

# AYMAN SIKSECK'S ISRAEL: DIVIDED ALONG DIFFERENT LINES

Excerpts from the Hebrew novel *To Jaffa* translated into English, accompanied by a discussion of the mosaic makeup of Israeli society, as illustrated in the selected passages.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *A minority within a minority within a minority*

Israeli society is a patchwork of minority and immigrant cultures, ranging from Ethiopian Jews to immigrants from the former Soviet Union to the state's Palestinian citizens. This last group occupies a particularly unique place in Israel. In 1948, those Palestinians who did not become refugees beyond the borders of the newly established state were granted Israeli citizenship and remained under military rule until the late 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Today, Palestinian-Israelis<sup>2</sup> make up roughly 20 per cent of the state's total population.<sup>3</sup>

Anton Shammas, poet, writer, and himself a Palestinian-Israeli, used the image of Russian nesting dolls to explain the situation of this minority. And though he made the analogy decades ago, it still rings true.<sup>4</sup> On an ethno-linguistic level, Palestinians are Arabs. Within this group, the Palestinian people constitute a separate nation, more accurately, a nation without a state. When the State of Israel was established, the Palestinian nation was divided into two groups. One group included the Palestinians who sought refuge outside Israel. The second group included those Palestinians who remained within the borders of the new state. The 1967 war between Israel and the Arab states, in which the Israeli army annexed the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, again, cut across the already divided Palestinian nation. Palestinians in these occupied territories form yet another, separate group within the Palestinian people.<sup>5</sup> Unlike their fellow Palestinians in the occupied territories and dispersed across the globe, Palestinian-Israeli's enjoy the benefits of citizenship in a democratic state, that is itself a minority in the surrounding Arab region. The result has been an ambivalent relation both with their fellow Palestinians in the occupied territories and beyond as well as with the State of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip L. Hammack, "Narrating hyphenated selves: Intergroup contact and configurations of identity among young Palestinian citizens of Israel," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34 (2010): 369.

<sup>2</sup> I use the designation 'Palestinian-Israeli' for the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel, which is in accordance with the self-identification of the Arab minority in Israel. Other common designations include 'Israeli-Arab' and 'Arab-Israeli'. These terms each reflect the inherent antagonism of the disparate identities: Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab. (See: Adia Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives* (West-Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014), 16. Also: Saree Makdisi, "They're Palestinians, not 'Israeli Arabs'," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 2015; Sam Bahour, "Don't Call Us 'Israeli Arabs': Palestinians in Israel Speak Out," *Haaretz*, September 26, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Yaron Druckman, "Israel at 68 years: Still strong and modern," *Ynet News*, May 9, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Mahmoud Kayyal, "Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques: Minor Hebrew Works of Palestinian Authors in the Eyes of Critics," *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 11 (2008): 32.

<sup>5</sup> Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 9-10.

This ambivalence follows from two parallel processes of socialization that Palestinian-Israeli's are subject to: *Israelization* and *Palestinization*.<sup>6</sup> At the base of Israelization lies the desire to reach economic, educational, and cultural standards on a par with those of the Jewish-Israeli majority.<sup>7</sup> This development can be measured by parameters such as increases in Hebrew language use and fluency, acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state and acceptance of the label "Israeli" as an identity marker.<sup>8</sup> Also, many Palestinian-Israelis attend Hebrew schools or universities and work with Jewish-Israelis on a daily basis. These interactions all contribute to a profound familiarity with the Jewish-Israeli majority culture.<sup>9</sup> This extensive integration into Israeli majority culture deepens the divide between Palestinian-Israelis and Palestinians living outside Israel. For the latter, refugee status and live in exile have become essential components of how they identify themselves and how they are identified by others.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the Jewish-Israeli majority continues to view the Palestinian-Israeli minority as a fifth column, a threat to the integrity and safety of the state. This translates into unrelenting discrimination, both on an institutional level as well as in daily life, that Palestinian-Israelis describe as "a defining characteristic of their experience as Israeli citizens."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this hostile attitude against the minority encourages a turn toward the Palestinian identity. The process of Palestinization is also bolstered by the numerous, often violent, confrontations between the State of Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied territories as well as with neighbouring Arab states. These events enhance the feeling among the Palestinian minority that there is no place for them in Israel, at least not on equal footing with the Jewish-Israeli majority. In response, Palestinian-Israelis give more weight to their Palestinian identity, turning outward for moral sustenance, political alliances and out of solidarity. In a vicious circle, the process of Palestinization intensifies the majority's mistrust of the Palestinian-Israeli minority, reinforcing already existing allegations of disloyalty and subversiveness.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the Palestinian citizens of Israel constitute a minority in a number of ways. Efforts to assimilate into Israeli society set them further apart from Palestinians outside

