Palestinian Identity in Hybrid Texts in Hebrew

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“L’identité est un triple mouvement d’effraction, de gommage et de réécriture de soi”

Achile Mbembé
Abstract

The current paper discusses Palestinian hybrid texts (novels) in Hebrew as part of hybrid identity in postcolonial discourse and in the context of Mahmoud Darwish’s “Third way.” Novels written by Palestinians from Israel, Atallah Mansour (1935-), Anton Shammas (1950-) and Sayed Kashua (1975-), set from a minority perspective in the context of Israel-Palestine, involve a space in which the Palestinian Arab identity of the writer meets Hebrew, the symbol of Jewish hegemony, and creates a liminal and hybrid space, in which majority and minority’s identities and cultures intertwine and collide. The hybridity process engaged by these Palestinian writers is complex and violent. On the one hand, the Palestinian minor narrative suggests a different Palestinian character from the “absent” and the “shadow” one encountered in Israeli literature. On the other hand, these novels are part of an ephemeral literature since the claim of these writers for a space in Hebrew literature, conceived and built by political Zionism as an exclusively Jewish literature, failed.

Keywords: Hebrew & Palestinian Arab Literatures – Minor Literature – Postcolonial literature - Anton Shammas – Atallah Mansour – Sayed Kashua – Palestinian novel in Hebrew – bilingualism and Translingualism
Introduction

With the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, also known as the Palestinian Nakba (disaster), the majority of the indigenous population was expelled and only a minority remained representing close to 20% of the Israeli population. They identify themselves as Palestinian and the Arabic language is a central linguistic and cultural reference. Yet, since Hebrew is the hegemonic language, they became de facto bilingual and use Hebrew for their day-to-day work-related interactions. Mahmoud Darwish’s early history speaks to these “minority-language” considerations. The National poet of Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), belonged until 1970 to the Palestinian minority in Israel, where he remained with his family, attended school, learnt Hebrew and embarked on a political, artistic and journalistic career. Apart from being a lover of Palestine, Darwish’s contacts with Israeli Jews and the Hebrew language were important for his intellectual development. The poet, through the role of his Hebrew teacher, named Shoshana, describes his first peaceful relationship with “the other:”

She saved me from the hell of hatred (...) Shoshana taught me to read the Bible as a literary production and she taught me to study Bialik not for his fervour in his political engagement but for his poetic commitment (...) Shoshana saved me from the hatred that the military regime has created inside me. She destroyed the walls erected by this regime. (Khallid, 2001).

Darwish wrote in Arabic with the representation of otherness. His poem Rita and the riffle reflected his love story with a young Israeli woman, while A Soldier dreams of white Lilies tells the despair of an Israeli soldier who took part during the 1967 war in the military operations against the Palestinians in Abu Tor, a suburb of Jerusalem. In this instance, his Israeli experience is not unique, but is shared by other Palestinians who represent the Palestinian minority in Israel. Darwish returned only once, in 1996, to his home for a brief stay. During that visit, he exchanged with the Israeli poet and journalist Helit Yeshurun in Hebrew on various issues such as his conception of “the other” (the Israeli) and his interaction with the Palestinian. He says:

It is impossible for me to evade the place that the Israeli has occupied in my identity. He exists, whatever I may think of him. He is a physical and psychological fact. The Israelis changed the Palestinians and vice versa. The Israelis are not the same people that came, and the Palestinians are not the same people that once were. In the one, there is the other (...) At this moment we are speaking about the Israeli component of Palestinian identity. It is a multivalent, heterogeneous element. I need heterogeneity. It enriches me. The other [a ḥer] is a responsibility [a ḥarayut] and a test. (...) Will a third way emerge from these two? That is the test. (Yeshurun, 1996).²

The Israeli, his language and culture, shaped Darwish’s identity, as it did with other Palestinian writers from Israel such as Atallah Mansour, Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua. However, Mahmoud Darwish chose to
write poetry in Arabic while the others favored Hebrew to write novels, plays and movies and thereby create a literary space where Jewish and Palestinian narratives can no longer ignore each other (Brenner, 2003). Set in what Mahmoud Darwish called the “third way” and the “heterogeneous identity,” this paper will review the choice of the Hebrew language by Palestinian writers in order to explore their novels which are primarily centred on Palestinian heterogeneous characters set within minority and majority relations. Yet, they are different characters to the ones we encounter in Israeli novels authored by Israeli-Jewish writers: They claim their identity, their language and their minority culture in Hebrew.

Indeed, there is unanimity in describing the Palestinian character as a problematic literary one within Hebrew literature. Françoise Saquer-Sabin’s (1997) study of Arab characters in twentieth century Israeli literature mentions “absence,” “denial” and “dependence” to describe the way Israeli writers (Mizrahim or Ashkenazim) shape Palestinian characters in their novels, including the ones who are citizens of Israel. Furthermore, “[…] the words "Arab " or " Bedouin ", or other substitute which were used in different periods, defined the other - the one that stood out from an implicit norm - from the perspective of Jewish identity and the Israeli citizenship” (Saquer-Sabin, 2009). The Lebanese writer, Elias Khoury, draws a similar conclusion and says, “the truth is that there is no Palestinian. It’s a big question, why there are no Palestinians in Israeli literature, and if there are, they are very marginal, they are a shadow” (Sela, 2014). Here we have Palestinians writings about Palestine, its history, its identity, its language and space, for Israeli Jews and in Hebrew. The close reading of the novels and the consideration of the relationship of each author with his language of writing highlights the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the Israeli social and cultural discourse which prevents creating characters independently from the political and ideological field (Ramras-Rauch, 1989). Thereby, it forces some Palestinian writers to have no choice other than writing political novels about their identity in the language of “the other.”

