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Supervisor: Håkan Bengtsson

Soaring over the dividing wall

Anne Svensson

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Abstract

In this paper I present my research of alternatives to war in Young Adult (YA) literature regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I believe that literature that render a non-stereotypical image of ‘the other’ can help tear down separating walls between conflicting parties, by conveying a more true, real and human image of ‘the other’. I argue therefore that a multi-dimensional character rendering of ‘the other’ can lead to increased understanding and dialogue between conflicting parties, which I regard as a step towards peace.

The character rendering is a clear indicator of how the author views ‘the other’ and how the author presents the conflict to the reader. The younger the reader is, the more readily he or she is to assimilate stereotypical images. That aspect shows how essential it’s to nourish good literature for young people.

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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is perhaps mostly known for the First Intifada [1987-1993] and the Second Intifada [2000-2005] since these periods have been thoroughly covered in media. However, I think it's important to remember that the prevailing conflict goes back a long time and entails so much more than disputes over land territories.

I believe the conflict is waged at the core of people's identity and is intimately associated with the recognition of their respective narratives. Both Jews and Muslims have a long tradition of religious texts, to which they have a close liaison. That can both forge a reciprocal understanding of 'the other', as well as it can fortify deeply rooted antagonism. Thus, I will also be interested in researching if there appear any religious themes connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the YA novels of my choice.

It was important for me to select books that I think many young readers can identify with and that reflect diversity of perspectives. I have therefore selected six YA novels of Israeli, Palestinian and American authors that I think together portray the many facets of the conflict; *Tasting the sky: A Palestinian Childhood* [2007], Ibtisam Barakat, *A stone in my hand* [2002], Cathryn Clinton, *Samir & Yonatan* [1994], Daniella Carmi, *Habibi* [1997], Naomi Shihab Nye, *Dancing Arabs* [2002], Sayed Kashua and *The people of forever are not afraid* [2012], Shani Boianjiu.

In order to further emphasize the importance of good literature for young readers, I find it here fitting to echo author Ann Lazim's question: 'What books exist to help young people make sense of the situation and where can they find literature which portrays [characters] in a non stereotypical way?'¹ Late Middle East expert and author Elsa Marston likewise expressed a similar concern: 'I hope young readers in the Arab world (and elsewhere, of course) will increasingly find good stories that say something true about their lives – and at the same time, widen their own horizons. Indeed, someday these young readers may become the writers who guide future generations.'²

I presume that Marston's aspiration was concerned with all young reader's equal access to increased understanding of other cultures, lives and situations – which foster the ability to imagine oneself in another person's place.

¹ <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/133/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/the-depiction-of-arabs-in-childrens-literature> [20190519].

² <http://www.arabchildrensliterature.com/resources/arab-world-childrens-books-finding-palestine> [20190519].

Thus, I hope that my research will contribute to a greater understanding of YA literature about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that my findings will help distinguish peace-promoting literature from wall-separating literature for young readers.

Methodology

To deduce how the conflict is rendered in YA literature I undertake a (qualitative) comparative research of the YA novels of my choice regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, I will pay attention to how the conflict is focalised through the protagonist's perspective and how 'the other' is rendered in comparison to the protagonist. As a frame for my analysis of the YA novels I utilize Pro. Maria Nikolajeva's definition of flat and round characters.

To clarify what I mean by 'the other' I like to refer to the psychologist and peace researcher Dan Bar-On's definition of the term. He writes as follows in *The others within us* that the 'collective identity formation, defining the collective self in opposition to the Other, can be characterized in "day and night" terms.'³ Which, I understand as an incompatible polarization of good and evil as can be seen in following citation of Bar-On:

[In the] Israeli society, the self was mobilized in an existential struggle against those Others. Thus collective Israeli identity construction was mobilized monolithically against the threat of internal Jewish and external gentile Others. The multiplicity of Others reinforced monolithic construction of Zionist hegemonic identity as an "absolute good" in opposition to the "total evil" [...].⁴

That indicates that the collective self has a very limited ability to identify with that, which is perceived as foreign and that represents 'the other'. However, this black and white collective identity construction which Bar-On calls monolithic or neo-monolithic construction of self, can be dissolved as is here recounted:

Awareness creates an opportunity for a deeper and more open dialogue. Instead of a well-bounded and defined Other and self, embodying absolute evil and good, a complex world picture develops that contains conflicting aspects of the identity (in both the collective self and the Other). Though these conflicting aspects are not easily reconciled [...] – a slowly ripening acknowledgment of their

³ Dan Bar-On, *The Others Within Us*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 14.

⁴ Ibid, p. 9.

mutual existence may lead to the beginning of a dialogue to replace the endless power struggles.⁵

Molly Andrews, Professor of Political Psychology, indicates that the stories we believe about ourselves become who we are, 'and separating the world population into "us" and "them".'⁶ She furthermore points to how intertwined identity construction is with the narrative, which is an on-going process of being shaped through the combined processes of being and becoming.⁷

As it's understood that the author's characterization of 'the other' represents each nation's definition of self and of 'the other', I think it's important to study if the YA narratives render a fair and just understanding of 'the other', or if the stories solely consolidate a stereotypical image that obstruct acknowledgement of 'the other'.

Thus, my first and central focus will be on how the protagonists and 'the others' are rendered in the YA literature of my choice. Consequently, I need to analyse some narrative features which is as follows: How is the characters rendered? Are they so-called flat or round? Are the characters authentic?

Secondly, since the narratives are located in a Middle Eastern context, my interest is to highlight the character rendering in relation to religion and history: are there any renderings that are common for a certain period, e.g. in respect to events such as the First and Second Intifada?

Lastly, since both the conflict and literature are intertwined it's assumed that some books promote a colonization of Palestinians characters; is it possible to detect any reaction to that in Palestinian literature, i.e. a kind of 'the empire writes back' response? Are these Palestinian 'responses' as stereotypical?

Andrews submits moreover that time is a central aspect of narrative research since the narrative is hardwired to change over time, and offers therefore new meaning when interpreted at a later time in a new or different framework.⁸ Corresponding to that thought I will compare larger themes in the YA books such as the First Intifada and the Second Intifada. I think that approach can yield a valid comprehension of how the conflict is rendered in the YA literature and if and how it has changed over time.

According to Andrews are: 'Stories [...] never told in a vacuum, and nor do we as

⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

⁶ Molly Andrews, *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

researchers simply tabulate information which we gather. Rather, we feed into the process at every level [...].⁹ Thus, I regard my comparative analysis as a creative process, in the sense that I lean on my own response to the texts for clarification and deduction of meaning.

However, I also withdraw meaning from other literary sources for further understanding of the novels. Thus, I have for example selected Amos Oz's *A tale of love and darkness* and Sari Nusseibeh's *Once upon a country: A Palestinian life*, since the authors, from their different perspective, encapsulate the religious and historic moments in Israel and Palestine during a very cataclysmic time.

YA literature is a rather new phenomenon in both Israel and Palestine and has developed essential thematic differences along with the historic events that have played out in the Middle Eastern region. Accordingly, I think it's necessary to invest in the historic background of the conflict to fully absorb the YA literature. The result of my historic study is presented in '2. Background – An overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' and is followed with a section with the Pro. Rashid Khalidi's perspective on the conflict, which I think adds another dimension to the complex nature of the conflict.

I furthermore refer to a variety of resources published online, such as articles and research on topics that are related to the subject of this paper. However, I haven't been able to find any research that combines Israeli and Palestinian characterization in children's literature, akin to what I aim to present in this paper.

⁹ Ibid, p. 3.

PART I

1. Background – Multicultural/global narratives

1.1. The I among others

I like to emphasize some relevant aspects that are salient in the discussion about multicultural and global children's literature. But, before doing that I like to clarify a few things. Firstly, when using the term 'YA literature' I refer to books that are published and marketed for a readership between 12-18 years. However, the age span doesn't represent the actual readership, since it consists of a large group of adult readers,¹⁰ even if children and adults in many respects belong to different worlds. The YA literature falls into the category of children's literature and I will interchangeably use the term 'YA literature' and 'children's literature' when referring to YA literature. However, 'children's literature' can designate many genres such as illustrated chapter books and picture books, and I will specify if that is my intention.

Secondly, I like to take some time to explain what I mean with a stereotypical, flat or round character rendering. With a stereotypical rendering I denote a flat or one-dimensional character trait that becomes representative for a group of people.¹¹ A flat character isn't fully developed in the story and designates a character that often displays only one attribute and can even occur as void of personality which makes them highly predictable.

A round character is multi-dimensional and consists of many attributes, which often displays a level of complexity. Thus the character rendering denotes a wholly human rendering,¹² and is therefore less predictable. A static character rendering denotes a character, which doesn't evolve, develop or change in the course of the narrative in contrast to a dynamic character that evolves.¹³ A round character often undergoes some kind of change in the course of the story. However, there are round characters that remain the same throughout the story i.e. they are static.

A stereotypical rendering can be conveyed through a hegemonic value system; meaning,

¹⁰ Lena Kåreland, *Barnboken i Samhället*, 2:3 ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2014, p. 14.

¹¹ Maria Nikolajeva, *Børnebogens Byggeklodser*. Copenhagen: Høst & søn, 2001, p. 67.

¹² Ibid, p. 68.

¹³ Ibid, p. 66.

one culture sees itself as being superior to another. The culture that perceives itself as more evolved, desire to rule over what is understood as less culturally evolved, i.e. ‘the other’ which for different reasons accepts the ruling culture.

In the West children’s literature has changed drastically - from having been regarded as an educational and a didactic tool until the mid 1900’s to something that the young reader can savour for pleasure alone. However, it isn’t only the reader’s relation to literature that has changed, but the way literature is read on a variety of media platforms in an increasingly mediated, digitalized and globalized society.

Thus, the reading experience can be related to a multimodal context, i.e. text, sound and picture combined convey meaning.¹⁴ I believe that this cross-medial context has a lot of advantages in terms of cultural exchange and learning, however it comes with a lot of challenges in terms of both shielding a sense of core identity and embracing a multicultural or global perspective.

One of the main principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the child, ratified by the United Nations in 1990, is children’s right to education and direct access to information.¹⁵ Thus, every child ought to have access to ‘good literature’.¹⁶ Similarly, all people ought to have access to reliable news sources that doesn’t negotiate with veracity.

However, the media often convey a distorted and stereotypical image of a person or ethnic group, which causes a discrepancy between the conveyed image and the real person or people that it represents. Not only do a lot of media sources present a biased view of reality, but are conduits of an increase of ‘fake news’, which is now regarded as one of the most serious threats to democracy.¹⁷ Norman Mailer, who coined the word ‘factoid’ already in 1973, described it as: ‘[F]acts which have no existence before appearing in a magazine or newspaper, [and are] creations which are not so much lies as a product to manipulate emotion in the Silent Majority.’¹⁸

Consequently, all social spheres are affected by distorted representations of reality, with no exception for children’s literature. I surmise that distorted media narratives reinforce stereotypical character renderings of ‘the other’ in children’s literature, which often is moulded on an already bias understanding of reality.

¹⁴ Kåreland, p. 12.

¹⁵ <http://www.ibby.org/about/what-is-ibby/> [20190519].

¹⁶ Kåreland, p. 83.

¹⁷ <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/turned-upside-down-fake-news-and-the-future-of-the-media/> [20190519].

¹⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/factoid> [20190519].

It can therefore be challenging to relate to multiculturalism with an open attitude when so much of our information conduits enhance the danger of the 'foreign'. However, according to philosopher Julia Kristeva one can overcome fear of the foreign, by recognizing that we're all foreign in a multifaceted and fragmented world. When we recognize the fragmented state of our being – we understand that we carry the alienated or 'the other' within ourselves. Thus, there is no longer a reason to fear an external foreign threat or an enemy.¹⁹

Although, Kristeva points to the liberation from fear of 'the other' by embracing the foreign, she is not presenting a response to the increase of horrific violence in the world, which can't be embraced or equated with most people's values.

Bar-On states that in moments of crises can a counter reaction occur: 'The old fear of the external Other who could not be trusted was awakened; apparently this Other was, after all, just waiting for the right moment to annihilate the Jews.'²⁰ A crisis can therefore trigger a tendency among children (and others) to tie strong bonds to their own traditional culture or religion, which correlates with Bar-On's statement that people then express a need to 'seek an anchor, support or authority'.²¹ This can perhaps furthermore lead to a need to defend the local, and which can transcend into religious extremism.

A multicultural or global context can furthermore contribute to an increased sense of rootlessness or loss of core identity. The challenge remains therefore: how to retain traditional core values and yet redefine what is acceptable within the social sphere? It can involve a lot of risk for a child or adolescent to accept worldviews that are regarded as diverting narratives by their community and as a result, positioning them in a loyalty dilemma. Hence, a lot of support is needed for bridge construction between different social or cultural spheres.

1.2. A struggle for a multicultural discourse

According to political theorists Laclau and Mouffe, there is an on-going struggle between different understandings of the social world, in order to gain dominance of one particular worldview - be it political, religious, and financial or any other social area.²² In that sense all

¹⁹ Kåreland, p. 144.

²⁰ Bar-On, p. 10.

²¹ Ibid, p. 4.

²² Marianne Jørgensen and Louise J. Philips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: SAGE Publication, 2002, p. 24.

information is framed within a construct that can be deconstructed by recognizing the reality that upholds that particular discourse.

However, I recognize that pioneering initiatives for multicultural and global children's literature; in classrooms, libraries and other projects related to literature, don't just struggle for one specific worldview to frame children's experience, but for many.