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<sup>6</sup> Kayyal, "Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques," 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Hammack, "Narrating hyphenated selves," 370.

<sup>9</sup> International Crisis Group, "Back to basics: Israel's Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," i.

<sup>10</sup> See: Michaela S. Clemens, "The Influence of Refugee Status on Palestinian Identity and the Impact of Identity on Durable Solutions to the Refugee Problem," *Nebraska Anthropologist*, paper 28 (2007).

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, "Back to basics," 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 4-6.

Israel, with whom they share their national and ethno-linguistic identity, but not the plight of being a refugee. Likewise, emphasizing the Palestinian identity puts them at odds with the Jewish-Israeli majority, with whom they share their civic identity and alongside whom they live their everyday lives. Palestinian-Israelis seem to be caught between a rock and a hard place.

### 1.2 *Palestinian-Israeli literature: voicing identity struggles*

As a result of their unique minority position, Palestinian-Israelis have developed a distinct literary voice. As its authors, this body of literature pertains to different worlds at the same time, being both part of modern Arab literature as well as being influenced by Israeli culture and literature.<sup>13</sup> In his study on the Palestinian novel, Ibrahim Taha explains that this “minority literature is a complex of direct and rapid reactions to the never ending events which take place in actual reality.”<sup>14</sup>

In the period following the establishment of the State of Israel, Palestinian-Israeli literature gave expression to the new reality, that of a national minority in a hostile and threatening environment. The literature reveals three different approaches that reflect the minority’s coping mechanisms. A limited number of writers boldly dealt with political subjects and did not eschew criticizing the authorities in their work. Others chose to write on social matters that would not aggravate the establishment, such as women’s right, or even state-promoted subjects, taking the majority group as a model. A third group of writers combined political and social issues in their writing. The Six-Day War heralded a new stage in the literature of the Palestinian-Israeli minority. Against the backdrop of this war and the events that followed, two thematic categories developed in the writings of Palestinian-Israeli authors. The first category entails the reinforcement of the Palestinian element in the minority’s collective identity. This Palestinization flowed forth from renewed contact with Palestinians in the occupied territories and the diaspora, the shattered myth of Israel’s invincibility as a result of the Yom Kippur War and the disillusionment with the Arab states’ ability to realize a sovereign Palestinian state, causing Palestinians to downplay the Arab component in their identity. The second thematic category involves the minority’s relationship with the Jewish-Israeli majority. Palestinian-Israeli literature has expressed continuous resistance to Israeli government. Soldiers, policemen, and employers appear in literary works as the embodiment of a repressive, war hungry, inhumane regime.

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<sup>13</sup> Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim Taha, *The Palestinian Novel. A Communication Study* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 22.

Conversely, Jewish-Israeli citizens were generally portrayed in a positive light, separate from the state and her oppressive policies. This distinction reveals the attempt to engage with the Jewish-Israeli majority and participate as citizens.<sup>15</sup> Up to the present day, negotiation between national and civic identity figures prominently in Palestinian-Israeli literature. The antagonistic dynamics of Palestinization and Israelization have made identity struggles the recurrent theme in works written by Palestinian-Israelis.

