106.

⁷⁷ Kayyal, 2008, p. 46.

⁷⁸ Kashua, 2004, p. 202.

societies, and while he seeks to find a common ground between them, he does not feel satisfied with either of them.⁷⁹

4.2.2. Let It Be Morning

Kashua's second, dark apocalyptic novel, *Let it be Morning*, begins in the aftermath of the second Intifada and the events of October 2000, in which thirteen Arab citizens were killed by Israeli police during the demonstrations. The book, like *Dancing Arabs*, engages with Israeli identity. The protagonist describes a strong sense of inability to participate and to find satisfaction in the Israeli society.⁸⁰ The novel is written, like Kashua's other novels, in the first person singular.

The nameless narrator, an Israeli-Arab who works as a journalist in a Hebrew newspaper, returns to his parent's house in the village in which he was born after ten-year absence. He goes back home because of the difficulty to live as an Arab in the Jewish society. The turning point in this regard is not just the expensive city life, but also the rising racial tensions following the events of October 2000:

*Ever since those days, something has been broken, something has died. Two days of demonstrations had been enough for the state to delegitimize its Arab population, to repudiate their citizenship. Two days that only served to stoke the Jewish fires of vindictiveness.*⁸¹

Those two days, he feels, have far reaching consequences on his life. His position in the Jewish newspaper has changed and his very presence in the office arouses suspicion and discomfort. Graffiti calling for the deportation of Arabs have proliferated over the country and the narrator becomes ever more concerned with the difficulty to find his place in society. As a journalist, he lost the privilege to criticize the Israeli government and his reports were scrutinized and edited beyond recognition:

Every sentence I wrote was inspected, every word double-checked. I got used to being summoned by the editor-in-chief and being required to provide an explanation for every piece of information I submitted.... Some of the journalists in the Hebrew press—non-Zionist left-wingers—allowed themselves to lash out against the occupation and against the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian inhabitants, but I no longer dared. The privilege of criticizing

⁷⁹ Kayyal, 2016, p. 152.

⁸⁰ Mendelson-Maoz, 2014, p. 60.

⁸¹ Kashua, 2006, p. 19.

*government policy was an exclusively Jewish prerogative. I was liable to be seen as a journalist calling for the annihilation of the Zionist state, a fifth column biting the hand that was feeding it and dreaming each night of destroying the Jewish people.*⁸²

The narrator imagines that the life will be better in his native village – a safer place where “everyone was like him” and a place where “Arabs didn’t have to hide.”⁸³ The journalist seeking refuge in his birthplace, however, feels like a stranger in his own home. He notes the changes in the village after his ten-year absence: for example, the villagers who are increasingly materialistic, the gangs and criminality abound, and there is also a revival of Islamic religiosity. The narrator’s wife, who is depicted as non-reflective, obedient Arab woman, also hates the village. Throughout the novel the narrator doesn’t bother to inform or include her in any of his decisions.⁸⁴

One day, shortly after the narrator returns, the novel takes a sharp turn, when without a warning and explanation, a police roadblock is set up at the entrance to the village and the Israeli military and tanks surround the village. No one is allowed to leave or enter and all forms of communication with the outside world are cut off. The novel then goes on to describe how the protagonist, his family, and the villagers in general cope with the blockade.⁸⁵ With the siege comes also a shortage of essentials – villagers stock up on food, there is looting and rioting, the power and water supplies are also cut off and eventually garbage starts to mount on the streets. The initial response of the villagers is one of disbelief, yet they don’t see the events “as a blatant breach of normal relations between citizens and their country.”⁸⁶ While the villagers are discussing the possible reasons for the blockade, the narrator remains calm and expresses his anger and revulsion at the Palestinian village and its social realities:

Things are bad in any case. For us, for the Palestinians, it doesn’t make any difference. We’ll always have wars in this godforsaken place. Take any six feet in this place and you’ll find too much damage, too much turmoil, too much chaos in every part of our lives, which means the wars will never end. The real wars in this village are the wars over honor, over power, over inheritances and over parking places. Actually I sometimes think it would be a good idea if

⁸² Kashua, 2006, p. 20.

⁸³ Idem, p. 21.

⁸⁴ Rottenberg, 2008b, pp. 139 – 140.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Kashua, 2006, p. 73.