The mirror, window and door are often used as metaphors for multicultural and global children's literature as it captivates the core value of the literature, which is to facilitate understanding of self in relation to the disparity of the world. Thus, the mirror reflects a truthful image of the self; the window signifies the access to other children's reality and the door the welcoming exchange with others.²³

Lena Kåreland, Professor in children's literature, indicates that children's literature in general is international literature, and much more so than literature for adults.²⁴ The Prof. Paul Hazard the late express a similar perception, in that children's literature can cross national and linguistic boundaries and give access to a common fantasy realm or what he designates a universal republic for all children.²⁵

The critical theorist Homi Bhabha states moreover that when the familiar culture meets with the foreign or unknown culture, there emerges a gap; a kind of a no man's land, a place that doesn't belong to either culture. Bhabha coined the idea the 'the third space',²⁶ which can be correlated to Hazard's chasm between adults and children.

However, Hazard's understanding of children's literature as a universal republic can perhaps be viewed as utopian, but if one recognizes that children's literature can reach across boundaries and function as a guide in an unfamiliar territory or 'third space' it may not be that farfetched.²⁷

Hazard's well-known poem captures that separating chasm between the children and the adults in the chapter 'Men has always oppressed children' in *Books, children and men*. [1947] An excerpt from the poetic exchange goes as follows:

'Give us books' say the children; 'give us wings'. You who are powerful and strong, help us to escape into the faraway. Build us azure palaces in the midst of enchanted gardens [...].

²³ Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature – Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Preface, Chapter 1.

²⁴ Kåreland, p. 148.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 145.

²⁷ Ibid.

We are willing to learn everything, [...] but please, let us keep our dreams.’²⁸ The adults respond as follows: ‘Our children know how to read and are growing up,’ say the adults; ‘they are asking us for books. We’d better take advantage of their wishes and their curiosity. Let’s pretend to build the castles they are so crazy about, but build them with our own superior wisdom [...].’²⁹

Cited paragraphs reflect a spiritual and intellectual exploitation of children and can be likened to a type of adult colonization of the child. However, there is much contemporary literature for young readers, today that recognizes and celebrates the child as a bridge builder and an ambassador to children in other parts of the world.

The late librarian Jella Lepman constitutes a great example of an advocator for bridge building through children’s literature. She founded the International Youth Library IYL in München in the aftermath of World War II, as she believed that one has to begin with the children in order to rebuild the world.³⁰ Lepman’s faith in the potential of children’s literature was great, as she viewed it as a healing agent for wounds caused by the war. She furthermore thought it was possible to prevent an outbreak of another war if children got acquainted with other children from different parts of the world through literature.³¹

The aftermath of the war was in fact a time when the children’s book was reinvented in Sweden,³² which birthed new stories about ‘the brave and free child’ – amongst these counts the late Astrid Lindgren’s books about the independent character ‘Pippi Långstrump’ or ‘Pippi Longstocking’ [1945]. The books about Pippi caused quite a commotion among readers that were disturbed by the girl’s audacity.³³ However, Pippi gradually became the beloved symbol of the new free child that fought for the good, as we know. The Pippi books have been translated into more than 75 languages,³⁴ and the character can therefore be regarded as a pioneer in transnational bridge building. I think this exemplifies that the function of the children’s book transcends an isolated reading experience in time and space, as it continuously opens windows and doors to children elsewhere.

Lepman founded moreover the International Board on Books for Young People, IBBY, in 1953, which is an organization that consists of over 70 member nations. Their aim is to

²⁸ Paul Hazard, *Books, Children and Men*. Boston: The Horn Book, 1947, p. 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kåreland, p. 149.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p. 58.

³³ <https://www.barnensbokklubb.se/reportage/cat/lasutveckling/post/fran-anglalika-smattningar-till-fria-busungar/> [20190519].

³⁴ <https://www.astridlindgren.com/en/characters/pippi-longstocking> [20190519].

promote good children's literature, that tell the truth about children's lives. IBBY's work is established on the conviction that all children have the right to read and to have access to books according to UN's stipulation. However, children should not only learn how to read, but to: '[...] think critically, participate actively in society, resist demagoguery, understand the world, know him or herself, and know others.'³⁵

The IBBY Children in Crisis Fund provide furthermore 'support for children whose lives have been disrupted through war, civil disorder or natural disaster',³⁶ and supports the therapeutic use of books and storytelling – 'bibliotherapy'. Both Israel and Palestine are represented members of the organization and IBBY has supported the children's libraries in The Gaza Strip since 2008.³⁷ The libraries were sadly destroyed by Israeli bombs in 2014 and have been replaced with a temporary library.³⁸

I think that IBBY'S work clearly demonstrates that through combined efforts, it's possible to empower, liberate, and restore children through literature, and that literature projects aren't isolated units, but exists within a social-political context that is global, national, and local – e.g. they interact with local schools and libraries and other social platforms far beyond the daily environment.³⁹

IBBY's work is moreover interlinked with efforts to publish books in diverse countries. That is of great importance because books written by native authors can render a more genuine perspective of people's realities. However, this prospect is severely hampered by huge international conglomerates that control the market for children's literature; i.e. the United States, Britain, France and Spain. This causes an unfair distribution of children's literature and especially of children's literature that isn't regarded as 'profitable' for an e.g. American readership.⁴⁰

Perhaps authors and distributors of children's and youth literature would serve the need of children better, if they kept Harzard's poem in mind. I believe that children's wellbeing ought to be the first priority, not the economical profit made from book sales. However, the interest in multicultural literature has yielded children's books that render minority children and youth in a more favourable way.

³⁵ <http://www.ibby.org/about/what-is-ibby/ibby-in-the-21st-century/> [20190519].

³⁶ <http://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/activities/ibby-children-in-crisis-fund/> [20190519].

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ <http://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/activities/ibby-children-in-crisis-fund/ibby-children-in-crisis/ibby-gaza-libraries/newspaper-article-may-2017/> [20190603].

³⁹ Botelho and Rudman, Foreword.

⁴⁰ <http://www.ibby.org/about/what-is-ibby/ibby-in-the-21st-century/> [20190519].

1.3. Recognition & reconciliation

Although there's an increase of multicultural children's literature, there still remain many stories that haven't yet been told. Since, it's assumed that literature is intertwined with history, we see that the winners of war throughout time have sought to conceal 'the others' narrative. I believe that as long as truthful accounts are concealed there's little ground for dialogue.

The Israeli and respective Palestine authors Amos Oz and Sari Nusseibeh, Professor in Philosophy, agree that recognizing culpability of wrongful actions is paramount for a healing and reconciliation process to begin.⁴¹ However, it isn't sufficient to solely recognize culpability – people's diverse stories must be recognized.

Molly Andrews problematizes the connection between healing and storytelling in *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change* [2007] in a chapter devoted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa. Although Andrews points to the healing potential of storytelling for individuals, she also addresses the complexities thereof.

Andrews submits for instance that it may not be the actual act of people telling their story about their experienced sufferings, but rather the experience of having their story recognized by the state, the national, and international community that is healing.⁴² Although, the TRC at times demonstrated a severe shortage of moral, by not being a wholly democratic agent serving the cause of the victimized population,⁴³ it nevertheless created a forum for many witnesses to recount their story.

In a similar way children's literature can play a vital part in constructing a moral truth about wrongdoing and injustice. Sharing each other's stories can moreover help us realize that our individual experience reflects other people's basic needs,⁴⁴ which I think is an important aspect in a healing process. Bar-On states furthermore that '[...] once one issue has been acknowledged, symbolic acts and reactivation of the past in artistic, educational or literary form can try to enable the younger generation to access their repressed feelings and work

⁴¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/02/opinion/global/02iht-GA05nusseibeh.html> [20190519].

⁴² Andrews, p. 161.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. X.

through'.⁴⁵

It's moreover understood that by Andrews that suffering unites more than joy,⁴⁶ and a suffering nation needs more acutely to mobilize its people in a unifying story in order to heal as a nation.⁴⁷ However, I think it's a true sign of restoration when there is room for diverging narratives and an appreciation thereof. However, I think it's important to note that healing and reconciliation on a national level takes time.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Bar-On, p. 197

⁴⁶ Andrews, p. 76.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 162.

2. Background: **An overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is according to Palestinian-American author Ibtisam Barakat, one of the most difficult contemporary conflicts to resolve ‘because both peoples, from inside their contexts, have justifiably strong attachments to the Holy Land.’⁴⁹ In very simplistic terms the struggle can be explained to evolve around ‘[...] two peoples, both of whom have suffered difficult histories’, and whom are unable ‘[...] to find a common ground that would allow both sides to understand and accept each other’s history and to become partners in achieving their similar goals of living in freedom and peace’.

However, Barakat points out that it’s not just a conflict between two belligerents, but it’s in the highest degree an international conflict. The conflict is intensified by ‘[...] religious and ethnic rivalries as well as a variety of economic and military interests’.⁵⁰ The prospect to find a conflict resolution is even more hampered due to the international society’s preferred support of one side over the other.⁵¹

Since the conflict involves so many different actors, there are likewise many opinions regarding it. The American writer and activist Phyllis Bennis conveys, for instance, a very simplified view of the complex conflict in *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict* [2007] by taking what I perceive an entirely pro-Palestine stance. I suggest that the Palestinian cause can be supported without seemingly deliberately leaving out facts. Bennis states, for instance, that the terrorist attacks will cease if only Israel ends the Palestinian occupation.⁵²

The Israeli writer Orly Castel-Bloom refutes such view as a naïve and simplified approach of European origin.⁵³ Castel-Bloom is furthermore included in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works⁵⁴ and addresses the Palestinian suicide bombings during the Second Intifada in her novel *Human parts* [2002].⁵⁵ Her view is supported by, for instance, the Greece born Litsa Boudalika, author of *If you could be my friend: letters of Mervet Akram Sha’ban*

⁴⁹ Barakat, X.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Phyllis Bennis, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007, p. 180.

⁵³ Runo Isaksen, *Litteratur i krig: møter med israelske og palestinske forfattere*. Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 2005, p. 96.

⁵⁴ http://www.ithl.org.il/page_13310 [20190603].

⁵⁵ http://www.ithl.org.il/page_13872 [20190603].

and Galit Fink [1998] who states that Palestinian extremists have no intention of giving up terrorism that easily.⁵⁶

There are many wars and world events that have led to the present situation in Israel and Palestine today. That includes the World War I and the European colonization of the Middle East, World War II, the Holocaust and the urgent need for Jews to return to what they designate their rightful home in Eretz Yisrael - the Land of Israel.⁵⁷ It's interesting to note that the Zionist idea is rooted in how the Jews have defined themselves in regard to the land for thousands of years.⁵⁸

However, in year 135 CE the Romans forbid the Jews to remain in Judea,⁵⁹ which caused them to migrate in large numbers and form diaspora communities in countries elsewhere e.g. in Europe. Although exiled from the land they remained faithful to it since it was regarded as their God given territory that they hoped to return to by divine intervention,⁶⁰ which they indeed did in 1948 – the year in which the State of Israel was created.

After the migration of Jews the land was for the most part populated by Palestinian Arabs. However, smaller groups of Jews returned to Palestine already in 1880's, and started to cultivate the barren and desolate land that flourished in their custody. That attracted people of other nationalities to join them, which included Arabs.⁶¹

Sari Nusseibeh points furthermore out that: 'Around the end of the nineteenth century, most of the Jews in [Jerusalem] were either East European ultrareligious [Chassidic] Jews or Arabic speakers who had lived with the Arabs for centuries and felt themselves to be a part of Arab culture, language, and life.'⁶²

In 1947 the UN voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states with international status for Jerusalem - without Arab consensus.⁶³ That was the beginning of Israel's war of independence and the Palestinian Nakba or catastrophe.⁶⁴ The British left the scene and as the Middle East journalist Ian Black concludes: 'The two peoples of Palestine were [...] left to

⁵⁶ Litsa Boudalika, *If You Could Be My Friend: Letters of Mervet Akram Sha'ban and Galit Fink*. New York: Orchard Books, 1998, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Barakat, 'Historical Note'.

⁵⁸ David Engel, *Zionism*. London: Longman, 2009, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

⁶¹ <https://www.bible-knowledge.com/israel-and-palestinians/> [20190519].

⁶² Sari Nusseibeh, *Once Upon a Country – A Palestinian Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. 23.

⁶³ Ian Black, *Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel 1917 – 2017*. London: Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 107-108.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* p. 105.

fight it out.⁶⁵ Thus, unspeakable atrocities occurred including mass-killings and mass-expulsions of Palestinians.⁶⁶

However, both sides underwent great crises and many Jews were killed in, for instance, bus-bombings. The Holocaust was still very real for the Jews,⁶⁷ and served most likely as a strong motivation to win the war – which they did. However, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem fell under Arab administration.⁶⁸

In 1967 the Six-Day War erupted when Israel was attacked by the surrounding Arab nations i.e. Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The war ended to Israeli advantage, and led to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories counting; the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.⁶⁹

Euphoric celebration ensued after the Israeli victory - a mood Black describes as nearly Messianic.⁷⁰ The unlikely victory drew moreover international accolades as well as some criticism;⁷¹ the anti-sniper walls were removed and East and West Jerusalem was unified again since the end of the war 1948.⁷² However, the Palestinians hadn't been involved in the fighting this time, yet many got their homes bulldozed to destruction.⁷³

Almost all the YA books I have read are set in the First Intifada 1987-1993 and the Second Intifada 2000-2005. However, they're for the most part set in the First Intifada, which was a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza with the aim to reach self-governance. The nature of the uprising was peaceful from the beginning and compromised according to Martin Bunton 'all strata of the Palestinian society'.⁷⁴ Grass-root initiatives were encouraged as well as engaging in acts of civil disobedience, which included boycotts of Israeli goods and services,⁷⁵ protests, burning tires and throwing stones, which were activities designated to children.⁷⁶ According to Black were these children referred to as 'children of stones', which he states was 'a neat reversal of the traditional "David versus

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 109.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 128.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 123.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 130.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 180-181.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 180.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 181.