Identity struggles, however, are not only apparent in the subject matter of Palestinian-Israeli literature. The language chosen to tell a story is equally revealing of the intricacies of this dual identity. Recalling Shamma's imagery of the Russian nesting dolls, we can discern yet another minority *within* the minority group of Israel's Palestinian citizens. Since the 1960s, a select number of Palestinian-Israeli authors have chosen to write their poetry, novels and short stories in Hebrew, as opposed to the minority's native language, Arabic. The choice to give voice to the Palestinian narrative in Hebrew, a language inextricably bound up with the Jewish majority and Zionist project, reflects the tension inherent in Palestinian-Israeli identity. Rachel Brenner, who addresses the issue of language in the work of Palestinian-Israeli authors, holds that "(t)he adoption of the Hebrew language to tell an Arab story is therefore a relational act that accepts the status of second class citizens and appeals against it at the same time."<sup>16</sup> The use of Hebrew by Palestinian-Israeli authors points to the minority's acceptance of the supremacy of Hebrew over Arabic. Despite the fact that Arabic is an official language in Israel, the Jewish majority remains illiterate, or ill versed, in the Arab language. This language gap allows Jewish-Israelis to disengage from the Palestinian narrative or even ignore it entirely. However, by writing in Hebrew Palestinian-Israelis narrow the divide. The Palestinian narrative is disclosed to the Jewish-Israeli majority in its own language.<sup>17</sup> This leaves little to no room for disregard or misunderstanding. Furthermore, through their literary activity Palestinian-Israeli authors demonstrate a familiarity, and even intimacy, with the language that dismantles the majority's exclusionary claim to Hebrew language and culture.<sup>18</sup> In a way, Palestinian-Israeli literature constitutes a remarkable intertwining of the processes of Israelization and Palestinization. The authors' use of Hebrew as a literary language indicates progressive

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<sup>15</sup> Taha, *The Palestinian Novel*, 14-20.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Feldhay Brenner, "The Search for Identity in Israeli Arab Fiction: Atallah Mansour, Emile Habibi, and Anton Shamma," *Israel Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded - Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visiting Culture* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003): 111.

Israelization, whereas their literary production tentatively introduces a Palestinian narrative into the predominantly Jewish-Zionist body of Hebrew literature.

### 1.3 *Hebrew language flowing from Palestinian-Israeli pens*

In her discussion of Hebrew literature, through a multicultural perspective, Adia Mendelson-Maoz identifies three generations of Palestinian-Israeli authors writing in Hebrew.<sup>19</sup> The first generation, writing from the 1960s, includes Atallah Mansour whose novel *In a New Light*<sup>20</sup> was published in 1966. Prior to the publication of his Hebrew novel, Mansour wrote as a journalist for both Hebrew and Arabic-language newspapers. *In a New Light* features a protagonist who is completely detached from his Palestinian-Arab identity and, instead, assigns great significance to Jewish-Israeli identity. About his choice for writing in Hebrew, Mansour has said that he considers this a way to emphasize the bi-cultural and bi-national character of Israel.<sup>21</sup>

A pivotal author of the second generation of Palestinian-Israelis writing in Hebrew is Anton Shammas. Like many of his contemporaries, Shammas also wrote in Arabic and was intensively engaged in translation from Hebrew to Arabic and vice-versa. The bilingual activity of this generation stemmed from Israelization through, amongst other things, increasing participation in higher education and exposure to Hebrew media. His novel, *Arabesques*,<sup>22</sup> was published in 1986 and describes the chronicles of the Shammas family over an extended period of time. The book earned a place in the canon of Hebrew literature, successfully challenging the exclusionary Hebrew-Zionist character thereof. For Shammas, his use of the Hebrew language stands for action and defiance. While he accepts Hebrew-Zionist culture as the main paradigm, he aims to destroy it from within. His writing forces the Hebrew language to tell the story the Jewish-Israeli majority tries so fervently to deny.<sup>23</sup>

The authors of the third generation bring us to the twenty-first century. They differ from their predecessors in that they reflect profound assimilation by writing exclusively in Hebrew. Sayed Kashua, an author of international acclaim who left Israel for the United States in 2014, belongs to this generation. In his novels, short stories and newspaper columns, Kashua makes abundant use of stereotypes to criticize Israeli society at large and, more specifically, the processes of Israelizing the state's Palestinian citizens.