The Minor Use of Hebrew by Palestinians

The Palestinian novel in Hebrew combine the Palestinian Arab identity of the writer with Hebrew writing and in that framework Yassir Suleiman labels them “hybrid texts:”

“[…] Hybrid texts (prose-fiction) are texts written by authors of Arab origin –descent or heritage – not in Arabic, but in another language, such as French, English or Hebrew, among Palestinians in Israel. These texts are assigned to different cultural locations, which may be defined by the dominant language of the text, the background of the author or in a third space or twilight zone between these two worlds” (Suleiman, 2013: 167).

The number of these novels is limited⁴, however, the particular interplay between Palestinian characters and their interaction with the “other,” the Israeli Jew, brings to the Israeli public arena the issue of Palestinian
identity/identities and discusses their fragile political and social status as a minority group within the hegemonic Jewish society.

On first analysis, this literature refers to the phenomenon of creative writing in a language other than the “native” or the “major” language, which in itself is not unique in the current globalized world. It could belong to the long list of colonial and postcolonial authors who use other languages in literature. For instance, Yasmina Khadra⁴ and Ahmadou Kourouma⁵, African writers and native speakers of Arabic and Maninka, write in French, while Asian writers such as Arundhati Roy⁶ and Ha Jin⁷, native speakers of Malayalam and Chinese, publish in English. Add to that normality of our period, writers from the Korean minority in Japan who write in Japanese. The Palestinian counterpart doesn’t fit in these categories. Why then is Palestinian literature written in Hebrew seen and described as exceptional? Why write “the turbulent search for identity by the Israel branch of the Palestinian community is unique” (Bouskila, 1999)? Why is the Hebrew fiction of Anton Shammas not as “familiar” as “ordinary” as the French writing of Yasmina Khadra? This situation is indeed exceptional since this literary writing is set in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which Arabic and Hebrew are key and founding elements for each identity. Yasmina Khadra and the other post-colonial writers use languages that have taken roots with the colonial expansion of the Modern era (French in Algeria, English in India), however, Hebrew is part of the rebirth of a modern language and literature as part of a Jewish national project, the Zionist project, and as an exclusively Jewish project. Despite the exclusion of the Palestinians from this renaissance plan, they learnt and mastered the major language, the symbol of Jewish Zionist hegemony, for their survival as a minority in the Israeli context. By using Hebrew in literature, Palestinians attempted, at first, to break this exclusivity and bring the voice of the Palestinian identity and its narrative to Hebrew literature in order to create a direct dialogic interaction with the Hebrew reader. Mansour declares that he made Hebrew an International language (1975), Shammas intended to “unjew” it (1989) and as for Kashua he simply explained: “I wanted to tell the Israelis a story, the Palestinian story” (2013).

The context of the Palestinian literary experience in Hebrew is the context of Minor Literature. The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, by studying the literature written in German by Kafka (a Jew from Prague) as minor literature, opened new orientations in studying the literature of minorities from the perspective of language use. They write, “a minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975). Minor here doesn’t involve quantity and numbers (majority and minority) but it relates to the conditions, revolutionary conditions, according to them, of a marginal literature within a homogenous one. Hannan Hever, who introduced the concept of minor literature in Palestinian literature in Israel (1987), insists that the use of the political and cultural categories “majority” and “minority” blurs the powerful relationship which exists between them within a unique political system (Hever, 2002). The question is not about the status of Arabic, the Palestinian minority’s language, in Israel, but it is about the minor use by the Palestinian minority, as Arabic speakers, of
Hebrew as the majority language. In other words: how and why did the bilingual writers, Atallah Mansour and Anton Shammas and the translingual8 (Grutman, 2007) writer Sayed Kashua, use Hebrew for writing literature?

It is in 1966 that the Palestinians started using and publishing in Hebrew. First, the poet Rashid Hussein9 translated Israel’s National poet Haim Nahman Bialik10 into Arabic. Then the then young Palestinian lawyer Sabri Jiryis (1938 - ) wrote a political pamphlet titled The Arabs in Israel in Hebrew. Finally, a young writer and journalist, Atallah Mansour, published a novel, the first Palestinian novel written in Hebrew, In a New Light. Less than 20 years after the birth of the State of Israel, Palestinians had appropriated the Hebrew language for different writing purposes in literature and in translation despite the hostile environment. Indeed, the authors of the first Palestinian hybrid texts in Hebrew faced major difficulties. First, they were cut off from the Arab literary world, which was booming since its Nahda11. Second, despite their mastery of the majority’s language and its literature since the 1950s12, these Palestinian intellectuals evolved outside the Jewish intellectual and literary circles.