⁷² Ibid, p. 183.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Martin Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 88.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Black, p. 280.

Goliath” image [...]’⁷⁷ in the Hebrew Bible.

Many students were involved in organizing the resistance by disseminating information, which mostly consisted of circulating leaflets. The high casualty among Palestinians, soon led to a more violent strategy which divided Fatah into two segments; one that still worked for a peaceful resolution through dialogue with Israel and another that agitated for a violent approach in favour of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement.⁷⁸ Hence, their religious resistance agenda consisted of opposing PLO’s acceptance to negotiate a two-state solution with Israel and on the contrary push for the destruction of Israel.⁷⁹

The Oslo Accords were secret meetings that took place in Oslo, 1993 and resulted in PLO’s and Israel’s mutual recognition of each other as viable negotiation partners.⁸⁰ The peace process aimed at building trust between the parties and to provide a political space for future negotiations regarding the most problematic questions, which correlated to; Palestinian self-determination, the demographic issues of Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlers, and the definition of East Jerusalem.⁸¹ However, the parties never arrived at consensus on these issues and the efforts ended with the failed summit at Camp David in the year 2000.⁸²

The Second Intifada or the Al-aqsa Intifada erupted in 2000 and was ignited by Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit at the al-Aqsa mosque, accompanied with a large Israeli police force counting hundreds. The mosque is situated at what Jews designate the Temple Mount, on top of the ruins of the Jewish First and Second temples.⁸³ Thus, it’s a holy place for both Jews and Muslims.

The instant riots were fuelled by the growing frustration among the Palestinians due to the failed peace talks at Camp David. The conflict rapidly intensified, and soon ensued Palestinian suicide bombings, which was employed by Hamas to target Israeli civilians.⁸⁴ To counteract Israel deployed helicopters and fighter jets and inserted tanks among Palestinians civilians ‘which brought about tremendous human suffering’.⁸⁵ Bunton states furthermore that: By summer of 2003 some 2,400 Palestinians and 800 Israelis had lost their lives, with

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Nusseibeh, p. 269.

⁷⁹ Bunton, 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 90-91.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 91.

⁸² Ibid, p. 96.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 98.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 99.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 100.

thousands more wounded.’⁸⁶

The separation wall was built during the Second Intifada, which the Israelis argued was necessary for protection against Palestinian terrorism. The wall was, nevertheless, fervently condemned by the Palestinians and with support from the international community, mainly because it was built to intersect Palestinian territories and was therefore perceived as illegal annexation of land.⁸⁷

The span of these historic events does rarely transpire in the YA literature I have read about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which in my view would contribute to a better understanding of the conflict. I think that it’s almost impossible for an outsider to fully grasp the complexities of the conflict, yet it’s so much more to it than the fraction of disruptive moments that I have mentioned here.

However, one can easily conclude that there are no simple solutions to the conflict, since ‘they are both right and wrong on both sides at the same time’.⁸⁸ Both sides have their own narrative as rightful heirs of the land and both sides omit their culpability as contributors to the conflict. Thus, each side is in a state of denial.⁸⁹

Even if they are equally wrong, I think one must consider that the opponents aren’t equally strong. Israel must recognize that they transfer the past victimization related to Holocaust on the Palestinians, which is linked to their fear of a reoccurrence of similar atrocities.⁹⁰ That demands immediate action to relinquish particular oppressive behaviour related to the occupation of Palestinian territories and to solve the refugee problem.

I believe moreover that the Palestinians must recognize their responsibility in the conflict as well to reach a peaceful settlement. They must come to terms with their internal problems, which in fact stem from poor leadership. Thus, they have to unite themselves under a constructive leadership, which contributes to informed dialogue with Israel.

In order to share in a peaceful future I think it’s essential to leave the past and reach out for the human in ‘the other’. That can be demonstrated by, for instance, appreciating the value of ‘the others’ narratives and thereby learn to think differently about each other. It’s perhaps a humble beginning, but it’s nevertheless a beginning.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 98.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 101.

⁸⁸ Boudalika, p. 3.

⁸⁹ <https://ethicalfocus.org/the-israel-palestinian-conflict-each-sides-contrasting-narratives/> [20190519].

⁹⁰ Bar-On, p. 196.

2.1. The conflict seen from Khalidi's perspective

I find that Khalid's insight contributes to a better understanding of the complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as he gives some valid explanations as to why the peace initiatives have produced conspicuous little results.

Rashid Khalidi is a Palestine American historian and author of *Brokers of Deceit* [2013], in which he holds the mainstream media responsible for deliberately presenting an askew, biased and unbalanced view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is furthermore summed up in his talk at 'Politics and prose'.⁹¹ He claims furthermore that the United States is culpable for having produced the present situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by using tactics based on misinformation.⁹²

Khalidi argues that the United States as an honest peace broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a myth. The 'peace processes', he argues, were crafted in such way that the real intent of the wording was made covert to serve a hidden agenda to Israeli advantage.⁹³ Hence, the 'peace agreements' were breakable because they in essence never really existed due to the covert meaning of the wording. Khalidi states that this condition corresponds well with Orwell's discourse on dishonesty: 'Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different.'⁹⁴

It occurs to me that the so familiar wording: *the Israeli-Palestinian conflict* can be understood as a straw man argument in itself, since it insinuate that the conflict involves two equally strong opposing parties,⁹⁵ and furthermore deludes people from realizing that there aren't just two belligerents involved in the conflict but many, one of them being America.

⁹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRTHJ91Tq9g> [20190519].

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press Books, 2013, pp. xxxv, 3.

⁹⁴ George Orwell, 'Politics And The English Language', vol. 13, issue 76. The Journal Horizon, 1946, p. 258; <https://archive.org/details/PoliticsAndTheEnglishLanguage> [20190603].

⁹⁵ Khalidi, p. xxxv.

2.2. Looking deeper into the context: Khalidi/Orwell

Khalidi quotes George Orwell in an epigraph in *Brokers of deceit* and he refers to Orwell a few more times, which I regard as an important framework for the content of Khalidi's book. The quote is taken from Orwell's essay 'Politics and the English language' from 1946: '[I]f thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.'⁹⁶ That expresses a good and clear idea. However, Orwell was in fact a well-known dissident to Zionism,⁹⁷ which is to be differentiated from being against the Jews or the Jewish, but Orwell was nevertheless an outspoken anti-Semite, which in my view throws a different light on Khalidi's references to Orwell.

The British-French author and journalist Ben Judah puts forth in the article 'Why I've enough of George Orwell' that: 'Not only are Orwell's diaries full of accusations [...] of Jews'⁹⁸ but Orwell's books are 'heavily stained with anti-Semitism.'⁹⁹ Judah regards Orwell's popularity being based on his clear rhetoric: '[E]verything is simple, everything is right or wrong, and everything [...] can finally be solved.'¹⁰⁰ Thus, Judah concludes, Orwell is a 'terrible role-model for an age that needs more serious people honestly grappling with complexity'.¹⁰¹

Even if I find it questionable to dis-merit an author's work based on what may represent a limited period of the author's production, I don't think that Orwell's position in the Zionist question in the 1940's can be disregarded. I find that Khalidi uncovers a very important reality connected to the Palestinian's right to self-government and its denial thereof. However, substantial information from an Israeli perspective is omitted which appears even more conspicuous because of his references to Orwell.

Considering the context of the book and the historic frame, I find it therefore relevant to question Khalidi's reference to Orwell's work from an ethical perspective. I regard Orwell's literature for its value, but I also think his anti-Semitic background is hard to overlook in this context; thus I ask myself what the actual narrative is that frames Khalidi's book. I decided to email Khalidi in order to find out.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Orwell, p. 246.

⁹⁷ <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/11/20/ive-enough-george-orwell/> [20190519].

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Anne Svensson: Email to Khalidi, 'Orwell+Brokers of Deciet', 2019.

Khalidi quickly responded to my email and politely answered my question, which he nevertheless found ‘quite strange’. He points out that the epigraph has nothing to do with Orwell’s anti-Semitism, which was well known and typical of his class and era. Khalidi furthermore states that Orwell and others ‘of that era had many other prejudices, which doesn’t stop us appreciating their literature’.¹⁰³

I am appreciative to Khalidi for his kind response to my ‘strange question’, which I am still not convinced is that strange, considering the growth of neo-Nazi tendencies not only in Europe, but all over the world. However, reading *Brokers of deceit* helped me clear away a substantial thicket in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which appears as a rather dense and wild forest to navigate through.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

3. Background: An overview of Israeli & Palestinian YA literature

3.1. Palestinian YA literature

According to Nusseibeh can children's literature oftentimes serve as an even more accurate reflection of the past and present mood in a society, than what any philosophical treaties can offer.¹⁰⁴ I like to add history books and political theories to that hypothesis as well, since I think it serve as a valid motivation to recognize the importance of the status of children's literature in society.

Sage publication, an educating knowledge hub for the global community, has dedicated a chapter to global and multicultural literature for young adults. A portion reads as follows:

We believe that [...] works written specifically for adolescents hold tremendous power to engage adolescent readers; however, we must acknowledge that not all cultures would name and recognize adolescents and young adult literature in the same way, if at all. Many cultures may not have texts specified for adolescents, nor will all adolescents [...] be enamored with what adults have designated and produced as 'young adult literature.'¹⁰⁵

It's interesting to note that several contemporary literary works, which were not initially designated for adolescent readers, are popular among some young Arab readers today.¹⁰⁶ Sage publication recognizes the positive aspects thereof, yet propose that it isn't recommended to replace YA literature with adult literature.

The librarian Ann Lazim likewise expresses concern for Arab YA literature in the article 'The depiction of Arabs in children's literature' published by 'Books for Keeps – the children's books magazine' [2009]: '[O]ne difficulty in representing a multiplicity of voices from Middle East [...] in children's literature is the lack of books available in English written by people who originated there.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Nusseibeh, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/54139_Chapter_12.pdf, p. 245.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 246.

¹⁰⁷ <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/133/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/the-depiction-of-arabs-in-childrens-literature> [20190519].

In the same article Julinda Abu-Nasr, founder and director of IWSAW (The Arab Institute for Women's studies in the Arab World), claims that '[t]here is almost no tradition of a special literature for children in the Arab World.'¹⁰⁸ Although she recognizes a small change she maintains that 'there is not a wealth of Arabic literature waiting to be translated'.¹⁰⁹

However, Marston argues in the article 'Finding Palestine' [2010] that the sombre trend had already begun to change the last two decades. She states that there is a 'remarkable increase in books of high literary quality' thanks to the 1990's 'emphasis on multicultural education and literature'. She furthermore acknowledges that the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) from 1987 to 1992 and the Oslo Accords 1993 gained attention from the international community, which 'encouraged a more open minded attitude regarding publication of the Palestinian viewpoint'.¹¹⁰

I don't think their statements contradict each other, but rather reflect different emphasis on the question. Abu-Nasr points out that there is a lack of books written by authors originating from Palestine, and I think it's plausible to derive from the context of Marston's article that she includes American descent authors and other international voices in her summary.

Almost a decade later Palestinian YA literature is noted for being more vibrant than in most Arab majority countries. The online periodical 'Arabic Literature and Translations' features YA novelist Sonia Nimr in an interview [2017], in which she designates the development of Palestinian YA literature, not only to the merited work by the Tamer institute (supported amongst others by Anna Lindh foundation, SIDA and UNESCO),¹¹¹ but to the innate resistance of the Palestinian people – '[w]ell, it's not like it's my agenda to resist. But somehow it's in the background that we want to give the children something different', Nimr states.¹¹²

I find it quite remarkable how the international community's approval of themes in the YA literature determines if a book gets published or not. It's also quite disturbing to consider that many events pass by the international community unnoticed, and are therefore considered unimportant for the book market.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.arabchildrensliterature.com/resources/arab-world-childrens-books-finding-palestine> [20190519].

¹¹¹ <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/members/tamer-institute-community-education> [20190519].

¹¹² <https://arablit.org/2017/03/10/ya-novelist-sonia-nimr-on-discovering-and-reinventing-the-treasure-of-palestinian-folktales/> [20190519].

3.2. Israeli YA literature

Israeli literature clearly shows how the Jews have struggled to create an identity other than, for instance, the suffering diaspora Jew. However, the last fifty years have brought an enormous change for Israeli literature, in a period that was marked by a series of cataclysmic events around the formation of the state of Israel 1948 and the following years. The pioneering authors were often referred to as the ‘the Generation of the state’ and were primarily engaged with themes associated with the creation of the state of Israel and their existential struggle during their childhood. These count authors such as Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua¹¹³ and David Grossman.

The so-called ‘generation of the state’ authors paved the way to contemporary Hebrew literature, which were heralded by a new breed of writers who sought to break out of the literary mould of the past. Not that the themes of the past were unimportant and must continually be written about, but this new generation of writers recognized the importance of separating literature from the past agonies. Asher Weill from the Jewish virtual library writes as follows:

Gone are the old concerns of nation building, absorption of new immigrants, the heroic cast of the pioneers of kibbutzim, the melting pot, existentialist concerns for the future of the country. In its place is a new brand of less spiritual concerns – the good life, the pursuit of happiness, the debunking of hitherto “sacred” causes – often in a surrealistic, anarchic, iconoclastic, and at times even nihilistic, literary style.¹¹⁴

The young generation of writers are often referred to as the Post-Zionist Generation and counts writers as Orly Castel-Bloom and Etgar Keret. The same pattern can be seen in contemporary YA literature.