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<sup>19</sup> Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel*, 24-31.

<sup>20</sup> Atallah Mansour, באור חדש (*In a New Light*) (Tel Aviv: Karni Publishing House, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> Kayyal, "Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques," 35.

<sup>22</sup> Anton Shammas. ערבסקות (*Arabesques*) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Mendelson-Maoz, *Multiculturalism in Israel*, 28-31.

His protagonists are antihero's who seem to be too Israeli for Palestinian-Arab culture yet too Arab for Jewish-Israeli culture. With regard to the Hebrew language, Kashua has admitted that his literary Arabic is simply not good enough, as he was mostly educated in Hebrew. Jaffa-born Ayman Sikseck also belongs to the third generation of Palestinian-Israelis writing in Hebrew. His debut novel, *To Jaffa*,<sup>24</sup> was published in 2010 and tells the story of a student who divides his time between Jaffa and Jerusalem. Like Kashua, Sikseck is better versed in Hebrew than he is in Arabic. As he says himself, "instead of being familiar with Arabic, I had a love affair with Hebrew."<sup>25</sup> With Ayman Sikseck, we arrive at the centre of Shammas' nesting dolls and at the heart of this research as I narrow the scope one last time *To Jaffa*.

#### 1.4 *Sikseck's Israel: divided along different lines*

In his work of fiction, *To Jaffa*, Ayman Sikseck masterfully blurs the line between himself, the author, and the novel's main character. Like Sikseck, the unnamed protagonist is a Jaffan who studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. As Doron Halutz wrote in *Haaretz* in the year the novel was published, "the obvious question is where the autobiography stops and the fiction begins."<sup>26</sup> In the following, however, I turn away from the obvious question and, instead, will direct my focus to the lines in Sikseck's novel that are visible.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, I aim to introduce Sikseck's novel *To Jaffa* to a broader readership by translating selected fragments to English. Thus far, only a German translation, under the title *Reise nach Jerusalem*,<sup>27</sup> and an English excerpt that was published in *World Literature Today* are available.<sup>28</sup> Second, by means of the translations from the original Hebrew, I will argue that Sikseck's debut novel illustrates that the divide between Palestinian- and Jewish-Israelis is not the only separation line that runs through Israel. Rather, Israeli society is divided along many different lines.

The semi-autobiographical character of the novel demands that the author's personal background be taken into account in order to fully grasp the meaning of his writing. For this reason, I will first outline Ayman Sikseck's biography, career, and, particularly, the novel *To Jaffa*. The subsequent four sections each comprise a fragment from the novel translated into

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<sup>24</sup> Ayman Sikseck. אל יפו (*To Jaffa*) (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot Sifre Hemed, 2010). For this research, I made use of the digital version of the novel, which is available through [www.e-vrit.co.il](http://www.e-vrit.co.il). All page numbers mentioned refer to the e-book.

<sup>25</sup> Doron Halutz, "Language Is My Anchor," *Haaretz*, April 11, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> Ayman Sikseck, *Reise nach Jerusalem*, trans. Ruth Achlama (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Ayman Sikseck, "To Jaffa" (Excerpt), trans. Evan Fallenberg, *World Literature Today*, May/August, 2015.



English, together with a discussion of the social divide it addresses. Finally, I will discuss how Sikseck's novel is a valuable addition to Israeli literature, Israeli society and well beyond.