*war did break out, to distract the inhabitants from their cruel and never-ending little fights. To me it doesn't matter anymore so long as they stay away from me, so long as nobody comes to me when the next disagreement breaks out.*⁸⁷

After some workers are shot trying to get across the roadblock, the high school students in the village organize a demonstration, burn the Israeli flag and call out slogans against the State of Israel and against the prime minister. The activists are later joined by other villagers from the Islamic movement, the Communists and the pan-Arabists. The mayor and his relatives are trying to keep the demonstrators from moving too close to the barbed-wire fence and eventually the demonstrators disperse. The main response to the siege is, however, decided at the meeting of village elders headed by the mayor, who presume that the blockade is caused by illegal workers from Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinians from the Occupied Territories, being treated here like a sub-human species, are rounded up and loaded into three buses and brought to the village gate. The villagers put planks across the barbed-wire so the workers can walk across. The first worker who climbs up holding a white flag is shot on the spot and drops to the ground. Mayor and his aides decide to try again “*convincing themselves that the soldiers had only shot because they thought one of the workers was hiding explosives under his clothing.*”⁸⁸ A nice interpretation of this and following scene is provided by Michael Keren, who observes that “*the confrontation between unequal powers in which perpetrators and victims are clearly defined, the author adds a third dimension to that divide.... The change (of the protagonist) from victim to journalist may be horrifying to the reader in light of the gravity of the situation, but it represents a refusal (by Kashua) to adhere to a shared narrative of victimhood....*”⁸⁹

*This new turn of events scares me at first, then makes me happy for a few minutes. I'll finally have a good story, I think.... A story like that even has a chance of being printed on the front page and, who knows, maybe it will lead to my being invited for a radio interview, like in the good days. I'm right on the spot, after all, in the heart of the story—a journalist and a resident of the besieged village. I might even get asked to appear on TV.*⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Kashua, 2006, p. 74.

⁸⁸ Idem, p. 158.

⁸⁹ Keren, 2014, p. 138.

⁹⁰ Kashua, 2006, p. 55.

At this point, Kashua, in contrast to the expectations advanced in popular culture that native minorities unite against their perceived perpetrators, provides a more nuanced perspective. While in the novel he articulates the increasing resentment toward the minority that he himself is a part of, and which many Jews see as a “fifth column”, he does not accept the return to the roots as a viable solution – the return to the village does not grant the protagonist peace and security and he hates himself for having thought that coming back would solve anything.⁹¹ The following excerpt Keren aptly describes as reflecting a post-modern approach to the national narratives dividing the Israeli society:

*My wife is a geography teacher, and they're still teaching the same material they taught twenty or thirty years ago. She writes the words on the blackboard—swamps, eucalyptus trees, malaria, diseases, mosquitoes, children dying, sand, desert. I doubt the children know who those *halutzim* were. I had never understood they were Jewish immigrants. It was never stated in so many words. I was convinced they were wise heroes that all of us ought to admire because they invented important things like netting for windows and doors, to keep out the poisonous mosquitoes which used to kill babies.⁹²*

Keren further remarks, that the text implies a possibility of the Zionist and Palestinian narratives merging and reconciling. In the modern world, the conflicting narratives can be expected to merge and reconcile, this is not, however, happening in Israel where the narratives of the past are devoutly adhered to by both Jews and Arabs. The novel attributes the adherence to the dichotomous notions, which makes it impossible for the Israeli-Arabs to feel a part of the Jewish state, not only to the Jewish extremists who daub the walls with anti-Arab graffiti, or to the organizers of the armed and violent demonstrations in the Arab village, but to the failure of Israelis in general to comprehend the complexity of the situation and therefore realize the carelessness of the ideas circulating in the Israeli public space. This is nicely articulated at the end of the novel when the Israeli military and tanks disappear and a historic peace treaty between Israel and Palestine is announced:⁹³

Jerusalem will be divided, the Old City will come under UN supervision, Jews will have access to the Western Wall. Most of the settlements will be dismantled and will be repopulated with Palestinian refugees returning from the camps in Lebanon and Syria. The

⁹¹ Keren, 2014, p. 139.

⁹² Kashua, 2006, pp. 82 – 83.

⁹³ Keren, 2014, pp. 139 – 140.