YA novelist Rachel Lynn Solomon, author of *You’ll miss me when I am gone* [2018] writes in the article ‘[B]est YA novels with Jewish protagonists’ about the scarcity of YA literature with Jewish protagonists available while growing up. She writes: ‘[...] I only saw Jewish

¹¹³ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/fifty-years-of-culture-in-israel-from-melting-pot-to-bouillabaisse> [20190519].

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

protagonists in Holocaust literature. The kind of books I loved – realistic YA– occasionally had a main character with a Jewish friend, but that was it [...] People like me didn't get to be protagonists.'¹¹⁵

Today there are many YA books in which Jewish themes don't constitute the essence of the stories, and there is a lot of authentic YA literature that render Jewish protagonists in everyday situations; related to school, relationships and dating or any other themes concerning young peoples everyday life.

Solomon recommend titles as: *Little & Lion* [2017] by Brandy Colbert, *Your voice is all I hear* [2015] by Leah Scheier, and *Playing with Matches* [2014] by Suri Rosen. Rosen's book is moreover one of few that represent modern Orthodox Judaism in contemporary YA literature, and dismantles stereotypes about Orthodox Judaism.¹¹⁶ This indicates that there is an on-going process to reinvent the Jewish identity in the YA literature, which includes the Orthodox sphere.

Marjorie Ingall writes about the YA literature available when she was growing up in the 80's in the article 'Jewy books: including Jewish characters doesn't have to be a big deal anymore'. She states that: '[A]ll the young adult novels with a Jew in them were about Important Jewish Issues. The Holocaust. War. Anti-Semitism. Mental illness. Smothering Orthodox parents. Shtetls. The traumas of immigration.'¹¹⁷

Ingall states moreover that most books rendered Jewish characters that were traumatized. *Are you there God? It's me, Margaret* [1970] by Judy Blume was an exception since it portrays regular American Jewish children. She concludes; other than that 'our opportunities to see our lives reflected in our books were pretty limited.'¹¹⁸

Whereas today she recognizes an enormous change in the range of YA literature, which is one of few literary categories that steadily grows, so much so, that critics call it the golden age of YA literature.¹¹⁹ That indicates that the YA book-market has to follow the demand for themes that young Jews can identify with since they don't primarily identify with the historical markers of the Jewish common experience.

The YA literature encompasses many genres, ranging from 'realistic fiction, dystopian

¹¹⁵ https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/blog/The_ProsePeople/post/best-ya-novels-with-jewish-protagonists [20190519].

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/183638/jewy-young-adult-books> [20190519].

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

fantasy, sci-fi, noir, horror, suspense, graphic novel',¹²⁰ which in addition have a large adult readership. These contemporary stories don't deal with Jewish issues in the same extent as before and should according to Ingall be termed 'Jewy literature' rather than Jewish, since Judaism only resemble one aspect of the identity of the characters.¹²¹

Thus, I can conclude that young Jewish readers need to identify with YA literature that renders stories about contemporary adolescence; it's evident that they request narratives about people that foremost are people and secondly are Jews. This type of discussion is in my estimation almost non-existent in regard to Arabic/Palestinian narratives. Thus, Jewish literature can be regarded as less homogeneous than Palestinian literature.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

4. Background: **Looking deeper into the contexts of the narratives**

4.1. Israeli narratives

I find that many Israeli authors have been preoccupied with the enemy of the past, i.e. the Nazi regime and the atrocities that occurred during the Holocaust or *Shoa*. And rightly so, since it was necessary to write about the past from their own perspective in order to deconstruct stereotypes about Jews and the Jewish.

Jonathan C. Kaplan writes in the article ‘How anti-Semitic stereotypes from a century ago echo today’ that Jews were portrayed as ‘an Other who did not belong within European society’ as an ‘infestation’ and ‘evil’ that destabilized Western civilisation.¹²² They were moreover often depicted with ‘large hooked noses, dark curly hair and thick lips’.¹²³

Kaplan amongst others appropriately recognizes the importance to learn from the past, since the anti-Semitic propaganda is on the rise all over the globe.¹²⁴ This tragic reality is, for instance, documented in the Canadian author and peace activist Deborah Ellis’ book *Three wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak* [2004]. Artov, a Jewish boy from Russia, explains that he has observed booby-trapped signs along the road saying ‘Death to Jews’ and ‘Jews are garbage’.¹²⁵

There is a wealth of Israeli/Jewish literature for both young and adult readers regarding the Jewish identity, which is tightly intertwined with the establishment of the state of Israel.

Most Israelis are probably familiar with the Israeli author of children’s and youth literature Galila Ron-Feder Amit’s *Warsaw ghetto uprising* - one of the books in ‘The time tunnel’ series. The books render the adventures of ‘two Jerusalem children who travel back in time to historical events related to the establishment of the State of Israel’.¹²⁶

The family oriented children’s book *What the moon brought* [1942] by late American author Sadie Rose Weilerstein prepared a way for other books written for a Jewish audience that needed to identify themselves with stories that acknowledge the special values of Jewish

¹²² <http://theconversation.com/how-anti-semitic-stereotypes-from-a-century-ago-echo-today-106451> [20190519].

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Deborah Ellis, *Three Wishes : Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. Toronto: A Groundwood Book, 2004, p. 21.

¹²⁶ http://everything.explained.today/Galila_Ron-Feder_Amit/ [20190519].

life and traditions - yet encouraging them to fully assimilate to American life.¹²⁷ Thus, the literature of the time sought to preserve Jewish values while embracing American values.

Emily Schneider states in the article 'Jewish Books, Jewish Families' that: 'Although the majority of children's books with Jewish themes are now produced by mainstream companies, [...] smaller presses are uniquely placed to deliver books which continue to affirm the value of [the Jewish] history and tradition [...], while linking Jewish stories to the wider world.'¹²⁸

Nevertheless, there has simultaneously prevailed a trend among younger Israeli/Jewish authors that prioritize an individual expression. These writers belong to the Post-Zionist Generation as mentioned earlier. They seemingly seek to purge their literature from politics and their inherited diaspora roots in order to construct a new Jewish identity. In so doing, they allow a chasm to separate themselves from the commonplace history of the suffering diaspora Jew and the historic hardships of the *aliya*, as well as from the present agony of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, lately an even more recent breed of Jewish/Israeli YA authors has emerged on the literary scene that seeks to describe the conflict from a more whole and self-scrutinizing perspective.

That trend is demonstrated in the thought-provoking *Dancing Arabs* [2002] by Arab Israeli Sayed Kashua, in William Sutcliffe's novels that contributes with a different view of the conflict in *The wall* [2013] and *We see everything* [2017] and in Shani Boianjiu's *The people of forever are not afraid* [2012] which is a raw and relentless rendering of three young women serving in the Israel Defense Forces.

I find it interesting to note that this overview of Israeli narratives shows that there is an ongoing shaping process of the Israeli/Jewish identity, which is reflected in the YA literature and which I believe allows the conflict to be addressed in a more honest and divergent way. The old stereotypical rendering of the Palestinian character, which oftentimes resembled a sly, shady and unreliable figure, as in, for instance, *Broken Bridge* [1994] by Lynne Reid Banks, isn't salient in more recent Israeli YA literature.

In 'Journal of Children's Literature Research, Vol. 40, 2017' Peter Forsgren states that the literary scholars Maria Andersson and Elina Druker find it important to be aware of the majority culture versus the minority culture in regards to multicultural children's literature and the power structures related thereto.¹²⁹

It's understood that authors affiliating with the oppressing side of a conflict are prone to

¹²⁷ <http://www.hbook.com/2018/10/blogs/family-reading/jewish-books-jewish-families/> [20190519].

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ <https://barnboken.net/index.php/clr/article/view/284/879> [20190519].

undermine the authenticity of the victimized ‘other’ by supporting a stereotypical image of them in their narratives. Hence, they reinforce an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, which creates an askew discourse of the conflict. Consequently, perhaps unbeknownst in some instances, the author assists a destructive power structure, which ultimate goal is to silence the voice of the victimized population.

4.2. Palestinian narratives

It’s noteworthy that Palestinian YA authors in a higher degree are concerned with the conflict and their ‘enemy’ i.e. Israel in their narratives, which I believe serves both an emancipating purpose and a need to understand the mechanism of their oppressor. This trend can very well be related to the phenomenon termed ‘the empire writes back’ meaning that a former colonized people breaks the silence and voice their narrative.¹³⁰

Iranian born Golbarg Bashi’s (she grew up in Sweden) children’s ABC book *P is for Palestine*, created quite a stir among Jews when it was published 2017 in the United States, since they regarded that the picture book promotes hatred, violence and anti-Semitism.¹³¹ The page ‘I is for Intifada’ raised, in particular a lot of commotion. The text explains that: ‘Intifada is Arabic for rising up for what is right, if you are a kid or a grownup!’¹³²

In an interview brought by ‘Times of Israel’ Bashi ‘rejects the idea that the word ‘Intifada’ refers primarily to terror attacks [...] she sees Intifada as referring to a broader cultural and nonviolent [context]. Western media [...] tend to emphasize Palestinian violence while not covering peaceful protest’.¹³³ Hence, one can conclude that Bashi’s statement confirms Sonia Nimr’s perspective on the Palestinian resistance in regard to children’s and youth literature.

In 2007 the ‘Electronic Intifada’ publishes the article ‘Three representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in children’s literature’ by the Prof. Fouad Moughrabi, in which he among other books acknowledges *A little piece of ground* [2003] by Elizabeth Laird and Sonia Nimr. He argues that the novel ‘is a metaphor for Palestinians who are simply asking the world to recognize their right to a tiny place where they can live freely and breathe some fresh air. It is

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/p-is-for-palestine-childrens-picture-book-ignites-controversy-in-new-york/> [20190519].

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

also a story of their endurance and their refusal to bow down to superior and rapacious power'.¹³⁴

Moughrabi further points out that 'the brave authors of children's books had to deal with the thorny issues surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict', yet have produced books that have sold hundreds of thousands of copies – and continues to do so throughout the world.¹³⁵

In an article published by 'the Electronic Intifada' [2004] Elsa Marston reviews if and how Palestinian characters in American literature benefit from multiculturalism, i.e. does it constitute of 'the basic idea that all cultural, national, and ethnic groups are worthy of positive attention an deserving of respect?'¹³⁶

She states that the Palestinian characters often have been equated with terrorists, Nazis, or characterized with inhuman attributes in general. Although the U.S. government and media have been reluctant in addressing 'the Middle East subject' Marston recognizes in line with Moughrabi's observations an increase of authentic literature by American authors that are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of portraying Palestinian characters in an authentic manner.¹³⁷

The Palestinian perspective is rendered by both American and Palestinian acclaimed authors, in order to mention a few: Naomi Shihab Nye's *Habibi* [1997], Ibtisam Barakat's *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian childhood* [2007], Randa Abdel-Fattha's *Where the streets had a name* [2008] and *Out of it* [2011] by Selma Dabbagh.

I find that the review of Palestinian children's literature highlights the steady evolvement of Palestinian YA literature and how obviously intertwined the literature is with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's furthermore remarkable that the word 'Intifada', as is mentioned in Bashi's ABC book, instigates such strong reactions among Jews even today – perhaps even more so since Bashi's book apparently was published first time already in 1990.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/three-representations-israeli-palestinian-conflict-childrens-literature-part-2/6740> [20190519].

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/more-just-stories-portrayal-palestinians-american-childrens-literature/5012> [20190519].

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ https://books.google.dk/books/about/P_Is_for_Palestine.html?id=V-wSAAAACAAJ&source=kp_cover&redir_esc=y [20190519].

5. Background: Oz, Nusseibeh & ‘the other’ neighbour

5.1. Presenting Amos Oz

I have chosen, as mentioned earlier, to include *A tale of love and darkness* [2002] by Amos Oz the late and *Once upon a country: A Palestinian life* [2007] by Sari Nusseibeh, as a backbone for further understanding how ‘the other’ is rendered in their respective books, which are regarded as classics. Nusseibeh wrote furthermore his book in response to Oz’s novel since he didn’t recognize Oz’s Jerusalem. However, the two authors became friends - they didn’t always agree, but chose to agree to disagree. Oz states for instance in a dialogue with Nusseibeh that: ‘We have to agree upon the future, not about the past.’¹³⁹

Amos Oz, professor in literature, is known as one of the most iconic Israeli authors and has left a legacy of a rich produce; which spans from novels, journalistic articles, his academic work and actions related to his firm advocacy for peace between Israel and Palestine and for a ate solution.

A tale of love and darkness can be read as an autobiographic novel and a family-chronicle which records his family’s Ashkenazi roots in Eastern Europe diaspora; their *aliyah*, Oz’s birth in Jerusalem, Mandatory Palestine in 1939¹⁴⁰ and the cataclysmic years with political instability around the birth of the state of Israel 1948.

Oz’s autobiographic material isn’t only tightly interwoven with the historic formation of the state of Israel, but with the very construction of the modern, spoken Hebrew.¹⁴¹ Thus the new words that developed in his hearing would become the foundation of his intimate relationship with literature. ‘I lived in Kerev Avraham, but where I really lived was at the edge of the forest’,¹⁴² he writes referring his mother’s folktales from Eastern Europe. He further writes: ‘What surrounded me did not count. All that counted was made of words.’¹⁴³ He grew up in a home full of literature and he learned to read his father’s books at the age of five (including the founder of Zionism Theodor Herzl).¹⁴⁴ Thus literature became a kind of sanctity to the child, where he in safety could explore the world.