Palestinian Minor Identity in Three Hebrew Literary Experiences

The langue choices of these authors are addressed in this article from an individual experience. The literary corpus for this study is representative of writers of diverse origin (Christians and Muslims). From the period set in between 1966 and 2013, we have established three generations:

1. The first Nakba generation (1948-1966) to which Atallah Mansour belongs
2. The Naksa generation (1967 – 1987) represents Anton Shammas’s period. Naksa is an Arabic name for defeat and refers to the Arab defeat during the six-day war in 1967.
3. The third Nakba generation (from 1988 up to present) fits the profile and the period of Sayed Kashua13.

Importantly the conditions in which Atallah Mansour evolved were different from those of Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua. Mansour witnessed the birth of the State of Israel and the deterritorialisation of the Palestinians. At the time, there were no public schools which trained Palestinians in Hebrew and therefore, the effort to acquire this new language represented an individual one. After 1967, the Hebrew language was present in a large way among the Palestinians in Israel and also in the Territories. In his novel The Pessoptimist (1974), Emile Habibi (1922-1996) writes “but what is strange is that now, a quarter century later, the soap makers of Nablus were able to learn Hebrew perfectly in less than two years” (Habibi, 1989: 49). Shammas, with his counterparts, Naim Araid, Siham Daoud and Salman Natour, had access to bilingual scholarship and hence were able to write both in Hebrew and Arabic and translate between both languages. Kashua, however, attended an exclusively Hebrew school. It was impossible for him to write novels in literary Arabic. Kashua, who published three novels, broke from the bilingual achievement of his predecessors in literature and became
a translingual writer, a writer who writes exclusively in a language other than his mother’s Arabic. If the experience of each author with Hebrew is different, so are the novels.

Atallah Mansour (The first Nakba generation 1948 – 1966): Yossi-Youssef, the first hybrid Palestinian identity in Hebrew literature

Addressing his praised novel In A New Light, Atallah Mansour writes in his autobiography

(…) less than one hundred years after its modern revival, the Hebrew language had been chosen by a non-Jew as his mode of expression. In a way I had made Hebrew an international language for the first time in its long history. (A. Mansour, 2013: 150).

Mansour, a bilingual writer and journalist, was born in 1935 to a Christian family from al-Jish. He witnessed the deterritorialisation of the Palestinian people during the Nakba and lived himself in exile for a year in Lebanon before his father brought him back to the new State, Israel. He left his village and went to Haifa, became a worker and built contacts with communists and young Israeli left Zionists. He acquired Hebrew through his relations with MAPAM and their several training programs for Arabs organized in their kibbutzim. In contrast to other members of his generations, such as Rashid Hussein, Mansour was never involved in a particular political movement. He was very suspicious of Palestinian political organizations and expressed sympathy with left Zionism. For instance, he is proud of having been the first Arab who met one the founders Israel, David Ben Gurion (Mansour, 2013).

Mansour wrote about the Palestinian minority in Arabic and Hebrew in what is called realistic fiction. He first published a novel in Arabic in 1962 titled And Samira Stayed (Wabaqeyat Samira) in which he portrays the hard and tragic life of a young Palestinian woman trying to survive in her village in Israel after the departure of her husband to Beirut in 1948. The novel represented a call for the modernization of the Palestinian peasant society but was harshly challenged by Arab critics, like Issa Loubani, for having hidden the oppressive role of the Israeli troops in 1948 and questioning the choice of a character who left his land instead of being expelled by Jewish troupes (Ghanayim, 2008). In his defence, Mansour wrote: “I was trying to draw a more complicated analogy between Samira’s condition and that of the Palestinian people” (Mansour, 2013: 144-145). In this instance, Mansour is referring to the fact that the Palestinian minority in Israel was subjected to a military regime from 1948 until 1966. As for Israeli reactions, the newspaper Maariv published a front-page review accusing Mansour of attacking the army (Tsahal) and the Jewish people. This was enough to motivate him to write in Hebrew In a New Light (1966): “the easy way out would have been to apologize for my attitude. Instead, I chose to become a Hebrew writer. My Hebrew novel, I feel, was a more mature effort than my earlier Arabic one.” (Mansour, 2013: 148).
The novel is set in the first years that followed the birth of the State of Israel. The main character, Yossi Mizrahi, is a member of a kibbutz, built on the ruins of a destroyed Palestinian village in 1948. He shares the socialist ideals of its members. His aim is to free humanity including those he considers to be “the backward Arabs” from the neighbouring Arab village. Like other Kibbutzim, Yossi shared the idea of bringing civilization to these “savages”:

Poor ignorant louts who know nothing about the Law of the Universe, who always mistake the casual for the causal! But they too, must not be left out of the scheme of things, and it is incumbent on us to bring our gospel to them whether they like it or not” (Mansour, 1966: 14)

In reality, Yossi experiences a problematic crisis: he was born Palestinian but pretends to be a Jew. Yossi is in fact Youssef and was adopted as a child by a Jewish man after his father’s death. He was more familiar with Hebrew and with Jewish traditions than with the Arab ones. He spoke Hebrew and not Arabic. He remembers his brothers and sisters from his Jewish adopted family and ignores everything about his Palestinian family. He enjoyed the Kibbutz’s life and believed in the socialist ideal of equality between its members. When his Jewish comrades discover the truth, their attitude changes and in their majority they challenge his membership of the Kibbutz and argue that he belongs to his ethnic group: the Arabs. Yossi-Youssef fights for his membership and for his hybrid identity, but fails. He is subsequently admitted as a full member but with the denial of his identity: he is neither a Jew nor an Arab.

