

THE OTHER IMAGE IN THE PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Mohammed Dawabsheh*

*Prof.Dr., The Arab American University, Palestine, Mohammed.dawabsheh@aauj.edu

Abstract

The paper will tackle the image of Arabs and Israelis/Jews taking into consideration that there is a difference between writers who were born in Palestine and those who came here from Europe, and also between writers from the extreme right, the left, or the moderate stream. Each writer has his/her own understanding of Arabs and their life, tradition and society. Some writers knew Arabs for who they really were and presented them in an honest way that showed the good and the bad. Others turned a blind eye on the good qualities and only showed the bad ones to show Arabs as backward and narrow-minded. The majority of what was written before 1948 was not an outcome of a direct contact with Arabs with Arabs. Writers relied on what they had read in books and news papers or on some false preconceptions and stereotypes about Arabs. The Zionist line, however, remained dominant among literary productions and Arabs were made fun of and shown as inferior, plain and naïve.

Keywords : the Image, literature, conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Palestinians and the Zionist Project has influenced literature ever since the very first Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine. The way writers tackled it, however, has changed in different times and circumstances. The perspectives in the early times of the Jewish immigration and settlements were different from those that formed after all the events that happened in the history of the conflict. The French critic and novelist Madame de Stael studied the image of The French in German literature, vice versa, and was among the first writers who established for comparative literature.

Her approach is summarized in: The Self in the perspective of the Self, the Other in the perspective of the Self, the Other's perception of the Other, the Other's perception of the Self.

The paper tries to answer a few questions, including:

How much has the views on each side of the conflict changed after 1948?

Has the image of Jews in Palestinian literature been the same in writers of the Diaspora as in the writers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip?

What has the image of Jews been like among Palestinian writers in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948?

In what ways has the image of Jews in Palestinian literature been similar to that in Arab and World literature?

How do Palestinians view Jews nowadays?

Are all Jews Zionists? And are all Zionists Jews?

And on the other hand:

How did Jewish writers portray Arabs before 1948?

How did Jewish writers who lived outside Palestine portray Palestinians?

How did Jewish Writers who were born here in Palestine portray Palestinians?

How did writers from the extreme right, from the left, and from the moderate stream portray Palestinians?

Real writers can serve their nation and people if they understand their cause and eventually express it in a frame that serves the values and aspirations of their societies. On the other hand, writers who prefer subjectivity over objectivity are not capable of benefiting their cause. I will not quote each writer's opinion here nor will I talk about those writers in details since this needs an extended study and is not possible to include in this review.

I will mention some of the opinions here and the full details will be included in the paper when it is published in due form.

In the beginning each side of the conflict's perception of the other was influenced by its thought and ideology as well as the nature of the conflict.

2. THE IMAGE OF JEWS IN PALESTINIAN LITERATURE

Palestinian literature had to deal with questions: Is it possible to write Palestine without writing about the Other -the Zionist- who is currently living on the same land we are living on? and what is the time period that the Palestinian text deals with since the age of the Nakba is still going on till the present day? The image of "the Other" is present in two forms in Palestinian literature:

2.1. The negative image

This part of the paper focuses on the way Palestinian writers view Jews whether it is Palestinian literature that emerged in the refugee camps or in historic Palestine. Both are connected to one reality that is the Palestinian reality where a people aspire to unite on the that been taken away from it, and where Palestinians feel foreign and isolated on their own occupied land or try to live in a new society outside their home land. This poses another question: How has the image of Jews formed in our minds? There are different perspectives based on the theory which suggests that intellect is a reflection of reality and the way this theory applies to the historical context of the Palestinian Problem. This leads to discussing intellectual education, the writer's perspective, the environment and the thought.

For example, there is difference between Palestinian writers views and perspectives before Balfour Declaration and after it.

The earlier views and perspectives were quite regular and did not have its own specific features. Some of the works that were written in the early 20th century were "al-ashik", a novel by Khalil Beidas (1919), a play by Mohammad Izzat Darwazeh called "al-malak wal-simsar" (1934) and a play by Burhan Al – Abboshi, Watan al shaheed (1947) .

Literature that developed in Palestine has looked differently at the issue of Arab-Israeli conflict since life in "Israel" gave writers a different perspective. Writers who lived outside Palestine were, on the other hand, the first to reflect on the Arab-Israeli conflict of Arab literature and the first to incorporate the image of the Other in this literature. The character of the Israeli was at first blurred and was mostly shown as an enemy soldier - an attacker.

Later on the Israeli became a main characters but was not described from the inside and remained an enemy and an outsider. This image has changed over the years especially in the light of relations between different sects in Israel and eastern Jews for example were described as pro-Arab. Israelis' were mostly still shown as soldiers and enemies, though.