Not far away from where he lived, was another Jerusalem, the city of the Arabs, which was

¹³⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/02/opinion/global/02iht-GA05nusseibeh.html> [20190603].

¹⁴⁰ Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2004, p. 105.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁴² Ibid, p.138.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 252-353.

perceived as: ‘A secretive, malign city pregnant with disaster.’¹⁴⁵ It was ‘a city of old cypress trees that were more black than green’¹⁴⁶ and it was a Jerusalem dense with different sounds, that was inhabited by a multitude of alien holy men and a little Arab girl called Aisha that he was to meet in the posh neighbourhood of Talbieh.¹⁴⁷

Oz’s subversive encounter with her and her family is described in great detail. It was a world that was rich and bright, in opposition to what he had been told about the poor minority Arab. ‘And what about Aisha?’ he wonders after the Six-Day War in 1967. ‘[...] who are the fortunate Jews who now live in what was once her family home in Talbieh [...]?’¹⁴⁸

What had happened to Aisha was a shared fate of hundreds and thousands Arabs as Oz recounts: ‘Instead of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Arabs, hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees [...] had arrived here.’¹⁴⁹ The Jews had arrived to the land of Israel, which they designated their only home. They lived in constant fear to have their infant state crushed to death before it had a chance to live.¹⁵⁰

Then it was the massacre in Deir Yassin 1948, where more than hundred Arabs were butchered.¹⁵¹ Many Hebrew settlements were similarly ‘razed to the ground and their Jewish inhabitants were murdered or taken captive or escaped’.¹⁵² Oz concludes that: ‘The Arabs implemented a more complete “ethnic cleansing” in the territories they conquered than the Jews did [...]’.¹⁵³ Thus the atmosphere was permeated with paranoia of ‘the other’, and is well described in what follows:

The Europe that abused, humiliated, and oppressed the Arabs by means of imperialism, colonialism, exploitation, and repression is the same Europe that oppressed and persecuted the Jews, and eventually allowed or even helped the Germans to root them out of every corner of the continent and murder almost all of them. But when the Arabs look at us, they see not a bunch of half-hysterical survivors but a new offshoot of Europe [...] in Zionist guise this time [that will]

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 338.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 337.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 323.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 338.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 385.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 375.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 342.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

exploit, evict, and oppress all over again. And when we look at them, we do not see fellow victims either [...] but bloodthirsty anti-Semites, Nazis in disguise [...].¹⁵⁴

Oz further expounds on the topic: ‘In the lives of individuals and of peoples, too, the worst conflicts are often those that break out between those who are persecuted. It is mere wishful thinking to imagine that the persecuted and the oppressed will unite out of solidarity [...].’¹⁵⁵ Hence, unity must be founded on something else. Perhaps it’s possible to find unity if involved parties are willing to recognize each other’s stories.

Oz recalls a little Arab girl who died in a roadblock on the way to hospital, which further describes how the turmoil escalated to an atmosphere of ethnic groups opposed against each other, which was enforced by a unilateral news covering. He writes: ‘[Her] eyes should be piercing our souls so none of us can sleep at night, though I didn’t even see her eyes because in the papers they only show pictures of our victims, never theirs.’¹⁵⁶

Following, his aunt’s words rings strangely hollow: ‘[...] we’d show the whole world how to treat a minority [...]. We, who had always been an oppressed minority, would treat our Arab minority justly, fairly, generously, we would share our homeland with them [...].’¹⁵⁷ A statement the mature author calls ‘a pretty dream’.¹⁵⁸

That was the dream before all the bloodshed, when Zionism was driven by a pioneering spirit; a nationalism ‘without their penchant for bloodshed’.¹⁵⁹ It was a statement before the UN sanctioned division, which in reality forced the Jews and the Arabs into conflict since most Arabs weren’t in favour of the UN led settlement from the beginning.¹⁶⁰

Having read *A tale of love and darkness*, I am not left with the impression of darkness but of love. It’s the discrepancy and complexity of people; their odd behaviour, their humour, their compassion, love, kindness and hope that shine ever so bright in spite of very challenging circumstances, or perhaps because of it.

Oz saw his main role as an author to portray the complexity of the lives of humans through the fictive characters and to annihilate stereotypes.¹⁶¹ He further emphasized the importance

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 343.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 342.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 183.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 192.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 384.

¹⁶¹ Isaksen, p. 69.

to be able to take an unbiased position as an author, and try to see the conflict from both sides. Thus, create psychologically complex portraits of the characters. If an author isn't able to do that, he states, he or she can as well be a politician.¹⁶²

Hence, Oz's preference to characterize the human experience pushes the actual conflict into the background – it's definitely there, but not in the foreground. The focus on the complex human experience is therefore prevalent in *A tale of love in darkness*. Oz's compassionate heart can moreover be recognized in the following commentary on his authorship: '[It's the] selfsame strange urge I had when I was small—the desire to grant a second chance to something that could never have one—is still one of the urges that set me going today whenever I sit down to write a story.'¹⁶³

It's evident that the overarching enmity between the Jews and the Arabs seemingly didn't affect Oz's personal relationships with the Arabs. As mentioned earlier refers Oz to Aisha several times, but also to a kind hearted man with compassionate eyes whom he designates his 'Arab father'.¹⁶⁴ This man found him in a women's clothing store after Oz hides from a frightening female dwarf. Oz is five years old and the man holds him in his arms and says in broken Hebrew with a husky voice, which according Oz is something he would always remember with longing: 'Enough child every thing all right child everything all right.'¹⁶⁵ Perhaps that is what the kind Arab man still whispers.

5.2. Presenting Sari Nusseibeh

Sari Nusseibeh is a Palestinian author, diplomat, Professor of philosophy and former president of the Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem. He was and still is an active spokesman for a peaceful settlement with Israel and a two-state solution. He is furthermore known for his close relations with the Israeli Leftists.¹⁶⁶

Nusseibeh was born 1949 in Syria and grew up in East Jerusalem - when the city already was divided. His family has a long history of diplomats, which still holds the ancient task as

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 68.

¹⁶³ Oz, p. 27.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 232.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 345.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sari-nusseibeh> [20190519].

doorkeepers to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher - thus safeguarding its key.¹⁶⁷ Nusseibeh's book *Once upon a country: a Palestinian life* [2007] was written as stated earlier in response to Oz's *A tale of love and darkness*, but I don't perceive his narrative being in opposition to Oz's, since I find their accounts complementing each other.

In *A tale of love and darkness* Oz's impressions of the conflict is conveyed from a somewhat peripheral place, while Nusseibeh's narrative is told from the epicentre of the conflict; that involves his father's diplomatic work as a governor in Jerusalem and as the Jordanian Minister of Defence, his own ambivalent involvement in the conflict during the First Intifada as a president of the student's faculty association,¹⁶⁸ and later on as a PLO representative during the peace negotiations that were to be called the Oslo Accords.¹⁶⁹

Nusseibeh states that: '[In the tale] I saw how a children's yarn could say more than a dozen philosophical treatises.'¹⁷⁰ Thus his memoir is written in the framework of a fairy tale – the conflict is a riddle that must be resolved. That aspect is moreover shown in the book's title, which alludes to the classic beginning of many children's tales - 'once upon a time'.

He moreover refers to children's stories such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] by Lewis Carroll.¹⁷¹ Thus, the rabbit hole that never ends once you set out to follow the white rabbit, can serve as a metaphor for the elusive solution for the complex situation in the Middle East. The children's tale theme is perhaps also a nod to Oz, whom in several instances refers to story telling and classic children's tales such as those of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.¹⁷²

Nusseibeh recalls a phantom in a pepper tree in the garden where he grew up. As a little boy he thought that a Jew hid in the trunk of it, looking like an evil wizard. He was convinced that it waited there to reach out after him when he passed by, thus, aiming to annihilate him.¹⁷³ The location of his family house next to the No Man's Land installed a fear-mingled curiosity in him of 'the other'.¹⁷⁴ He had in fact no idea of who the Jews were. Later on he would befriend Oz that grew up a short distance away from him, whom had in a like manner been brainwashed to fear and distrust 'the other'.

¹⁶⁷ Nusseibeh, p. 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 186.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 448.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Oz, p. 394.

¹⁷³ Nusseibeh, p. 69.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Nusseibeh holds education as a viable means to eradicate ‘public misguided opinion’,¹⁷⁵ since it leads to a healthy and strong society when people can think and reason by themselves and not en masse blindly follow agitators of violence. He has been regarded as a dangerous man for his democratic views and endured contention from Palestinian authorities because he wasn’t loyal to Fatah and Arafat, and Israeli authorities that repeatedly closed down the Birzeit University where he taught.

Nusseibeh was furthermore imprisoned on very absurd grounds, so much so that the Israeli inmates jested amiably with him about it. He and his family furthermore received death threats from Israeli security service Shin Bet numerous times and he has watched many friends and students disappear for months and reappear again after Israeli imprisonment.¹⁷⁶

Thus, Nusseibeh realized that the brute interrogation methods of students suspect of anti-Israeli behaviour oftentimes made the young men stronger. He writes: ‘[...] paradoxical as it sounds, [the students] reemerged from the Israeli prison camp emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually freer than they were when they went in.’¹⁷⁷ Thus, the interrogation transformed many of the students into ‘full-fledged human beings’, because they had defied the interrogators and become aware of their self-worth.¹⁷⁸ ‘Humiliation’, Nusseibeh writes, ‘has always been Israel’s most powerful weapon against us’ it ‘can either lead to a stronger will and greater sense of autonomy, or destroy a person’s self-worth [...]’¹⁷⁹, which has caused many to turn to the ‘nihilism of terrorism’.¹⁸⁰

At first suicide bombings were almost entirely the work of Hamas or Islamic Jihad,¹⁸¹ but later the nonviolent, pious branch of Fatah morphed into Hamas.¹⁸² The ‘martyr hero’ intensified the cult of the suicide bomber that became like a pop star among the Palestinian youth during the Second Intifada. The prospect to offer themselves in a suicide attack attracted thousands of young men and women. This was a new phenomenon, Nusseibeh writes.¹⁸³ I think following words sum up the essence of his thoughts on the subject: ‘[You can] condemn dehumanization only if you [haven’t] allowed yourself to be dehumanized.’¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 429

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 212.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 213.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 213-214.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 460.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 459.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 180.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 479.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 505.

The culprit of the conflict is according to Nusseibeh ‘a basic lack of honesty among politicians’,¹⁸⁵ which correlates with Khalidi’s stance in relation to the peace processes, and furthermore a lack of empathy which stems from the inability to imagine the life of another because one is so immersed in the trench of ones own tragedies.¹⁸⁶

However, Nusseibeh puts forth a prospect for peace: ‘No matter how hopelessly entrenched two parties seem, their feud can be solved through an act of human will.’¹⁸⁷ This unyielding hope seems to fuel his unbending faith in a peaceful settlement through dialogue, since he regards Israelis and Palestinians as natural allies that ought to work together towards peace¹⁸⁸ – thus ‘building bridges of understanding not walls of separation’.¹⁸⁹

Most people that suffer because of the conflict desire peace and are ready to accept concessions. This can not least be seen in Ellis’ documentation of both Israeli and Palestinian children’s voices in *Three wishes – Israeli and Palestinian children speak*. Sadly, politicians are often on the other hand ‘allies in stoking the conflict’¹⁹⁰ out of fear that a peaceful resolution could occur. Thus, in reality the politicians aren’t willing to let go of what they identify as rightfully theirs.¹⁹¹ Consequently, a sudden incursion is designed to cause a violent response to flare up in Gaza or elsewhere in order to gain a political stance and a peace settlement is again out of reach.

Reaching a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine is indeed a very challenging task. It’s, as we know still unresolved to this day and is in fact getting harder to resolve because of the impasse of reaching consensus regarding the demographic issues and other questions. Nusseibeh surmises that for a consensus to happen, it’s necessary to reformulate the way of thinking about the problem, by addressing it in a new and creative way or to think the unthinkable,¹⁹² just as the two-state solution was an unthinkable idea when it was presented at the first time.¹⁹³ Thus, a new unthinkable structure can hold the answer to the peace riddle.

As stated earlier I believe that a key formula to solve the riddle is enfolded in Israeli and Palestinians recognition of each other’s narratives – after all it’s the narrative that is contested,

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 204.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 128.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 98.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 525; 457.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 457.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 142.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 142.

not the land.¹⁹⁴ Oz states furthermore in a dialogue with Nusseibeh that: ‘It’s not mainly a real-estate conflict, and it’s certainly not mainly a religious conflict. It’s a conflict of emotions, of hurt feelings, of mistrust and insult and pain and humiliation and fear – on both sides.’¹⁹⁵ The two friends agreed on that everything is possible,¹⁹⁶ but perhaps some miraculous intervention is needed.¹⁹⁷

Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians can perhaps expand the frame of possibilities for peace in the Middle East. He writes in chapter 2 verse 14 as follows: ‘For he Himself [Jesus] is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.’¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tojcV8Hg7ng> [20190519].

¹⁹⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/02/opinion/global/02iht-GA05nusseibeh.html> [20190519].

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tojcV8Hg7ng> [20190519].

¹⁹⁸ <https://biblehub.com/,/2-14.htm> [20190519].

PART II

1. Analysis of the YA literature

As I mentioned in the 'Introduction' it was important for me to select YA novels that together reflect a diversity of perspectives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My criteria for the selection of the books was based on the nationality of the authors and other features that add to the complexity of the narratives, such as the language the author writes in. I furthermore selected the books based on what timeframe the stories are set in.