Mansour confirms his aim “this time my message was clear: I was criticizing Israeli society for its chauvinism and its inability to solve a human problem” (Mansour, 2013: 149). Mansour discusses dual identities as set in ideological and physical spaces: Jewish and Arab identities in the space of a Kibbutz and a Palestinian village dominated by Zionist ideology. He chose to criticize the ideological foundation of the State of Israel. Yossi-Youssef tries to be distant from Zionism and Arab nationalism. However, Mansour used this “neutral” character in order to expose the reality of a minority and thereby exposing the hypocrisy of Kibbutz ideology, which was conceived for Jews only. In other words, Youssef cannot be part of his chosen social group because he is not part of the Jewish people. Yossi-Youssef fights for his identity as a plea for a place within the Israeli identity, but he failed, facing opposition based on ethnic grounds. In this sense, this is a first attempt by a Palestinian to use Hebrew as a tool and Palestinian identity as a subject to construct (deconstruct) the image of the Palestinian character within Hebrew literature: the Palestinian character talks, thinks and stands for his minority’s rights.

In a New light is the only novel written by Mansour in what he calls the language of his “Step-Father” (Mansour 2013) and it was never translated into Arabic for financial reasons. Mansour is a journalist, the first Palestinian journalist who worked for a Hebrew language newspaper, Haaretz, (Benziman, 2004) and spent the
rest of his career writing articles related to the political and military conflicts in the region in Arabic and Hebrew and as he mentioned in his autobiography he is “still waiting for the dawn” (Mansour 2013).

The next generation to follow is different from Mansour’s experiences. After 1967 war and after the abolition of the military regime in 1966, a new generation of writers, poets and actors emerged with a bilingual (Arabic-Hebrew) trying to find a common ground between Palestinian and Israeli cultures. Among them: Naim Araidi (1950-2015), Siham Daoud (1952), Salman Natour (1949-2016), Mohammed Bakri (1953). However, the most outspoken Palestinian literary revolt against the exclusive Hebrew literature is Anton Shammas’ novel Arabesques.

**Anton Shammas (The Naksa generation 1967-1987): Arabesques, between Jewish (Israeli) time and Arab (Palestinian) space**

Anton Shammas, a Palestinian writer from Israel, published Arabesques his first and only novel in Hebrew in 1986, a few months before the beginning of the first Intifada. Most of the Israeli literary critics highlighted his mastery of the Hebrew language and of Jewish culture in his novel, which was written under the influence of the narrative style of one of the most famous narrators in Arabic literature, Shahrazad. To summarise his novel, Shammas said:

One of the things I am trying to do in these chapters, is get at the different ways in which one constructs an identity in Israel. The Palestinian identity is with the land, time is jumbled, and swirls around it. That is what I attempt to show in the Fassuta chapters, the tale itself. But when I leave the village, what is the identity? Jewish identity is not constructed the way Arab identity is. Understand this and you understand the magnitude of the problem here - and also perhaps the place of the novel. (G. Marzorati, 1988).

Anton Shammas is probably the most respected bilingual Palestinian writer among Hebrew (and Arab) readers. Born in 1950 in a Christian family from Fassuta, his first contacts with the Hebrew language took place with his family’s move to Haifa and when he attended a school where Hebrew was taught. He then went to University in Jerusalem and practiced journalism and poetry. Apart from writing poetry in Hebrew and Arabic, Shammas is best known for his magnificent semi-autobiographical novel Arabesques in which he addresses his hybrid identities as a writer, as a narrator and, as the main character, interacting with other identities in different spaces questioning: Who am I? Palestinian, Israeli? While claiming and proclaiming Palestinian identity.
Writing in Hebrew a “Sindibadian” Adventure

Using the Hebrew language, and particularly the writing of Arabesques was for Shammas a “Sindibadian” adventure (M. Seddiq, 2000). However, his first encounter with the language, the language of his mother-in-law (G. Marzorati, 1988) was tortuous. Shammas was 12 years old when he left his village, Fassuta, and settled with his family in a poor suburb of Haifa. Shammas likes to recount his shock when he first encountered the Hebrew language in an incident that took place upon his arrival in Haifa. His mother sent him to the Jewish shop in order to buy sunflower seeds. Such a banal task turns into torture, for he does not master Hebrew. He is petrified by the reply of the merchant: “with or without salt?” The incident was traumatic for the teenager and it pushed him to learn and master Hebrew: “I took my seeds - without salt. And I walked home, vowing I would one day know Hebrew better than either of them.” (Marzorati, 1988). This anecdote, certainly very personal, reflects more the uneasiness felt after the transition from the village to the big city than the change in the material situation of the family, a traumatic situation, which is absent in his novel. Indeed, Shammas didn’t include this brief part of his life in Arabesques: “I could not write about it in the novel (...) It was for me a six-year nightmare.”

Shammas’s experience with Arabic and Hebrew raises the problematic choice of writing between both languages. Arabesques’s language was not clear from the beginning. The literary project was first conceived in Arabic in 1979, however, the writer didn’t feel the freedom to narrate the story of his family set between spatial references (Fassuta) and family names (Shammas). A priori, it is the lack of freedom in his writing in Arabic “I kept hearing the relatives breathing down my neck, watching over their stories,” which provoked the language switch.