The image of Jews in Arab literature in this period was stereotypical regardless of the writer's environment: Jews were shown as occupiers, tyrants and money-loving people.

Mamdouh Udwan says describing Jews in his Novel "My Enemies(2000) .

"Jews are excellent when humiliated and degrade the same as they are excellent when they are armed and independent. The difference is that their excellence in the first case is a very smart and deceitful that shows submission, and in the second case provocative and pugnacious(Udwan, 2000,p74).

Arab literature in general and Palestinian literature in particular expressed an understanding of the Other in the light of conflict on the ground by refusing to react towards this Other.

Emile Habibi only talked about the effects of the enemy that destroy villages and steal their names. We never see Israelis clearly in his novel " sudasiyyat al-ayyam al-sitta" (1968) even though they occupied a part of Palestine in 1948 and then all of Palestine in 1967.

Jews remained present in terms of actions and absent in terms of characters in his novels "ikhtiyah" (1985) and "saraya, bent al-ghool(1991) m (Saraya, the Ogres Daughter)(1991). When Habibi created a Jewish character and gave it a name and a personality in "saeed abul-nahs al-motashael(1974) (The

Secret Life of Saeed the Possoptimistic) (1974) he created a very abstract character he took from books and gave him features borrowed from Cynical literature(Habibi, 1974,p69).

Dr, Hussien Abu Al-Naja says that Palestinian novelists have not succeeded in a true and objective image of Jews since they lacked neutrality. There are many contradictions in the way Palestinian novelists treated Jews; these contradictions originated from their inability to convey an accurate image of the Other since their approach in writing was influenced by their own knowledge and political orientations which shaped their conceptions about the other and made it impossible for them to understand the other and convey its true image.

The absence of objectivity element resulted in the failure of many of these novels; the reason behind such an orientation is the fact that they were too busy (seeking their own security and working hard to provide for their families) to be studying Jews with scrutiny.(Abu Al naja,2004,p155).

2.2. The positive image

The only who came near the accurate image of Jew was Samih Al-Qasim in his story "The Last Picture in the Album" (1980) but his Marxist ideas prevented him from handling the subject properly. He was trying to serve Marxism more than to give a real image of Jews(alqasim, 1980, p 104)

We also see humane features in the soldier in Mahmoud Darwish's poem "A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies" (1967). This soldier wants to leave because he does not want to continue killing; he came here to see sunrises and not sunsets. He wants to drink his mother's coffee and return home safe and sound in the evenings(darweesh, 1976,p 112). We also learn this story of his emigration in the poem. His story reminds us of the Israeli attorney Felicia Langer (1930-) who said she left Israel because she couldn't do her job and maintain justice in her country.

Tawfiq Zayyad described Jews as friends while Michel Haddad found tenderness in their Darkness and innocence in their destruction. He sees "Mira" a beautiful girl in "mirage" so if we delete (ge) from mirage it will be (mira) (Haddad, 1989,p 40)

3. THE IMAGE OF PALESTINIANS IN JEWISH LITERATURE:

3.1 Negative image:

Young generations were influenced by the negative image Zionist writers created of Arabs. In a survey conducted by Dr. Mina Zemach for the Van Leer Institute 14% of Jewish youth had a negative attitude towards Arabs. 13% had a positive attitude (western Jews). 70% were not sure of their opinions. Researchers related the negative attitude of young Jews towards Arabs to the fact that Israeli curricula do not guide youth on how to treat Arabs who represent 1/6 of the population.

In fact Israeli curricula directs the youth towards despising Arabs, they do not encourage toleration or treating Arabs as equal citizens. Israeli stories between 1948-1967 gave a very ugly image of Arabs. They were shown as a horrible nightmare lead by evil and violence that threatens the security and civilization of Israel.

Herzl drew his vision of the future of Arabs and the Middle East from the delusion that Arabs role throw-out history has been to substitute a master for another foreign master and that their new master has to be the Zionist that Imperialism created in the 19th century.

Many Jewish authors tried to avoid this dilemma by setting their novels in European countries away from Palestine, and even when they would have to set the events of their novels in Palestine the, the other side of these novels would always be British or Turkish , or even Russian! Arabs, however, would always seem to be in a state of vanishing.

Jewish literature - especially before 1948 - drew a picture of a land empty of its peoples except a few Bedouins here and there. Bedouins were only 6.4% of the population at the time according to Sarah Graham in her book "Palestinians and their Society".

Some of the Jewish writes said that when Turks occupied Palestine had not faced any resistance because there were no people to resist! Most of these writers avoided addressing Arabs as individuals.They drew a stereotypical image that was influenced by their preconceptions. The stereotypical of Arabs was negative like in Benjamin Tamouz's novels who, on the contrast, drew a very positive image of Jews.