Hence, I chose *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* by Ibtisam Barakat, since it's set in the Six-Day War and is written by a Palestinian author, *A stone in my hand* by Cathryn Clinton, which is set in the First Intifada and is written by an American, *Samir & Yonatan* by Daniella Carmi who is an Israeli author that writes about a Palestinian protagonist - which is very unusual. I furthermore selected *Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye for her American-Palestinian perspective, *Dancing Arabs* by Sayed Kashua who is an Arab and writes in Hebrew and, *The people of forever are not afraid* by Israeli Shani Boianjiu, for her unusual rendering of women in the Israeli military in the end of the Second Intifada.

1.1

Author: Ibtisam Barakat.

Land of origin: Palestine.

Title of book: *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*.

Year of publication: 2007.

Time and place of story: 1981, Six-Day War 1967 and after. West Bank and Jordan.

Protagonist: Ibtisam, 3 ½ - 11 years. Round and dynamic characterization.

‘The other’: Flat and static characterization.

Ibtisam Barakat’s story is told in first person and is the well-known poet’s memoir. The prose has a creatively poetic slant, which works well as a contrast to the war theme and the sufferings associated with it.

Barakat’s story begins in medias res at the Israeli army checkpoint in Surda, West Bank. Ibtisam is eleven years old and has taken the bus from Ramallah to Birzeit to find out if she has received any letters from any of her many pen pals she keeps from all over the world¹⁹⁹ – living in realities that perhaps is easier to understand than hers. Ibtisam’s home can in fact disappear any day.²⁰⁰ Letters or not, it’s more important to just spend some precious time at the post box, since the ‘Post Office Box 34 is the only place in the world that belongs to me’, and it’s ‘like having a country, the size of a tiny square, all to myself’.²⁰¹

A narrative analepsis, i.e. the story goes back in time, brings the reader to the very day the Six-Day War broke out – more precisely ‘the evening of June 5, 1967’.²⁰² The three and a half year old protagonist and her family; consisting of mum, dad, two elder brothers and one baby sister (the baby boy wasn’t born yet) escapes from their unsafe home, in a such haste that Ibtisam loses not only her shoe but momentarily her family in the tumult of ‘people from neighbouring villages fleeing their homes’.²⁰³ Her foot swells up as it has contracted an infection and isn’t attended to until the family reaches a safe house in Jordan with the means of a water tanker. Due to the delay she almost lost her foot. The incident told in context of the roaring war, paints a hauntingly intimate portrait of the brave little girl.

The family ends up living in an empty school under the auspices of the International Red

¹⁹⁹ Barakat, p. 11

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 8-9.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 20.

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 22.

Cross, since ‘the government of Jordan had turned many schools into temporary housing for West Bank refugees’,²⁰⁴ and later they move to in a single room apartment until their family name finally is mentioned on the radio - announcing that they are allowed to return to their house in Ramallah.²⁰⁵

Back home the children rummage the hill country for treasures – things that can be used for building a kite to fly in an act of celebration of liberty. Flying the kite the children hears a rumbling noise, like an earthquake – a troop of Israeli soldiers marches to a hill behind their house and they start to dig trenches and exercising for another war.²⁰⁶

Worries of stray bullets forces the family to move again,²⁰⁷ this time to an orphanage in Jerusalem against the father’s will. The mother alleges that he is dead in order to have the children registered. The boys are later expelled to another orphanage until the father comes to get them all, saying to his wife: ‘Our children are treated like orphans while we live.’²⁰⁸

The father improved the security of the house, but the searchlight still reached into the bedroom at night. The children’s fear mingled curiosity grew for the Israeli soldiers; they played war and imitated the soldiers, inspired by their everyday vista. ‘They were the source of our anxiety and our entertainment’,²⁰⁹ Barakat writes. The children dared getting closer and closer to the soldier’s camp, ‘until one afternoon we stood only yards away and could look into their faces’.²¹⁰ ‘We had become more curious than scared’, she concludes.²¹¹ The soldiers motioned the children to leave, without shouting.

Barakat’s narrative is a developing story, recounting the sibling’s growth in somewhat sweeping gestures. The sibling’s togetherness functions as collective main character for a long stretch; they had each other, just like the soldiers had each other²¹² and together they grew increasingly free from fear. However the boys start in school and Ibtisam is on her own again, until she finally can start in an UNRWA school, and join her brother’s school life. In spite of many challengers, she performs very well. When ranked the best student in first grade, she receives her mother’s only pair of golden earrings.²¹³

The portrayal of the Israeli soldiers ends on a disheartening note. The parents decide to sell

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 54.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 65.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 76-77.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 79.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 89.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 99.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 96.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid, p. 97.

²¹³ Ibid, pp. 158-159.

the house and move the family to another area, when the soldiers come to the house, not for water, but for demonstrating sexually insulting gestures to Ibtisam's mother.²¹⁴

The brute Israeli soldier is introduced in the story at the very first page and the image of 'the other' doesn't change much in the course of the narrative. It's the children's attitude towards the practising soldiers that change. These soldiers are to be fair portrayed with a human slant in that they momentarily seem less brutal. Nevertheless, this notion is totally liquidated at the end of the story.

The stereotypical rendering of 'the other' reflects a traditionally one-sided notion, which is prevalent in many narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a Palestinian perspective. That is furthermore reflected in the lack of information about the Six-Day War, since the fact that Israel was invaded by surrounding Arab nations is totally omitted. Such information could easily be included by the author in the 'Historical note' and could serve as a mitigating aspect in the portrayal of 'the other' (even if savage acts of war never can be excused).

Given that the Israeli soldier holds a central place in the narrative as a representative for 'the other' and no other Israeli are introduced that can counterbalance the characterization, it forms a very one-dimensional rendering of 'the other'. However, the narrative is focalized through the young girl's experience and one can conclude that she really didn't know of any other Israeli than the soldier, and the rendering is therefore fully convincing.²¹⁵ Nora's account in Ellis book *Three wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak* expresses a similar experience: 'I don't know any Israeli people other than soldiers, and they are all very mean and very tough. [...] They might be nice like me at the beginning, but they would change.'²¹⁶

The author breaks nevertheless with the traditional rendering of gender roles. The protagonist is, for instance, portrayed with attributes common for boys; she is brave, determined, gets angry and plays wild games with her brothers and questions social norms for how a girl is expected to behave.²¹⁷ Yet, she is also a sensitive and gentle girl, all in all it's a multifaceted characterization.

The mother is portrayed as harsh and shows surprisingly little empathy for her children. However, underneath the harsh surface one can detect a frightened woman that desires her children to be strong in order to survive. Her father is the very centre of Ibtisam's world: secure, strong, joyful, and loving, yet psychologically marked by the war. I find that all the

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 164.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 95.

²¹⁶ Ellis, p. 27.

²¹⁷ Barakat, p. 140.

members of the family are fully developed and ought therefore be classified as round, dynamic characters since they all undergo notable changes - even the mother softens.

It's evident that the narrative doesn't just convey the traumas of war but the notion that everything is possible if one is really determined. *Tasting the sky* is a story about breaking free from war, but also about emancipating oneself from imprisoning gender roles.

1.2

Author: Cathryn Clinton.

Land of origin: America.

Title of book: *A Stone in My Hand*.

Year of publication: 2002.

Time and place of story: Gaza City, during the First Intifada, 1988.

Protagonist: Malaak, Palestinian girl 11 years. Round and dynamic characterization.

'The other': Rather flat and static characterization.

Cathryn Clinton's book *A stone in my hand* [2002] is an entirely fictional work written in first person. It begins with the protagonist Malaak sitting on the roof of the family house in Gaza City with her tame dove Abdo whom is her source of comfort. She is withdrawn and has hardly spoken after her father's tragic disappearance on a trip to Israel. She soon learns that he was killed in a bus explosion spearheaded by Islamic Jihad.²¹⁸ Now it's only Malaak, her mother, older brother Hamid and older sister Hend living in the house.

Malaak develops a semi-imaginative reality as a cope-mechanism as a way of escape. The dove is a kind of a spiritual messenger from her father and Malaak can see her father in the eyes of the dove. With its help she can soar free over Gaza City and visit her dad, hidden from the soldier's ubiquitous gaze.²¹⁹ The anxiety of being watched is furthermore confirmed by Nora's in Elli's book *Three wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak*, as she states that the soldier 'watch us all the time. We can't do anything without being watched by them'.²²⁰

The encounters with the dove are rendered in poetic passages²²¹ and one can conclude that

²¹⁸ Cathryn Clinton, *A Stone in My Hand*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2002, pp. 58-59.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

²²⁰ Ellis, p. 25.

²²¹ Clinton, p. 17.

the dove helps her locate a strengthening poetic stream flowing within her. Thus, the poetic element is reminiscent of Barakat's in *Tasting the sky*. It's the soul's language of freedom and resistance – it's a means to build a way with the rubble of war.

Hamid is coping with the loss by turning to *Shabab* - a gang of young Intifada fighters,²²² thus he claims that: 'We are fighters. The stones speak. The soldiers will have to listen.' Malaak is petrified of the war and worries about Hamid. He has tried to throw stones at a soldier that responded with gunpoint.²²³ Later he gets involved in building a barrier against the Israeli vehicles and the soldiers responds with teargas,²²⁴ which can kill weak people and causes the trees to drop their leaves.²²⁵

The violence is escalating. A young man is shot dead by an Israeli soldier during a funeral procession,²²⁶ and an Israeli settler is shot dead by an Arab. However, the author writes that a *man* shot him. It's the context reveals that it was a Palestinian man that shot him.²²⁷ I find that unnecessarily non-specific for the sake of a more balanced rendering. The text is otherwise drizzled with the wording; 'Israeli soldier' combined with 'Israeli patrol', 'Israeli jeep', 'Israeli authorities' or simply 'soldier'.

Nevertheless, the father's death in the terrorist attack by Islamic Jihadists shows that the author isn't consistently trying to omit Palestinian responsibility in the conflict and points furthermore to a complex situation with different Palestinian factions. In that sense the Islamic Jihadist is presented as 'another'.

It's nonetheless clearly the Israeli soldier that represents 'the other' in *A stone in my hand*, similar to the soldiers in Barakat's novel. No other Israelis are present in the narrative to convey a different image of the Israeli. However, Clinton's rendering of the soldier is in a couple instances more humanized since the text reveals that the soldier can be helpful and afraid.²²⁸

Clinton furthermore brings a glimpse of another perspective of the Israelis into the story, as an old man tells Malaak that he remembers the time when Jews, Christians and Muslims lived in peace with each other.²²⁹ However, the author doesn't take advantage of that window of opportunity to render 'the other' with a more rounded characterization outside the

²²² Ibid, p. 3.

²²³ Ibid, p. 2.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 67.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 95.

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 146.

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 30; 145.

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 24.

protagonist's own frame of experience.

The man ensues to recount the massacre of the Arabs at Deir Yassin and how the Israeli razed the houses in the village to the ground and built their homes where they had stood.²³⁰ That is true, but similar things also happened to the Jewish/Israeli population, which Oz, for instance, mentions in *A tale of love and darkness*. This creates in my opinion an unbalanced and one-dimensional rendering of the 'the other' and doesn't contribute to a better understanding of the conflict as a whole.

Malaak's mother Ibtisam serves as a modifier of the narrative as she is opposed to all forms of extremism, terrorism, radicalization and revenge.²³¹ She interferes in an intercessory manner when Hamid is in great trouble as a stone-fighter, begging the soldier for her son's life. She furthermore encourages Malaak to break out of her isolation and go back to school, which the Israeli authorities have opened again. As a consequence Malaak gather the strength necessary to become the one that helps Hamid out of the spiralling danger of wanting to join Islamic Jihad.²³² Nevertheless, Hamid gets shot when throwing stones at a soldier and the narrative ends with him in a coma at hospital. It's an open ending with a hopeful slant. Rain is falling in Gaza City and Malaak knows it's a sign of God's blessings. Her father told her so.²³³

I find the characterization of the protagonist of most family members as being round but not necessary dynamic or evolving. Malaak is portrayed as introvert and frightened to begin with, but ends up demonstrating more bravery than most young girls in her age, when for instance saving her brother from being killed in a rally. I find therefore her characterisation being both round and dynamic.

Hamid is protective and friendly, but also understandably angry because of his father's death. It's a bit of a mystery that he aspires to join the terrorist group that caused his father's death, and I don't think the reason for it transpires sufficiently in the text. Hamid's future isn't disclosed and one can only guess that he wakes up from the coma and that he undergoes some kind of inward change in regard to the destructive spiral of vengeful anger and that he finds another way to come to terms with the loss of his father.

The mother functions as mentioned earlier as the moderator in the story. She is a stable force of good that isn't changing. Why should she? The sister Hend is nevertheless rendered

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

²³¹ Ibid, pp. 44-45.

²³² Ibid, p. 127.

²³³ Ibid, p. 184.

in a flatter and static manner. She is in my opinion, not really coming alive in the narrative and is mostly thinking of getting married. Her characterization is perhaps even more one-dimensional than that of the Israeli soldier.

1.3

Author: Daniella Carmi.

Land of origin: Israel.

Title of book: *Samir and Yonatan*.

Year of publication: 1994.

Time and place of story: 1990's Israeli occupation of the West Bank, hospital in Jerusalem.

Protagonist: Samir, Palestinian boy, ca. 12 years. Round, dynamic characterization.

'The other': Round characterization.

Daniella Carmi has received many literature awards for *Samir and Yonatan*, among others the Swedish prestigious ALMA award – Astrid Lindgren's Memorial Award.

Carmi's book is unusual, since the Israeli author focalises the narrative through a Palestinian protagonist – Samir. The narrative is told in first person and convincingly captures the inner life of Samir. He is a quiet and thoughtful boy from the West Bank who ends up in an Israeli hospital in the children's ward with Israeli and Russian children.