*large blocks of settlements will be permanently annexed to the State of Israel. In return, the Palestinian Authority has received Israeli lands in direct proportion to the size of the settlements.*⁹⁴

Following the announcement, the narrator is enthusiastic to the moment until he finds out that his village has been transferred to the newly established Palestinian territory. His lifelong quest for the identity is shut off. His entire being as a person who is devoted to searching a place in a society that he is part and parcel of in spite of barriers it creates is denied. The narrator, who like Kashua is an individual of multiple identities, has been subjected to a forced reality free to pursue his one-dimensional identity across the border.⁹⁵

4.2.3. Second Person Singular

As was discussed above, in his first two novels, *Dancing Arabs* and *Let it be Morning*, Kashua presents Israeli-Arab protagonists who are trying to emulate the hegemonic norms, such as language, dress, and cultural attitudes that they believe will help them succeed in Israeli society. *Second Person Singular*, Kashua's third novel, develops this theme and takes it to the extreme. It moves beyond these acts of mimicry, that may or may not lead to the successful "passing", and explores the complete metamorphosis of an Israeli-Arab. The novel describes two modes of Arab existence within the Jewish sphere. The first is the realistic mode of emulation, characteristic of Kashua's earlier works, whereas the second is a provocative, fantastical option, in which the Arab protagonist chooses to transform his identity into a Jewish one.⁹⁶

The novel weaves together the stories of two men, a lawyer, who remain nameless, and a young social worker, Amir, whose endeavours to pass in Israeli society explores the role of education in the process of assimilation. Despite the title of the book, one story is narrated in the third person and the other in the first person singular. Notwithstanding the fact that both protagonists have degrees from prestigious educational institutions, their academic knowledge does not compensate for gaps in cultural education. The attempts to overcome these shortcomings so as to pass within the majority society in which they exist, lead them to ardent attempts to educate themselves in the culture and customs of the world which they strive to belong to.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Kashua, 2006, p. 261.

⁹⁵ Keren, 2014, p. 140.

⁹⁶ Shimony, 2013, p.52; Harris, 2014, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Harris, 2014, pp. 50 – 51.

The first main character is a successful Arab lawyer, who lives with his wife and children in West Jerusalem. He is driven by a desire to avoid the fate he believes awaits him, because of his rural origins and by his attempts to become a part of the majority that will enable him to determine his own place in society. For him, becoming an Israeli is equal to adopting the material status symbols: a luxurious car, expensive clothes, food and fine wine.⁹⁸ To feel a part of the majority culture, the lawyer makes a considerable effort to read some of the works of western literature. One day, after purchasing Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" in a used bookstore, he accidentally finds a piece of paper with a cryptic note on it in his wife handwriting. The note, intended for another man, makes him suspect his wife of having an affair. Suddenly his cultural mask of a liberal man who scorns Arab codes of masculine honor is removed and his reaction is extreme and violent. In the following excerpt, Kashua mocks the refined image of the "new Arab", who deep beneath his western cultural façade still holds the conservative patriarchal attitudes which are identified with traditional Arab society:⁹⁹

The lawyer leaped out of his daughter's bed to kill his wife. He'd stab the bitch, cut her throat, gouge out her eyes, butcher her body. Or maybe he'd strangle her. He'd sit on her stomach, straddle her, pin her to the bed, and wrap his fingers around her throat, thumbs pushing deep into the flesh. He saw her writhing, gasping, her eyes popping out of her head, and saw himself staring at her, meeting her pleading and fear with furious derision. He'd throttle her while she tried to resist him, her fingers scratching at his arms as he clamped down on her windpipe, squeezing even harder, puncturing the skin of her neck, soaking his fingers with her blood, keeping up the pressure long after her body had gone slack.¹⁰⁰

The second variation of changing identity is far more daring and provocative. Amir, a young social worker from Jaljulia who has just graduated, ends up working as a caretaker for Yonatan Forschmidt, a young Jewish Israeli who attempted suicide and became completely paralyzed. During the long nights that Amir spends with Yonatan, caring for him, he studies and absorbs his identity – he acquires Yonatan's cultural taste in music and literature and his hobby of photography. What a complete absorption of Jewish identity offers is clearly outlined in one of Amir's monologues, in which he claims that, more than anything else,

⁹⁸ <http://bit.ly/2ukpA9V> (last visited on 7 July 2017).

⁹⁹ Shimony, 2013, p. 161.

¹⁰⁰ Kashua, 2012, p. 37.