Arabesques: Palestinian History, Identity and Geography

The novel, in which we encounter a main character named Anton Shammas, is divided into two parts: “the tale,” the collective narrative, which tells the story of the Shammas family, its origin, its settlement in Fassuta, the defensive mobilization of the villagers in 1948 facing the Jewish army and the new minority framework of the remaining Palestinians after the Nakba. “The teller,” the individual narrative, is based on Anton Shammas, a journalist and a Hebrew writer, investigating his alter ego and cousin, Michel Abyad, working for the Center for Palestine Studies in Beirut. His quest takes us on a Journey to the occupied Palestinian Territories, to Paris and to the United States where he meets people from the Middle East, Europe and North America.

The section which takes place in the Parisian cemetery of Père-Lachaise, is symbolic of the relationship between literature and identity, between Palestinian identity and the Jewish one and the existence of a political dialogue within Arabesques (Brenner, 2001). Paris is known for being a romantic city, but for Anton, only
death makes the idea of sharing a space possible. The human plurality is symbolized by the visit of Anton to *Père-Lachaise*. It is well known that this cemetery is a museum representing a human mosaic: Jews, Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians and atheists are buried next to one another, without any separation. Anton’s aim was to visit the grave of Marcel Proust, "the Jew of the time" but he also encountered the grave of the PLO representative in France, Mahmoud el-Hamshari, addressed in the novel as "the Arab of the place" and “the man of the lost homeland”:

It must have been the French sense of humour that granted both of them, the man of the lost country and the man of *temps perdu*, nearly identical grave (...) Fifty years separate the two lost times, the two darknesses. But both are equally lost under the flowers of remembrance. (Shammas, 2001: 136).

El-Hamshary and Proust’s graves are only a reflection of Anton’s relationship to a whimsical Israeli character Yehoshua Bar-On, a direct representative of Hebrew literature in *Arabesques*. It is commonly accepted that Bar-On represents the Israeli writer, A. B. Yehoshua who belongs to the writers of the Israeli Statehood generation. Bar-On chose Anton as a model for his new novel in which a Palestinian is the main character. However Anton doesn’t fit the requirements of Bar-On:

My Jew will be an educated Arab. But not an intellectual. He does not gallop on the back of a thoroughbred mare, as was the custom at the turn of the century, nor is he a prisoner of the IDF, as was the custom at the turn of the state. Nor is he A. B. Yehoshua’s adolescent Lover. He speaks and writes excellent Hebrew, but within the bounds of the permissible. (Shammas, 2001: 91).

Bar-On questions Anton for being a model for his character. He is Palestinian and masters both Hebrew language and culture and therefore it is hard for him to draw lines between himself and Anton. For that reason, Bar-On drops the idea of having Anton as a character and chooses instead Paco, a Palestinian from the West Bank, as an easy symbol to write about. If Bar-On is “a restricted zone” (Shammas, 2001: 136), which is a symbol of this Jewish identity as encountered by Anton, the Palestinian of Israel is a continuous problem in the midst of Jewish hegemony.

The encounter between Anton and Michel takes place at the end of the novel and outside Israel-Palestine in a neutral and safe place for the encounters of identities. Michel, the exiled Palestinian, hands Anton a manuscript, his autobiography, and insists: “Take this file and see what you can do with it. Translate it, adapt it, add or subtract. But leave me in. I didn’t take the time to arrange the material. I haven’t even found a title for it ….” (Shammas, 2001: 259). By doing so, Anton linked his identity as a Palestinian from Israel to the identity of the exiled Palestinians in order to make a single and rich narrative. If we consider Vincent Jouve's (2001) use of Perlocutionary force (the intention of the writer) and illocutionary effect (his capacity to act on
the reader), Shammas managed to transfer to the Hebrew reader a Palestinian identity in its plural and diverse forms. *Arabesques* clearly defines the different tensions between Shammas, a Palestinian from Israel, and other Palestinians, without creating a gap between the two. The novel goes further to explore the Jewish-Israeli representative of Hebrew literature and confronts the liberal perceptions of Bar-On with the identities that Anton could have: a Palestinian, an Israeli and a world citizen. The manuscript handed by Michel to Anton during their encounter and the call for the dissemination of its content, reflects the role Shammas assigns to this novel: it is about the narration of Palestinian space, time and identity in the heart of Hebrew literature.

Anton Shammas’s literary adventure with Hebrew has since stopped. He left Israel for Michigan and cut all his links with Hebrew literature. More importantly, he refused to have his book translated into Arabic because he wanted to protect his close family, whose members were models for different characters in the Fassuta tale. Apart from teaching Middle Eastern Literature at Ann Arbor, Shammas invests his time in writing about his experiences in the translation field between Hebrew and Arabic. In his translation in 2006 of Taha Mohammed Ali (1931-2011) poems into Hebrew, Shammas redefined his Palestinian minor use of Hebrew as follows:

However the biggest challenge was to impose constraints on the language that turned into agony the life of Taha Mohammed Ali and of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians during the Nakba. To force the language to stop and listen to the voice of his agony. To open the door for an imaginary return to Saffouriah. To listen to his narrative and to implicitly acknowledge its responsibility in his Nakba of mid-July 1948 (Shammas, 2013: 27).