## 2. From Jaffa, *To Jaffa: Ayman's Sikseck's life and career*

### 2.1 *Biography*

Ayman Sikseck was born in 1984 in Jaffa as the fourth child of Ibrahim and Tamam Sikseck. His father descends from a distinguished Jaffan family where many hold academic degrees. His mother, on the other hand, was born into a family of lesser stature.<sup>29</sup> From childhood, Sikseck's parents, both observant Muslims, sent their youngest son to Jewish or mixed educational institutions and made an effort to keep politics outside of their home, silencing their own history in the process. To them, their son's integration into the Israeli milieu was "the proof of their success."<sup>30</sup> Sikseck spent several years at the French Catholic Collège des Frères de Jaffa, where, with the exception of the language classes (Hebrew, Arabic and English), all subjects were taught in French. He later switched to a Hebrew-speaking vocational school in order to obtain an Israeli matriculation certificate. While unwillingly studying to become a dental technician, "because it was a profession and you could make a living from it,"<sup>31</sup> Sikseck discovered and further explored his passion for literature. From 2004 until 2007, he studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, from where he obtained his degree in English Language and Literature. Though he spent four years in Jerusalem, Sikseck does not harbour warm feelings for the city and describes it as "tough and strange and not always welcoming to the outsider, the new arrival."<sup>32</sup> Sikseck also spent several years in upstate New York, where he finished working on his second novel. His heart, however, has always been and remains in Israel, more specifically in Jaffa. His writing constitutes a great deal of what keeps him there. As he puts it himself, "there is no other place in the world I believe that my writing would matter as much."<sup>33</sup>

### 2.2 *Career*

It was Sikseck's literature teacher who first noted his student's talent and convinced the budding author to try and have some of his works published. His advice did not fall on deaf ears. At 18 years old, Sikseck published his first short story in the national daily newspaper *Maariv*, followed shortly by publications in literary journals. In 2004, the 20-year old Jaffan won a commendation in an annual short story competition sponsored by *Haaretz*, Israel's

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<sup>29</sup> Judith Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way Into Existence," *The Jerusalem Report*, August 22 (2016): 42.

<sup>30</sup> Halutz, "Language Is My Anchor."

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way Into Existence," 43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 43.

oldest daily newspaper. Following this encouragement, he published a series of *Tel Aviv-Jaffa* vignettes, earning him the interest of not one, but two publishing houses. This *Tel Aviv-Jaffa* series eventually formed the basis for Sikseck's debut novel *To Jaffa*, to which we will turn shortly.<sup>34</sup> In 2016, Sikseck's second novel was published. *Tishrin*,<sup>35</sup> based on a true family story, takes place in Jaffa of the 1960s and evolves around someone growing up in the city, determined to find out more about a murder that took place 40 years ago.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to his novels, Sikseck has written literary reviews for *Haaretz*'s book supplement and worked as a culture correspondent for *Ynet*, one of Israel's most widely read news outlets. Currently, he works as a journalist and news anchor for *i24News*, a Jaffa-based channel that broadcasts in English from the Middle East. Also, Sikseck periodically writes op-ed articles for *Yedioth Aharonoth*, a Hebrew daily newspaper, in which he discusses issues that affect Palestinians living in Israel, and life in what he describes as "so-called mixed cities," like his hometown, Jaffa.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3 *To Jaffa*

In his debut novel *To Jaffa*, Ayman Sikseck gives his readers an intimate insight into the life of a Palestinian-Israeli. The protagonist, who remains unnamed throughout the book, is a young man from Jaffa who travels back and forth between his hometown and Jerusalem, where he studies literature at the Hebrew University.

The frequent commute, however, is not the only reason Sikseck's protagonist experiences a sense of being lost, unable to decide where he truly belongs. He has a relationship with Nitzan, a seemingly carefree Jewish girl. Nitzan is indifferent to the fact that, unlike herself, he is a Palestinian-Israeli, and a Muslim. She shows up for a date donning her military uniform, takes him out drinking and dancing, and at a festival, where she has to work security, casually explains how she is trained to consider anyone dark-skinned, with dark eyes and an accent a possible threat. At the same time, the narrator is engaged in a secret relationship with Sharihan, a young woman from a traditional Muslim family and sister of his long-time friend Said. Since he has not officially asked Sharihan's hand in marriage, their romance is limited to stolen moments in the old city, a trip to the market place where they can be physically close without rousing any suspicion, and coincidental encounters at Sharihan's house when the protagonist visits her brother.