Israelis are socially and intellectually liberated, while he, as an Arab, is trapped by his social culture, experiences of guilt and is barred from the free world available to Israeli-Jews:¹⁰¹

*Today I want to be like them. Today I want to be one of them, to go into the places they're allowed to go, to laugh the way they laugh, to drink without having to think about God. I want to be like them. Free, loose, full of dreams, able to think about love. Like them. Like those who started to fill the dance floor with the knowledge that it was theirs, they who felt no need to apologize for their existence, no need to hide their identity. Like them. Those who never looked for suspicious glances, whose loyalty was never questioned, whose acceptance was always taken for granted. Today I want to be like them without feeling like I'm committing a crime. I want to drink with them, dance with them, without feeling as though I'm trespassing in a foreign culture. To feel like I belong, without feeling guilty or disloyal.*¹⁰²

During the whole process of Amir's transformation, he is supported by Ruchale, Yonatan's mother – a liberal, educated, Ashkenazi mother who slowly adopts him as her own son. She helps him to gain education, first by borrowing Yonatan's books and later by helping him to assume her son's identity in order to study at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. Ultimately, she encourages him to switch the ID cards and after Yonatan's death to take on his identity completely. For Yonatan's mother, enabling Amir to take on her son's identity is part of her belief that national boundaries are inherently destructive:¹⁰³

*I gathered from our conversations that she had nothing but scorn for tradition, nationalism, religion, roots, roots trips, and sentences like "He who has no past, has no future." She believed that the Arabs did a bad job of impersonating the Zionists, who did a bad job of impersonating the European nationalists of the early twentieth century. Nor did she believe in identity, certainly not the local nationalistic version of it. She said that man was only smart if he was able to shed his identity.*¹⁰⁴

The more Amir becomes like Yonatan, the more his Arabness fades away, until he takes the final step, when Yonatan is buried in a Muslim cemetery with his Arab identity card, he officially becomes Yonatan by switching his identity with him at the Ministry of the Interior.

¹⁰¹ Harris, 2014, pp. 51 – 52.

¹⁰² Kashua, 2012, p. 189.

¹⁰³ Harris, 2014, p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Kashua, 2012, p. 180.

Having completely abandoned his Arab identity, Amir is engaged in the process of self-destruction just like Yonatan who attempted suicide – by becoming the Israeli, he has embarked on a journey of his own annihilation.¹⁰⁵

A short-lived friendship between the social worker and a woman that later becomes the lawyer's wife links the two stories. When the lawyer finds the note in "The Kreutzer Sonata" and discovers the connection between Amir and his wife, he is determined to find the social worker at any cost. First he searches for him on account of his obsessive jealousy, and later because he cannot bear the idea of his wife having had feelings for another man. When the lawyer finally meets with Amir, he has already become the artist Yonatan, who works continuously to maintain the process of erasure. At the end of the novel, the lawyer visits the Bezalel's year-end art exhibition (a series of images that erase ethnic boundaries) and comes to understand the mission that has become Amir/Yonatan's way of seeing Israel:¹⁰⁶

*They really are impressive, the lawyer thought, looking at the close-ups of the children, teens, women, and men. The lawyer, who was always proud of his ability to discern between Arab and Jew at a glance, had a hard time determining the ethnicity of these people.*¹⁰⁷

Similarly to his previous novels, Kashua provides here a sharp-witted guide to the simmering tensions of class, politics, and generation within the Israeli-Arab society, and between Arabs and the hostile majority. Yet whereas *Let it be Morning* describes an apocalyptic nightmare scenario of the Israeli state turning against its own Arab citizens, *Second Person Singular*, while not completely erasing that fear, proposes a more thoughtful assessment of the everyday nature of Arab and Jewish interactions. Much more than in previous works, Kashua examines life as a struggle against the destructive forces within the individual, while witnessing the destructive ethnic pressures and xenophobia in Israeli society. And the unsettling climax in which the lives of the two troubled men converge is the storytelling of the highest order.¹⁰⁸

4.3. Language, Reception, Literary Critique

For the first generations of Israeli-Arab writers, Hebrew was a foreign language, a symbol of the occupation they challenged. Kashua, the most eminent author of the younger generation of Israeli-Arabs, however, writes in Hebrew because it is the language in which he was raised; if not in his home, then certainly in educational institutions, media forms, and popular culture.

¹⁰⁵ Shimony, 2013, pp. 162 – 163.

¹⁰⁶ Harris, 2014, p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Kashua, 2012, p. 214.

¹⁰⁸ <http://bit.ly/2tDQHf5> (last visited on 8 July 2017).