He waits for a knee operation since he has injured his knee in a bicycle accident. His injury isn't related to military violence, which serves as a mitigating circumstance. However, acts of war are daily occurrences in the West Bank and Samir's little brother Fadi was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier. A terrible situation like that is regrettably reflecting reality. In Elli's book *Three wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak* Nora recounts that the Israeli soldiers carry guns and 'if they feel like shooting, they will just go ahead and shoot. They don't care if they shoot at a child or an older person'.²³⁴

The author skilfully moulds a mini Middle East society within the confines of the hospital room and the interrelation of the children portrays a multi faceted reality. Since the story is established in a children's ward all children are displaced from their familiar contexts and the characters interaction is therefore rendered on a somewhat neutral ground. All children exists therefore on equal odds – even if Samir undergoes challenges related to the Israelis and has to

²³⁴ Ellis, p. 25.

get used to people speaking Hebrew.

Arriving at the hospital Samir's image of the 'the other' is that of a brute soldier similarly to what is described by both Barakat and Clinton in their respective books. However, Samir's perception of 'the other' is gradually transformed as he gets to know the Israeli staff and children. His encounters count for instance an obnoxious Israeli boy and his visiting brother – an Israeli soldier. That meeting constitutes Samir's most challenging encounter since it triggers memories of his little brother – was he the soldier that killed his little brother?²³⁵ However, Samir accomplishes to see the soldier more as a human being than as a brute killer.²³⁶ He realizes moreover that the Israeli nurse doesn't look like a soldier at all.²³⁷

Samir made an internal vow to never speak again after his brother's death.²³⁸ The Israeli writer Etgar Keret sees the silent or mute Palestinian character as the Israeli author's colonization of the Palestinian identity.²³⁹ It's interesting to note that Samir's silence is reminiscent to Malaak's in *A stone in my hand*. Malaak remained silent after her father's death until she eventually gathered strength to express her self verbally. Samir breaks out of his silent place in a like manner, thus both protagonists grow and undergo a change as their inner person is being gradually emancipated from fear.

The adult author can moreover be considered as a type of a colonizing power, as he or she seeks to explain what is going on inside the head of the young character.²⁴⁰ In this case it is, as mentioned earlier, an Israeli author writing about a young Palestinian boy. However, I deem that the narrator conveys the young boy's perspective in an authentic way.

Carmi's literary technique enables her moreover to include a multifaceted rendering of 'the other' even if the story is mostly set in one room. Samir's interaction with the Israeli staff and the Israeli children creates therefore a balanced rendering of 'the other', combined with his flashbacks of the West Bank.

He thinks of his dad's Volkswagen full of bullet holes, curfews and electricity cuts. He thinks of a rabbit dead from teargas, and his brother's death. Thus, the author isn't omitting the harsh reality of the war and I deem therefore the characterization of 'the other' as round and even evolving, which is especially demonstrated through Samir and Yonatan's friendship.

²³⁵ Daniella Carmi, *Samir and Yonatan*. New York: Arthur. A. Levine Books, 2000, p. 72-73.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 68.

²³⁶ Ibid, pp. 63-65.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 19.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

²³⁹ Isaksen, p. 33.

²⁴⁰ <https://barnboken.net/index.php/clar/article/view/62/62> [20190519].

Yonatan is a clever and sweet Jewish boy that is immersed in astronomy books. Samir and Yonatan's friendship develops far away from the confines of the hospital room, as they embark on a journey to Mars together, through the means of Yonatan's computer game.

Samir learns that all humans consist of the same material as stars, which makes everyone of equal value.²⁴¹ They are both stars among all new, old and dying stars in the universe. Yonatan lets Samir navigate through space and together they build landscapes on the planet and they create something completely new together.²⁴²

It's a sweet rendering of a sprouting friendship between the boys on increasingly equal terms. Samir is throughout the story portrayed as the quiet and insecure follower. But in the course of the boy's interaction they become increasingly equal as they 'consult' each other on important matters while creating their new landscapes.²⁴³

Samir is escaping that quiet and insecure place, and communicates his thoughts to Yonatan less hesitatingly. Samir gets for instance annoyed with Yonatan when he gets too 'bossy' and tells him so. That is an important aspect, which demonstrates Samir's growth and renders him with a more rounded personality constitution – and importantly removes him from the position of the colonized 'underdog'. I find it nevertheless disturbing that it's mostly Samir that learns new things from Yonatan. I think it would benefit the story if Samir got to contribute to Yonatan's knowledge about interesting things from Samir's valid life experience.

However, I perceive that the author points to equitable collaboration and sharing as a solution for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. I think that Carmi shows that in order to reach peace, one must start from a neutral ground. Spiritually speaking that would refer to cleaning the slate by releasing each other in forgiveness and moving on towards a shared goal of reaching peace. The author evidently celebrates understanding of 'the other' and suggests that friendship can be achieved through interaction found on common ground – on earth or on a distant planet.

²⁴¹ Carmi, p. 160.

²⁴² Ibid, p. 170.

²⁴³ Ibid, p. 169.

1.4

Author: Naomi Shihab Nye.

Land of origin: America/Palestine.

Title book: *Habibi*.

Year of publication: 1997.

Time and place of story: During the First Intifada, West Bank.

Protagonist: Liyana, American/Palestinian girl, 14 years. Round characterization.

‘The other’: Round characterization.

Naomi Shihab Nye is a prolific poet and author of both novels for adults and young adults. *Habibi* is written in a poetically engaging style and is the only book among my selected books that is written in third person. However, I don't find that the third person rendering differs from the first person renderings since the story is focalised through the protagonist; a teenage girl named Liyana Abboud. The title means darling in Arabic in masculine form. The story begins with Liyana's family moving from St. Louis to a Palestinian village close to the father's village of origin. It's challenging for the young girl to adjust to the Palestinian culture because she can't wear shorts, meet boys or do things she was used to do back in the United States.

The romantic theme is consistent throughout the book, and at a first glance it seems like a regular YA book about romance and relationships. But there is a twist. Liyana isn't only challenging dress codes, she is confronting stagnant worldviews, which is related to a grand topic – culturally and religiously transcending love. The narrative picks up momentum when Liyana falls in love with Omer, a sweet and smart Jewish boy whom she meets in Jerusalem.

The conflict is looming in the background and draws at times closer; Liyana's friend gets shot by Israeli soldiers as he is mistaken for a bombing in a Jewish marketplace, and Liyana's dad is imprisoned because he tried to assist the shot boy. He is nevertheless soon released again.²⁴⁴

However, the real conflict for Liyana is to overcome the stagnant cultural barrier within her family. She brings Omer home after a lot of disputes with her parents, and after a while Omer is also invited to come with Liyana and her family to visit Sitti (grandmother in Palestine Arabic), whom in my view constitutes the most interesting character in the novel.

²⁴⁴ Naomi Shihab Nye, *Habibi*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1997, pp. 220-221.

She is a peculiar old woman that welcomes Omer with open arms. And so does the whole extended family – also after they learn that he is a Jew.

However, none of the characters are orthodox. Omer isn't an observant Jew and Liyana's mother believes in a variety of things; a mix of Christian sounding practises combined with Hindu spirituality such as karma.²⁴⁵ Her father is after all essentially a cultural Muslim and Sitti practices something reminiscent of witchcraft, which in my understanding has no relation to the Muslim faith. She heals for instance Liyana from a fever by outlining her body with pins while she is in bed.²⁴⁶

Habibi is the only YA book that I have read so far in which religion is central to the development of the story, and it serves therefore as an important indicator for how to understand the transcending friendship that occurs between the Palestinian girl and the Jewish boy. In my opinion, it had made a better story if the religious theme was set in a more authentic Middle Eastern faith context in order to show how the relational dilemma had been solved in such environment.

Christian characters are moreover included in the narrative in the form of three wayward American evangelists. They are completely unaware of their backwards behaviour and their religious speech seems like a remnant from the era of King James. If that isn't enough one of the reverends takes 'anti-panic pills' and they are portrayed as 'holy' hypocrites.²⁴⁷ It's indeed amusing, but it really doesn't promote the Christian faith.

The dad's past friendship with Christian Arabs is incidentally mentioned,²⁴⁸ which I find disappointing since there doesn't exist many stories that render Palestinian Christians. Therefore, I would have preferred to learn more about the particular synergy of faith between Muslim and Christian Palestinians, than of values that perhaps can be correlated to 'one world religion' and which I think appeals more to a Western or American readership. Consequently, I find that the book serves more as a bridge builder between an American and Arab culture than actually enhancing the understanding of relations in the Middle East.

The author's essential incentive is quite clearly to promote an all-embracing faith or no faith at all. Thus, religion appears as a valuable asset only if it's watered down to a good thought or if it becomes a gallimaufry of divergent beliefs. The solution for peace in the region is in my opinion not to omit or even include other faiths, but to make a serious effort to understand each other's perspective and thereby hopefully find a common ground for

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 168.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 137.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 203.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 165-166.

interaction.

The protagonist is definitely multifaceted and the rendering of other characters is for the most part round, although I find that there are examples of flat character renderings, such as that of the Christian evangelists. I find nevertheless that the overall characterization of ‘the other’ is round since it includes a variety of perspectives.

‘The Israeli soldier’ is visible in the narrative, but is by no means a central figure and Liyana’s meeting with Omer serves as a counterbalancing rendering of ‘the other’. The multidimensional rendering is furthermore shown through Liyana’s perspective, since she recognizes that the adults are unaware to the fact that both Israel and Palestine are culpable of instigating violence – violence that only leads to more violence.²⁴⁹ Thus, it’s clear that Liyana expresses a wish for peace between Israel and Palestine which authentically mirrors the principal wish among the children in Ellis’ book *Three wishes: Palestinian and Israeli children speak*.

1.5

Author: Sayed Kashua.

Land of origin: Israel/Palestine.

Title book: *Dancing Arabs*.

Year of publication: 2002.

Time and place of story: end of First Intifada and Second Intifada. Tira/Galilee and Jerusalem.

Protagonist: Boy, ca. 15 years in the end of the First Intifada. Round characterization.

‘The other’: Round characterization.

Sayed Kashua is an Arab journalist and author and writes about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a refreshingly experimental way in *Dancing Arabs*. The story is told through the unnamed protagonist, whom undergoes an Arab/Jewish identity crisis. The identity theme is common in YA literature, but the author takes it a step further – the Arab protagonist wants to *become* a Jew. The identity aspect gets even more interesting since Kashua writes all his novels in Hebrew. This gives a notion of the novel being set in a meta-context; it’s not just a novel, it’s a story in the making, which continues to unfold in real time.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 225.

The protagonist originates from Tira; an Israeli Arab village in the Triangle area, which is a centre of the Islamic Movement in Israel. He carries a blue identity card,²⁵⁰ which makes life easier, since it yields benefits in terms of, for instance, work opportunities in Israel - opportunities orange identity card holders don't have, namely Palestinians from the West Bank.

Dancing Arabs is a semi-autobiographic novel and the story is set during the 80's, early 90's and touching upon the millennial turn, i.e. towards the end of the First Intifada and beginning of the Second Intifada. However, the narrative is rendered in a vignette-like style and isn't always following a chronological order. That obstructs the identification of the actual timeframe, but the context delivers some useful clues. A part of the story is, for instance, set in the end of the Gulf War in 1991. Then the protagonist is about 15 years old and earns a scholarship to attend a Hebraic boarding school in Jerusalem; not solely due to his scholarly merits, but because he helped his father solve a riddle in a live-transmitted TV quiz.²⁵¹

The narrative begins with the protagonist's childhood in Tira, where he lives with his family; that counts his mother, father, two brothers and grandmother. The protagonist is rendered as a sensitive and anxious boy that prefers to sleep next to his grandmother. The father is a man with an impetuous temper that beats his children; calling them cowards, useless and spineless and a variety of other psychologically destructive epithets – thinking that it's helpful for their success. The father is furthermore a former suspect for bombing the Hebrew University cafeteria and served his time in prison during 1969-70 – in the days of Moshe Dayan as an Israeli Minister of Defence.²⁵² He moreover sings in the streets: 'P-L-O – Israel no!'²⁵³ He doesn't understand how his sons have become so unlike him – they don't even know what PLO stands for.²⁵⁴

In the early stages of school the protagonist visits a Jewish school through Seeds of Peace – a school where the teachers don't beat the children.²⁵⁵ He gets paired up with a Jewish boy whom really loves him.²⁵⁶ This early school years serve as a time of awakening for the protagonist, since it dawns on him that the Jews have their own narrative and live better lives. He realizes moreover that his parents haven't treated him right, which serves as the main

²⁵⁰ Sayed Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*. New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 137.

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 82.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 36.

²⁵³ Ibid, p. 17.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 65.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

reason to why he wants to escape his Palestinian identity and become a Jew.