Mansour and Shammas’s experiences point to their failure in their attempt to make a space for Palestinian writers in Hebrew literature. The conditions in which their novels were published were marked by a very tense political and ideological context, but since then, Sayed Kashua has written in harsher conditions marked by both Intifadas and by the weakening of Palestinian identity and rights in Israel. Like his predecessors, the Palestinian identity in Israel is a central theme of Kashua’s hybrid texts.

**Sayed Kashua (The third Nakba generation 1988 - ), the Pessoptimist Writer**

Born in 1975 to a Muslim family from Tira (Triangle region), Kashua, a writer and a journalist, first attended an Arab-Palestinian school in his town before moving to Jerusalem at the age of 14 where he integrated a Jewish boarding school. Kashua admits the difficulty of his early Jerusalem experience “All of the classes were in Hebrew – science, bible, literature. I sat there not understanding one word. When I tried to speak everyone would laugh at me. I so much wanted to run back home, to my family, to the village and friends, to the Arabic language” (Kashua, 2014). In addition, his early encounter with Hebrew prevented him from mastering Arabic literary language and instead he acquired Hebrew language and literature. “Very quickly my Hebrew became nearly perfect. The boarding school library only had books in Hebrew, so I began to read Israeli authors. I read
Agnon, Meir Shalev, Amos Oz and I started to read about Zionism, about Judaism and the building of the homeland” (Kashua, 2014). Kashua’s experience in the Hebrew School system is not unique since it is common for young people of his generation to attend exclusively Jewish schools. Ayman Sikecck, the author of the 2010 Hebrew novel Al Yaffo (To Jaffa) attended a Jewish-Hebrew school for its high standards in education which are lacking in the Arab Palestinian education system in Israel. He therefore cannot write in another language than Hebrew and he does not master literary Arabic.

Kashua and Sikecck are part of the category of translanguial writers. That is to say the writers whose literary language writing is different from their mother tongues. For Steven Kellman, Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad, Kateb Yacine, Wole Soyinka and Nathalie Sarraute represent a peculiarity of our century since these writers published in different languages “which are not those in which their mothers sang them lullabies” (Kellman, 1991: 528). Positioning Kashua as a translanguial and a minor writer highlights his impossibility to write about the Palestinian Identity other than in Hebrew and emphasize his perspective to transfer to the Hebrew (Israeli) reader the Palestinian narrative.

Kashua published three novels: Dancing Arabs (2002), Let It Be morning (2006) and Second Person Singular (2010) and a short story, Cinderella (2005). He is the scriptwriter of two major sitcoms in Israel: Arab Labor and The scriptwriter in which the Israeli public enjoys in both Hebrew and in Palestinian colloquial Arabic, the adventures of Arab characters within Hebrew Jewish society. Sayed Kashua combines humour, irony and sometimes mockery to tell stories set between optimism and pessimism. In that sense, he is an example of a “Pessoptimist,” a word invented by Emile Habibi for his character Said, a symbol of the Palestinian minority in Israel, satisfied for having been able to stay on his land and satisfied for not having known worse than expulsion. Kashua is both happy and unhappy for being a Palestinian Hebrew writer in the midst of a long lasting political conflict. Irony is deployed by the author as a manoeuvre and a strategy, which concedes freedom to the author in order to narrate a difficult and painful situation without disrupting his position neither in Hebrew literature nor in his relationship with the Jewish reader.

The translation of Kashua’s literary works into Arabic marks a major difference between him, Mansour and Shammas. He has regularly expressed his wish to see his novels translated into Arabic. In 2011, Gamal al-Refaeey, an Egyptian Professor of Hebrew language and literature, translated Dancing Arabs for Markaz al-Mahrous in Cairo. Therefore, Kashua became the first and only Palestinian who writes in Hebrew to be translated by an Arab publishing house. Then in 2012, the Lebanese Publishing Company, Daar al-Saqi, translated Let It Be Morning into Arabic, but the novel was classified as French literature and the translation was performed from French by Marie Tawk Ghosh since she doesn’t master Hebrew. This situation speaks to the existing, but unknown, channel of cultural exchanges, which is taking place in this very narrow field of translation between Hebrew and Arabic. It mostly highlights the interest of the Arab reader for the subject of
Palestinian identity within the Hebrew context.

Kashua’s novels address Palestinian identity in its collective and individual forms impossible and uncertain minor identities but always with its relation to the Israeli Jew. In Dancing Arabs, Kashua uses the dance as a metaphor for an impossible identity. Published during the start of the second Intifada (2011), Dancing Arabs narrates the life of a Palestinian, a nameless hero-narrator, from childhood to adulthood. Combined with fiction, the novel is partially about Sayed Kashua, but the reader is not aware when fiction starts and when autobiography stops. The protagonist leaves the quietness of his village to enter a prestigious Hebrew school in Jerusalem. The interaction between Palestinian and Jewish realities impacts on him and shapes his childhood consciousness from his understanding of Zionism to questioning his own Palestinian identity. Central to this story is the discrimination this Palestinian character faces within the Israeli-Jewish society and the different strategies he uses to wear a Jewish “mask” and hide his Palestinian “skin.” The hero-narrator understood that the only way out is to avoid being identified as an Arab, from the way he dresses to what language he uses. He likes disco and says that he doesn’t dance the Dabkeh. He doesn’t speak Arabic except in closed spaces with his family and he even speaks Hebrew to other Palestinians. He hates them to the point of wanting to deny them the simple happiness of dancing during a Jewish festival. This following quote summarizes the psychological posture of the main character: the more the Jewish side rejects him, the more he hates the Arabs for it:

It’s the night of Purim and two Arabs are taking over the dance floor …They are really ugly, especially the short one with the moustache. He swivels his ass, crammed into those cloth pants of his, making a mockery not only of himself but of anyone dancing next to him - of the whole bar, especially Shadia and me. If he wasn't so clueless, he wouldn't dare to dance. Why should Arabs like him be dancing disco anyway? Don't they realize how different they are, how out of place, how ugly? (Kashua, S. 2004: 173).