While once Arab writers were multilingual, Kashua's generation is no longer comfortable writing in Arabic as Hebrew, therefore the implied dissidence of Arab writers using Hebrew, which was a powerful element for the previous generations of writers, is irrelevant for Kashua and his generation. As Kashua reminds us in one of his interviews, he lacks the mastery of written Arabic (*fusha*) that he has of Hebrew: "*To write in Arabic the way I speak it, in a Palestinian-Israeli dialect, just isn't possible,*" he says. "*Only literary Arabic is used for writing and I don't know it well enough. The Arab books that I read are in Hebrew translation.*"¹⁰⁹ Kashua thus moves beyond Shammas' un-Jewling of Hebrew, and instead experiences it as his only literary language.¹¹⁰ For him, Hebrew is not the language of the other/master, no more so than it is the language of Kashua and his protagonists – in his own words, it is the language of building bridges; it offers a way to be heard in Israel. For Kashua and his protagonists using Hebrew never simply means a movement from the self/the true identity and toward the assimilation into the culture of the other. Nor does Hebrew symbolize a domain for liberation. It functions as a means of coming to terms with the very idea of "the self" as a cultural product – one that is already prescribed from the outside by others. The new generation of Israeli-Arabs using Hebrew have undoubtedly developed their discourse from the focus on Palestinian and Arab nationalism that dominated the writing of previous generations. Kashua brings a new sense of identity to the Hebrew language he uses; he is not longer fighting or subverting the language as his predecessors had done, but instead inhabiting it from within.¹¹¹

Sayed Kashua's novels have received a great deal of critical and scholarly attention. Both critics and scholars stress their admiration of his language and style. With his best-selling novels, he has become one of the Israel's most celebrated writers today. Israeli-Jewish critics have for the most part praised Kashua's novels, albeit ignoring the works' sharp criticism of Israel's politics of exclusion. Astonishingly, some of these critics have even managed to read the novel *Let It Be Morning*, which presents one of the most bitter and sharp-witted attacks on Israeli ethno-separatism published thus far in Hebrew, as a work dedicated primarily to the criticism of the Arab society.¹¹²

Kashua's popularity as a Hebrew writer also raised accusations of his alleged betrayal of the "Palestinian cause." In his study, Michael Keren writes that Kashua, however, cannot be seen as betraying any such cause, since his works are characterized first and foremost by

¹⁰⁹ <http://bit.ly/2uoU6Ae> (last visited on 8 July 2017).

¹¹⁰ See footnote 40.

¹¹¹ Harris, 2014, pp. 42 – 43.

¹¹² Hochberg, 2010, p. 2.

blurring common narratives. That is the reason why the scholars trying to relate his works to specific narratives have mostly failed. For example, Adia Mendelson-Maoz and Liat Steir-Livny deal in their study titled “*The Jewish Works of Sayed Kashua – Subversive or Subordinate?*” with the difficulty to classify an Israeli-Arab who writes in Hebrew within the common categories of Hebrew/Palestinian. The difficulty is solved by placing Kashua in another fixed category, that of post-colonial writer whose Arab protagonists are trying to imitate and internalize the majority’s/colonists’ gaze either as a form of subordination or subversion.¹¹³ For them “*Writing in Hebrew clearly positions Kashua at a post-colonial juncture. To speak a certain language implies acceptance of a particular culture and reality... As part of the attempt to approach the majority, Kashua consciously chooses to play the post-colonial game, which features the adaptation of Jewish stereotypes and images.*”¹¹⁴ Keren instead remarks: “*The two scholars do not even consider the possibility that having been educated in a Hebrew-speaking environment, Hebrew has become the language Kashua feels comfortable to use and that his writings stem as much from literary inspiration and sharp-eyed observations of reality as from a conscious choice to play ‘the post-colonial game.’*”¹¹⁵

Generally speaking, the attitude of Arab critics to the works of Israeli-Arab writers who write in Hebrew has been influenced by their antagonistic and polemic discourse towards Israel, towards its culture, and its language. For these critics, writing in Hebrew is an act of servitude, treachery and denial of their rich cultural, literary and linguistic Arabic heritage, which is a central element of their national identity. Thus Kashua’s novels were mostly ignored by critics in the Arab world. Israeli-Arab critics, however, harshly criticized his critical attitude towards Arab society and culture and his contribution to strengthening the stereotypes of the Arab in Israeli society by internalizing the Israeli perspectives. Muḥammad Ghanayim, for instance, criticized Kashua in his reviews for the journal *Israeli scene*¹¹⁶, published by the Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies, saying that his works are ridiculing the Israeli-Arabs in Hebrew. Contrariwise, Ayman Sikseck, an Israeli-Arab author of *El Yafo* (a novel meditating on the condition of an Israeli-Arab student from Yaffa living in Jerusalem) notes in his review of Kashua’s *Second Person Singular* that “*the literary achievements of Kashua's third novel - on the narrative level and, more significantly, on the structural level - place "Second Person Singular" on a totally different plane than his previous works. With this book, Sayed Kashua has become one of the most important contemporary Hebrew writers.*”

¹¹³ Keren, 2014, p. 133.