The image of Arabs in Jewish literature does not originate from a painful reality but rather from the creation of Zionist minds and from the lowest social levels away from all the essential elements of a stable human society. The image of Arabs has changed according to which Jewish writer was tackling it.

So we never see Arabs as doctors, engineers, writers, university professors, lawyers or archeologists. Even when such characters are present they are always not as professional or as accomplished as Jews or foreigners. Arthur Koestler in his novel "Thieves in the Night" (1946) shows the people of a whole Arab

village as a punch of illiterate clowns. He also portrayed Arab officers fighting with swords, getting shot by Jews and falling like wheat spike in the time of the Harvest.

Amos Oz drew a picture of the Kibbutz surrounded by Bedouins and serpents. Bedouins symbolize the Arab world; Arabs and serpents complete the image and along with Arabs form a complete nightmare and a real threat to the Kibbutz (Oz, 2001, p 84).. The Israeli society went as far casting out women who marry Arabs like what happens with Shoshana in Sami Michael's novel "Refugee" (1977).

Arabs in the view of Jewish writers have no national feelings and are greedy and traitorous while Jews are loyal and hard working. Arab men's perception of women is only sexual and they like to have many wives. They are heavy and bloated and have big fat bellies. Their faces are dark and ugly and deformed by all sorts of diseases. The folkloric image of Arabs that was supposed to carry an aesthetic quality was turned into an image of a minority that was aimlessly wandering the desert to confirm the Zionist claims that Palestine was dead and empty. Even realist writers did not treat Arabs as individual human beings but as a threat to Israel's existence. Writers from the Third Aliyah were torn between the romantic image of the homeland that they had before coming to Palestine and between the bitterness of reality. While writers who were born or raised in Palestine after 1948 do not see Palestinians true image and only vie them as fighters.

3.2. The positive image:

Some Jewish writers tried to present an individual Arab image instead of the stereotypical one. Benjamin Tamouz, for example, was different from other writers in the fact that he presented a civilized and educated image of Arabs. Other writers felt guilty towards Arabs and hence wrote some stories in which they admitted the crimes Jews committed against Arabs. Empty villages were a dominant theme in the 1960s literature such as Yizhar's (who repeatedly declared his political position that supported negotiations with P.L.O. and withdrawal from Palestinian land).

In his novel "Khirbet khizah" (1949) - a documentary novel that has a historical value in addition to its artistic value and in which he criticized the way Israeli forces treated Palestinians in the Palestinian cities and villages in 1948 - he says: "we saw a woman walking by. She was holding a seven-year-old boy's hand and. She looked tough, firm, and determined. Tears were streaming down her face as if they were not her own, and the boy's face was sobbing "what have you done to us! For a moment she seemed the only one who understood the truth about what was going on .. I looked away with shame.. They passed by, and in the boy's eyes we saw that thing that was getting bigger and bigger and we knew it will only stop growing when it turns into a venomous snake." Yizhar, 1946, p 55)

Benjamin Tamouz in his story "The Olive tree" did not focus on the 1948 War as a national war or a war of independence. He, instead, considered it unjustifiable from humane and moral perspectives since unarmed Arabs were fighting against heavily armed Jews (Tamouz, 1950, p 88).

He did not conceal his disgust of new Jewish immigrants who took the land from Arabs. He used the olive tree as a symbol of the deep-rooted history of its owners (Arabs). Palestinians in his opinion are deeply-rooted in this land the same way the olive tree is.

He considered Arabs the true children of this country while Jews are foreigners. Yizhar, Tamouz, Oz and others disavowed the social and national role of Jewish literature and opposed with Zionism after it disappointed them. Writers of the First Aliyah such as Moshe Smilansky sometimes showed Arabs as worthy of respect and understanding and even as good role models sometimes. In the same context, some news papers adopted an approach some called positive and which encouraged coexistence.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

1. Israeli-Palestinian conflict was and still is a place (the earth).
2. The conflict in the literature part of the political conflict on the ground and his reflection.
3. You cannot say that the other image was negative or positive on both sides.
4. Palestinian and Israeli writers had an important role in the conflict, either toward peace or either toward war.
5. There is a big difference in the presence of the other image and tools among the writers who have lived in Palestine or Israel or who have lived abroad.
6. The image of the other has evolved and changed by the time, and there remained no traditional stereotype.
7. Before 1948 was the other image generally positive on both sides.
8. Between 1948- 1967 the other became black in both sides.
9. After 1967 until the beginning of the uprisings (intifada) the other image became more dramatic.
10. After the Oslo Accords (Agreement) between Palestinians and Israelis, the image has become more calm. Some writers from both sides tend to peace and quiet, and tend to become irrational image and not

violence. (This required).

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