Dancing Arabs talks about the impossible identity of a Palestinian who wanted to be Jewish and dance Jewish, dance Disco not Dabkeh. However, he fails. This failure is amplified when he sees other Arabs dancing. These Arabs are competing with him in the process of imitating a Jew. By dancing disco, these Palestinians remind him of his self-image: an ugly imitation of another identity, an impossible one.

Sayed Kashua’s second novel, Let It Be Morning, is about the continued uncertainty of the collective Palestinian identity in Israel. Once again, the main character of the novel is nameless, but this time he is a journalist working for a Jewish newspaper in a big city during the highest tensions of the second Intifada. After being idolized by his Jewish workmates for being a “good Arab,” he became professionally and socially isolated, lost his work and returned to his village. Suddenly, without any notice, water, telephone and electricity were cut and the Israeli army surrounded his village. Every resident saw this military operation as a
mistake. They believed the army was looking for dafawiya\textsuperscript{20} who were living illegally in the village and so they turned them over to the military as proof of their loyalty. After a few chaotic days, the inhabitants discovered that their village became part of the new Palestinian State and lost their Israeli citizenship. Some of its residents are worried and hostile to their new State, they prefer to remain Israelis. They felt betrayed by Israel: “The Jews have sold us down the river” says one of them (Kashua S., 2006: 268).

*Let It Be Morning* is the most political novel of Kashua wrote. It was published during the year in which Avigdor Leiberman, the head of the nationalist-exclusionist Israeli party, *Israel Beitenu*, suggested the transfer of Israeli Arab towns adjacent to Palestinian Authority areas in exchange for Jewish settlements in the West Bank. According to his plan, the only Arabs allowed to keep their Israeli citizenship would be the “loyal ones.” *Let It Be Morning* is a description of the concrete application of this plan. This novel is about the deep exploration of the torn collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel. They are Palestinian Arabs, but they are Israeli citizens and they don’t necessarily aspire to live in a common state with the Palestinians from the Territories. Here is a group living in Israel since 1948 and yet their identity and future remain uncertain.

*Second Person Singular*, Kashua’s third novel, is no longer about his life and fears, but rather about a deeper exploration of the Jewish side of the society and about the place of Palestinian identity, as complex as it can be, within the Israeli context. Kashua runs two parallel storylines within the divided space of Jerusalem, between it West (Jewish) and East (Palestinian) divide. The first storyline describes the turmoil of a Palestinian lawyer, who discovers a possible love affair between his wife and an Israeli Jew named Yonatan. The second storyline is about a Palestinian character, Amir Lahab, who usurps the legal identity of an Israeli Jew, also named Yonatan. Amir Lahab, is a social worker from Tira. He refuses to go back to his village and decides to leave his miserable job in East-Jerusalem, instead becoming a caregiver for a young Jewish paraplegic man. Rachele is this Yonatan’s mother. She is a liberal Jew, who treats Amir like her son. She allows him to read her son’s books, listen to his music, use his camera and wear his clothes. Amir becomes Yonatan’s double. With Rachele’s collusion, Amir appropriates Yonatan’s legal identity and enrols in a prestigious art school, *Betsalel*, to become a photographer. When the real Yonatan dies after Amir finishes arranging to take his legal identity, Amir the Palestinian starts a new Jewish life and gets rid of all of Yonatan’s belongings, including his books.

The novel is clearly a follow up of Kashua’s previous writings on identity crises of a Palestinian in Israel. This is the first time that Kashua gives a more important space to the desired Jewish identity. His protagonists aspire to the best position in their society and Amir is aware that identity is chosen and not inherited and he went for the best: “I was Yonatan Forschmidt: Israeli, white, Ashkenazi consumer of Western culture. I was not Sephardic and I was not the token Arab” (Kashua S., 2013). Furthermore, the Jew in the novel is not limited to
a person who humiliates a Palestinian because of his accent, or to a soldier monitoring a checkpoint or surrounding a village. No, in this novel, the Jew can also be: Oved the nice barman who serves coffee to the Lawyer; Merav the Librarian who helps the lawyer trace Yonatan; Osnat the nurse who trains Amir to take care of Yonatan and finally Rachele who helps Amir to become Yonatan and therefore to be her Palestinian son. Finally, the novel is about this sensitive young paraplegic man named Yonatan who inspires Amir to become a photographer and gives him a chance in a segregated society.