One of the first indications of the protagonist's growing transnational interest is when his Israeli left-wing history teacher lets him carry an Uzi on a hiking excursion, which the protagonist takes great pride in – even if he is scared to death of violence.²⁵⁷ While on the hike, he meets his old class from Tira and he pretends not to recognize them.²⁵⁸

People tell him that he doesn't look like an Arab at all. They tell him that he in fact looks like a Jew, which he takes as a compliment since he always wanted to be a Jew.²⁵⁹ He grows sideburns and does what ever it takes to not look like an Arab. He learns Hebrew, shaves off his moustache, and buys Israeli designed trousers, which enables him to unnoticed slip by the Israeli soldiers gaze.²⁶⁰

In fact, he turns against the Arabs with searing hate, which really originates in his dysfunctional relationship to his father. The twist of the narrative is that the protagonist in a sense becomes 'the other' - the enemy of the Arabs. It's through his alienated perspective the reader learns of his growing loathe towards other Arabs. The protagonist's increasingly distorted understating of self and reality leads furthermore to a string of catastrophic undertakings; failed studies and failed marriage combined with a profuse alcohol consumption and general moral depravation.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is hardly noticeable in the most part of the narrative, but it's internalised through the protagonist's psychological challenges. His father resembles his internal conflict; not the roadblocks, checkpoints, Israeli soldiers or even a funeral of a war victim. Those are peripheral events for the protagonist that is suffering from an escalating psychological breakdown due to his identity crisis. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict becomes increasingly apparent in the narrative, as it draws nearer to where the protagonist lives in Jerusalem.

The protagonist lives with his wife for a period in Beit Safafa in Jerusalem. They live in a house from 1967 that is cheaper because 'the water and electricity are supplied by Arab companies, so there are a lot more power stoppages and problems with the water system. When war broke out - the [Second] Intifada - the Palestinian part came under much greater pressure because the electricity was cut every time Israel shelled Bethlehem or Beit Jala or Beit Sahur',²⁶¹ the author writes. This is ironic since the protagonist gets to suffer alongside

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 103.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 105.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 91.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 101-102.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 148.

the Palestinians, in spite of his fierce attempts to distance himself from them.

The protagonist realises that no matter how hard he tries he can never become a Jew. Maybe his father's statement is right after all: '[O]nce an Arab, always an Arab.'²⁶² Palestinians like the protagonist are 'ground down and their aspirations are frustrated simply because they are Palestinian'.²⁶³ Thus, the author points to the inequity between Jewish and Arab citizens. The protagonist is increasingly trapped in the identity dilemma, since he can't identify himself with either the Arab or the Jew anymore. However, the novel ends on a hopeful note. The protagonist reconnects with his family in Tira, which points to a reconciliation with his father and perhaps to an acceptance of his Arabic roots.

The author shows that family relations can be as messy as a war and that the conflict doesn't merely involve clearly defined Jews and Arabs, but people that don't really know where their alliance belongs. The protagonist's uncertain national belonging ties moreover interestingly into Homi Bhabah's theory of 'the third space'.

The characterization of the protagonist is round and multifaceted as is that of 'the other'. In this case the protagonist himself constitutes a part of the characterization of 'the other', since he views other Arabs from the vantage point of an alienated other, that in his mind is 'Jewish'. This is a very interesting approach, but in order to fully understand the 'plot twist' in *Dancing Arabs*, I think it's recommendable to have a solid background-knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beforehand.

1.6

Author: Shani Boianjiu.

Land of origin: Israel.

Title of book: *The People of Forever are Not Afraid*.

Year of publication: 2012.

Time and place of story: Israel and the West Bank, Second Intifada.

Protagonists: Yael, Avishag and Lea, ca. 18 years old. Round characterization.

'The other': Flat and stereotypical characterization, with ambivalent motive.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 106.

²⁶³ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/amusing-satire-peace-industry/14630> [20190519].

Shani Boianjiu is an Israeli author that lives in Western Galilee. *The people of forever are not afraid* [2012] is her debut novel, which has received international acclamation. It's a fictive coming of age story with both realistic and surrealistic elements and is written in first person. The story is mostly told from the perspective of three female protagonists; Yael, Avishag and Lea, who grew up in an unnamed Israeli village close to the Lebanese border. The novel conveys the girl's last year at high school and their conscription into military service at the approximate age of 18.

Boianjiu writes in English, but breaks with English grammar rules, as she allows her native Hebrew tongue to influence the text. Thus, the text conveys unexpected literary qualities and the poetic playfulness serves as a contradiction to the girl's highly demanding reality.

However, it's problematic when grammar rules are systematically broken. Consequently, I find myself halting the reading process in order ask myself; 'is this the meaning the author intend to convey?' or 'is the ambivalent meaning solely due to poor editing?' Thus, the ambivalent meaning breaks the narrative illusion and produces an unreliable narrator that can't be fully trusted. However, I think this ambivalence serves an intended purpose, as it emphasizes a pervading theme in the story, i.e. nothing can be trusted and nothing is really real.

The novel is divided into chapters that alternately render each girl's experience in the military; Yael serves as a weaponry instructor at a military base close to an Arab village, Lea as an IDF officer at checkpoints in the West Bank, and Avishag monitors surveillance screens near the Egyptian border.

The young women deal with various teenage issues, while they simultaneously represent the Israeli military force. Thus, the military environment enhances the girl's destabilized existence, and exposes the transition from childhood to adulthood in a very disturbing way. They are, for instance, drilled hard at boot camp where they have to stay in a tent full of tear gas - without mask, until they choke and have to run out.²⁶⁴

The story is set in the end of the Second Intifada and the girls are mostly stationed at remote places. The psychological effect of boredom is rampant, due to long hapless watches. That aspect serves as a breeding ground for the characters increased emotional detachment and unpredictable actions. Towards the end of the novel the protagonists are severely out of sync with reality, as they are unable to recognize the real consequence of their actions. Yael states for instance without much ado: 'Once I pretended I could get a man killed [...]. It was a

²⁶⁴Shani Boianjiu, *The People of Forever are not Afraid*. New York: Hogarth, 2012, pp. 27-28.

game. I told my officer [...] that a man had winked at me.²⁶⁵ Thus, an innocent Arab man is blindfolded and abducted. They make him believe that they will shoot him if he moves, and he falls to the ground in terror when the fake shot echoes. The incident serves as a stern reminder of what detached people in power positions are capable of.

The girls serve in a regime with a prevailing shaming culture. While they are protecting the country from a rather non-existent external enemy, the same age male soldiers at the military base sets up a kind of psychological hostage situation, and abuse the girls sexually. As the girls are totally detached from themselves, they deal with the incident rather matter-of-factly. Lea states, for instance, that it was an interesting experience and ‘that she might write about it’, since she is a professional writer.²⁶⁶ Thus, the young Israeli men come across as a more real enemy – than ‘the other’ i.e. the Palestinians.

In other instances the young women are rendered with warmth and humour as when three Palestinian demonstrators turn up at the checkpoint with an A4 sign. They kindly ask Lea to open the road for arriving wedding guests. Lea has to consult the IDF’s instruction manual in order to determine how to handle the situation.²⁶⁷ After reading a while she concludes that the demonstration is too small and too amiable for any military action. In order to get newspaper headlines, which could yield both attention and access to the road, the Palestinians try to convince her to use the most effective weapon that causes the least harm.²⁶⁸

Another incident renders Arab children that fearlessly collect empty bullet shells and steal metal fences from the military base. Yael states that: ‘These little crawling boys have no qualms. They are not afraid. And now they have begun stealing our base.’²⁶⁹ She finds it amusing and let them go since they are ‘just boys’.²⁷⁰ That is ironic, because she is nothing but a girl herself. Somebody ought to say to her in a like manner: ‘Let her go, she is just a girl.’ Lastly, Avishag decides to sunbath naked in a watchtower and sets in motion a military command apparatus, which involves both Egyptian and Israeli officers.²⁷¹

The girl’s function as a collective protagonist, that renders ‘the Israeli soldier’ from a new perspective. Firstly, this is the only YA book I have read where ‘the Israeli soldier’ is represented by the female gender. Secondly, the author problematizes their young age by

²⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 214-215.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 299.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 203.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 46.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 49.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 155.

rendering a psychologically complex portrait of the girls. Lea thinks, for instance, that she looks like a ‘child drowning in a green uniform’²⁷² and it’s evident that the young women struggle to find their bearings due to their young age.

I find that the rendering of the protagonists is multifaceted and I appreciate that the novel isn’t an attempt to embellish the military service, but to convey an honest if yet disturbing account thereof. The story conveys moreover a sense of hopelessness since the young women in the end struggle to accept a ‘normal’ existence after finishing military service.

The characters that represent ‘the other’ are mostly anonymous Palestinians at the checkpoint. Most of them are construction workers, waiting for the soldier’s goodwill to let them through to the Israeli side. Fadi is the only Palestinian man that is named at the checkpoint. Yet, he remains anonymous, since the reader only gets to know him through Lea’s derailed imagination. That is, until he out of frustration stabs an officer.²⁷³

Thus, the Palestinians are generally rendered as docile and powerless with exception of Fadi and the fearless Palestinian boys that appear in the beginning of the novel and a few peripheral mentions of suicide bombers.²⁷⁴ The image of ‘the other’ is clearly conveyed as the product of the young women’s limited worldview and appears for the most part as a flat and stereotypical. However, the rendering of ‘the other’ is ambivalent, and I regard it as a possibility that the author’s incitement is to mock colonialist behaviour, rather than further fortify stereotypical images of ‘the other’ as well as she mocks the Israeli military establishment.

²⁷² Ibid, p. 63.

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 82.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 314.

Conclusion

The YA literature of my study shows that all the protagonists are rendered in a round and multidimensional manner; they evolve and overcome crises through different creative means in almost all novels. This displays a conspicuous contrast to ‘the other’, which is most often rendered in a flat and one-dimensional manner. However, there are some exceptions, which count *Samir & Yonatan*, *Dancing Arabs* and *Habibi*.

It’s interesting to note that Kashua’s and Shihab Nye’s double cultural background contribute with a cultural/religious complexity - in *Habibi* a Westernized religious perspective meets a Middle Eastern context and in *Dancing Arabs* Kashua conveys an ambivalent identity theme, which transcends the common understanding of ‘the Arab’ or ‘the Jew’. *The people of forever are not afraid* conveys moreover an ambivalent image of ‘the other’, which can be interpreted as flat or round, depending on how the reader interacts with the story.

It’s moreover interesting to note that Boianjiu’s and Kashua’s stories are two of the more recently published novels and render protagonists that aren’t fully loyal to their national background. Thus, the narratives entail an aspect of self-criticism, which doesn’t occur in any of the other novels. A colonizing theme is moreover salient in these two books, but with a twist as mentioned earlier in relation to my analysis of Boianjiu’s novel. In *Dancing Arabs* the protagonist’s desire to become a Jew can be understood as a kind of reversed colonization. I find it therefore credible that it’s the authors’ intent to problematize the Israeli-Palestinian relation rather than consolidate a stereotypical image of ‘the other’ through a colonizing theme.

I truly appreciate the speculative storyline in *Dancing Arabs* that yet unfolds within an authentic historic and cultural frame. I also appreciate having read Barakats’s *Tasting the sky* for its poetic qualities and for its authentic historic frame and character rendering. Hence, good literature can’t solely be recognized by whether it conveys a non-stereotypical character rendering of ‘the other’ or not – if a flat characterization of ‘the other’ is well motivated, as in Barakat’s novel, then I think it’s perfectly justified and can moreover lead to a better understanding of the Palestinian experience.

It’s evident that Palestinian affiliated narratives render the most stereotypical images of ‘the other’ while Israeli affiliated narratives seemingly are more open-minded in their constitution. However, I recognize a multicultural inclusion theme of ‘the other’ in both Israeli and Palestinian narratives, counting; *Dancing Arabs*, *Habibi* and *Samir & Yonatan*.

That can be correlated to Kristeva's theory of the inclusion of 'the other' as a means to escape the fear of the external foreign. However, it can also be understood as the author's suggestion to dismantle the construction of 'the us' and 'the other' as a part of the protagonist's identity redefinition. In more calm times there's according to Bar-On an increased 'freedom to express aspects of identity that derive from personal biography, whether or not they are valued by the collective'.²⁷⁵ Such redefinition allows a new view to develop of 'the other' as a viable partner 'in a future peaceful coexistence'.²⁷⁶

Most of the narratives of my selection are set in the First Intifada, again with some exceptions that counts; *Tasting the sky* that is set in the Six-Day War, *Dancing Arabs* and *The people of forever are not afraid*, which briefly touches upon the Second Intifada.

The First Intifada was for the most part a peaceful uprising and explains why religiously motivated fanaticism of, for instance, Hamas or the Israeli settler movement aren't central in these novels - with the exception of *A stone in my hand*, in which the protagonist's brother aspires to get involved with Islamic Jihad.

The First Intifada was a time when the Palestinian people emancipated themselves from a state of powerlessness and which involved children. All what they had were stones and throwing them was an act of liberation and a resistance to injustice. I believe that's why so many of the Palestinian or Palestinian affiliated stories are set in that timeframe since it acknowledges the right to express freedom from Israeli occupation and can in that sense be understood as a type of 'the empire writes back' responses.

However, the spirit of resistance seemingly transforms into creativity in the stories – whether it entails writing poetry, building computer landscapes or kites. I think that shows a very beautiful aspect of it, since it promotes life and confirms the prospect of a peaceful future.

The sparse occurrence of religious extremism in the YA literature reflect moreover that people demand good stories that can remind them of the possibility of leading a peaceful life. Isn't that what we all need? Good stories that remind us that we can write our own narratives and take active part in the shaping of our destiny? Stories that remind us that we can rise up against the dark forces in this world and live in freedom and at peace?

On the basis of the books I have read I can conclude that YA literature potentially can contribute to a better understanding of 'the other' and inspire to dialogue, which I regard as a

²⁷⁵ Bar-On, p. 6.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

step towards peace. By learning how to think differently of ‘the other’ people can figuratively soar over the dividing wall. Yes, it’s true that the separating wall still exists, but the real dividing wall exists in our minds and it can be destroyed. Until then, let’s remember that as long as there is a wall, it’s possible to find doors in it.²⁷⁷ Let’s find those doors.

²⁷⁷ Shihab Nye, p. 258.

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