¹¹⁴ Mendelson-Maoz and Steir-Livny, 2011, pp. 110 – 111.

¹¹⁵ Keren, 2014, pp. 133 – 134.

¹¹⁶ The journal is published in Arabic; see Kayyal, 2016, p. 154.

¹¹⁷ Kashua himself expressed disappointment with the antagonistic reactions of Arab world in general:¹¹⁸

"איך יכול להיות שכל הביקורות בעברית והביקורות בחו"ל כותבות שאני מאיר את סבלם של הערבים ופתאום בעיני הערבים אני האויב. אבל ככה זה כשלא רגילים. זאת חברה שלא כל כך רגילה להסתכל על עצמה."¹¹⁹

How can it be that all the reviews in Hebrew and reviews from abroad write that I elucidate the suffering of the Arabs, and suddenly in the eyes of the Arabs I am the enemy. But that's how it is in a society that isn't accustomed to looking at itself.

Apparently, the criticism levelled at the Arab society in Kashua's novels was seen by Arab critics as eroding the Palestinian narrative. The collective experience of Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians has become a nightmare that haunts the novel's protagonists/narrators, who try to shake off and/or conceal their Arab identity. However, as discussed earlier, the irony and sarcasm towards Israeli society that characterize the author's novelistic writing, point to the novels' high degree of cynicism towards both societies. The novels were therefore met with ambivalent criticism in Arab society, which on one hand harshly criticized them and on the other hand translated the works into Arabic¹²⁰ making it available to the broader readership.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ <http://bit.ly/2ukpA9V> (last visited on 16 July 2017).

¹¹⁸ Kayyal, 2016, pp. 133 – 155.

¹¹⁹ <http://bit.ly/2tkuAHT> (last visited on 11 July 2017).

¹²⁰ Unlike the Hebrew novels of Atallah Mansour and Anton Shammas, Kashua's first two novels, *Dancing Arabs* and *Let It Be Morning*, were translated into Arabic. The former was translated into Arabic from the Hebrew original in 2011, whereas the latter from its French version in 2012.

¹²¹ Kayyal, 2016, p. 155.

5. Conclusion

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, many Palestinian Arabs who found themselves within its boundaries experienced an identity crisis. Having become Israeli citizens, they were always torn between their national identity as Palestinians and their identity as citizens of a newly established Jewish state. Naturally, there are many national groups living as minorities within sovereign states, yet the situation in Israel has been especially difficult because of the continuous Israeli-Arab conflict and because Israel, while granting all of its citizens political rights, defines itself as a Jewish state, therefore excluding non-Jews from the narrative developed as part of the nation-building process. Israeli-Arabs are then faced with a complicated situation in which they are defining their identity as citizens of the state within circumstances encouraging their exclusion from it.¹²²

The thesis explored a creative attempt by novelist Sayed Kashua to breach the boundaries of the futile discourse held about the overall condition of Arab minority in Israel. Kashua's literary writings contain strong statements about vulnerability of the Israeli-Arabs, the wilfulness with which they are treated, and the failure of the Jewish state to create an all-inclusive community allowing both the Jewish majority and the Arab minority to thrive. However, this study shows that Kashua refrains from the politics of victimhood representing much of the intellectual discourse about the Israeli-Arab conflict, in which the world is divided into perpetrators and victims. Kashua's literary contribution lies in his refusal to adhere to dichotomous narratives in a postmodern world and view the predicament of Israeli-Arabs only from the perspective of the victim.¹²³

Additionally, the dichotomous narratives traditionally assumed that Arabs means Palestinian, and is separate from Israeli, which implies Jewish. Kashua, however, offers a new hybrid, multi-faceted identity in which the Israeli-Arab casts off the dichotomous options, and instead presents a different third path. Rejecting the isolated position of the Arab within the State of Israel, and arguing his increasing assimilation in the twenty-first century through mastery of the Hebrew language, the integration within the Israeli education system, and changing his social values and economic status, this new identity offers a way in which a generation of Arabs coming-of-age within Israel have created a cultural and intellectual space that confounds previous categorizations.¹²⁴

¹²² Keren, 2014, pp. 126 – 127.

¹²³ Idem, p. 142.

¹²⁴ Harris, 2014, p. 35.

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