Sayed Kashua expresses in the language of the “other” multiple, impossible and uncertain identities. It is a space where two conflicting poles mark and reflect the fragility and the sensitivity of a minority to which he belongs. Narrating his reality in this “in-between” space falls in the strategy of “infiltration of Hebrew cultural context” (Hever, 2002) rather than a strategic choice of the language. Kashua hasn’t published a novel in Hebrew since 2010. He left Israel during the Gaza war (2014) and since then he only publishes a weekly article in Haaretz in which he describes his new life as an immigrant in the US and expresses with more freedom his criticism of Israeli society. Before leaving Israel, Kashua wrote in an article published in The Guardian the reasons for his departure from his home:

“Twenty-five years of writing in Hebrew, and nothing has changed. Twenty-five years clutching at the hope, believing it is not possible that people can be so blind. Twenty-five years during which I had few reasons to be optimistic but continued to believe that one day this place in which both Jews and Arabs live together would be the one story where the story of the other is not denied. That one day the Israelis would stop denying the Nakba, the Occupation, and the suffering of the Palestinian people. That one day the Palestinians would be willing to forgive and together we would build a place that was worth living in (...) When Jewish youth parade through the city shouting "Death to the Arabs," and attack Arabs only because they are Arabs, I understood that I had lost my little war” (Kashua, 2014).

Kashua admits lost battles: a battle for the right of the Palestinian minority in Israel, a battle to convince the Israel-Jewish reader and a battle to make room, as a Palestinian writer, within Hebrew literature.
Conclusion: Palestinian novels in Hebrew are ephemeral

Because of the political situation, it is impossible for Mansour, Shammas and Kashua not to write about Palestinian identity as shaped by the Israeli political framework and by the Palestinian historical disaster. It is also impossible for these authors not to be Pessoptimists “in-between” majority and minority. Therefore, it is impossible for them not to write in Hebrew. The three writers’ experiences with the use of the Hebrew language highlight the fact that there is no “common story or narrative” when it comes to the relationship of each one with the hegemonic language. Their stories are multiple and intimate and familial. Hebrew is a stepfather, a stepmother and a foster mother to Sayed Kashua.

Because Hebrew and Palestinian literatures take root and are shaped by a long-lasting colonial conflict, so is the Palestinian Hebrew novel. This prevents the creation of a Palestinian figure in the literary field outside politics. In conclusion, this literature is minor and political literature of a hybrid identity but it is also ephemeral due to the uncertain position within Hebrew literature. Atallah Mansour and Anton Shammas have never renewed their literary experiences in Hebrew. Shammas left Israel, settled in the United States and cut his links with Hebrew literature. More recently, Sayed Kashua left Israel to find refuge in the United States and questioned his use of the Hebrew language in his next novel. Palestinian hybrid novels in Hebrew have, since 1966, struggled to carve out a place within Hebrew literature, but have not succeeded, mainly because an Israeli writer is defined as such according to his ethnicity (Jewish). Also, Palestinian works are, in general, not read and critiqued based on their aesthetic choices and perspectives, but are mainly analysed in the framework of political events. It is not a literature forged with an historical continuity, however, it is a dynamic literature that operates on the literature of the centre.

In the end, these hybrid texts offer the possibility to discuss the issue of the commitment of the Palestinian writer in Hebrew in Israel as part of the general Palestinian literature and particularly in its political role in preserving national unity (Jayyusi, 1999); a Palestinian literature that acts from inside and not from exile. Therefore, we question the possibility of including novels of Atallah Mansour, Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua in the definition of the “literature of resistance” used in the 1960s by Ghassan Kanafani to describe literary texts written in Arabic by Palestinians in Israel. This time we extend this category to Palestinian literature written in Hebrew since it acts as a resistance within Hebrew literature.
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2 This text was translated into English and published by the Journal of Palestinian Studies [http://www.palestine-studies.org/jps/fulltext/162552](http://www.palestine-studies.org/jps/fulltext/162552) and in French in *La Palestine*.
3 We identified ten novels written by Palestinians in Hebrew since 1966 by Atallah Mansour, Anton Shammas, 
Naim Araidi, Salman Natour, Sayed Kashua, Tamima Kittany and Ayman Sickseck.
4 Algerian writer (1955-)
5 Writer from Ivory coast (1927-2003)
6 Indian writer (1961-)
7 Chinese writer (1956-)
8 Kashua writes literature exclusively in Hebrew. He is not bilingual in writing literature, but “Translingual.” A definition applied by Grutman to writers who immigrated and adopted the language and the culture of the new society they settled in.
9 (1936-1977)
10 (1873-1934)
11 *Al-Nahda* refers to the cultural renaissance in Arabic literature.
12 Jewish intellectuals didn’t know Arabic. Palestinians had contacts mainly with Arab-Jews, those who left their country of origin (Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt,) and settled in Israel. They helped in what we call the process of the renaissance of Arabic literature in Palestine.
13 This period is defined thanks to works on Palestinian literature by Ami-Elad Bouskila and Mahmoud Kayyal.
14 First published in 1975 as *Waiting for the Dawn*, it was reedited in 2013 with the title *Still Waiting for the Dawn – Palestinian Long Life with his Step-father, Israel*
15 United Workers Party, a left Zionist organization.
16 (1939-1973), PLO’s representative who was killed by the Israeli secret services in Paris in 1973.
17 [https://www.lnk.tv/shows/arab-labor](https://www.lnk.tv/shows/arab-labor)
18 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8Z9QDT06NU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8Z9QDT06NU)
19 Palestinian traditional dance
20 Palestinians from West Bank.
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