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<sup>34</sup> Halutz, "Language Is My Anchor."

<sup>35</sup> Ayman Sikseck, תשרין (*Tishrin*) (Tel Aviv: Achuzat Bayit, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way Into Existence," 41-42.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 40.

In stark contrast to Nitzan's light-hearted ways, Sharihan speaks to the main character's more contemplative side.

Throughout the novel, the narrator struggles to find a way to be at peace with his multi-faceted identity. He appears perpetually torn. When he is in Jaffa, he contemplates going back to Jerusalem. When he is with Nitzan, his thoughts are with Sharihan, and vice versa. When he goes to see a movie on Friday evening, he feels guilty about not accompanying his father to the mosque. In his notebook, which he carries with him everywhere, the main character documents his thoughts and observations, contemplating the question of how to find his way in Israeli society, being both a Hebrew speaking Israeli citizen and a Palestinian-Arab Muslim.

### 3. A stronghold of fear and distrust: Jewish-Palestinian relations in Israel

#### 3.1 *On the bus from Jaffa to Tel Aviv*

In the scene below, the first-person narrator and main character in the novel is riding a bus from Jaffa to Tel Aviv with his girlfriend Nitzan. His friend Said is also on the bus, but sits apart from them. At one of the stops, a woman enters the bus and inadvertently becomes the centre of attention.

*“Did you see that?” Nitzan tugged my arm and pointed at the people who had just got on the bus at the last stop. Standing next to the bus driver was a woman; she was my mother’s age, wearing a traditional Islamic headscarf and carrying a large bag in her hand.*

*“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Nitzan grabbed my hand and wrapped her fingers around mine.*

*“What are you thinking?” I asked, playing dumb.*

*“This looks suspicious to me.”*

*“What is suddenly so suspicious?” I felt my cheeks turning red. “Because she is Arabic, she seems suspicious to you?”*

*Nitzan gave me a bewildered look and remained stunned for a while.*

*“Don’t be daft!” she finally blurted out. “Haven’t you seen the bag she’s holding? That’s why she looks suspicious to me. Plus, look around, everyone here is anxious.”*

*“No one here is anxious,” I insisted.*

*Suddenly, the bus driver turned off the radio in order to better examine the bag in the woman’s hands.*

*“But I am!” she shot back at me, angrily.*

*In the meantime, two girls sitting in the front seats, who had been engaged in an animated conversation in Russian that whole time, now got their bags, left their seats and quickly disappeared to the back of the bus.*

*“Madam, what’s in your bag?” A gruff voice suddenly emerged from the back of the bus. A bald and shapely man came forward with a confident stride.*

*“Hey, didn’t you hear me?” He raised his voice and scoffingly clapped his hand in front of her face. “I asked you what’s in the bag.”*

*The woman didn’t answer. She only pulled on the fringe of her headscarf slightly to tighten it around her face.*

*“Give me that bag.” He leaned toward her and snatched the bag from her hands*

*with a quick pull. She let out a terrified, frantic scream and immediately stretched out her hands in an effort to get back her bag.*

*“Wait a minute,” he said, pushing her back. “First, let’s see what you’ve got in here.”*

*My legs became heavy and my stomach suddenly turned, as if I was coming down with something. The man swiftly undid the buttons on the bag and spilled out the contents on the floor. My heart pounded like a drum band. With all my strength, I held onto Nitzan’s small hand.*

*First, an old, white leather pocketbook fell at the feet of the passengers, followed by a pencil, a small notebook, a bundle of keys jingling on a ring, and a red lighter. He shook the bag one last time, and a few paper handkerchiefs were added to the pile. Nitzan and I stared, eyes gaping, at the meagre contents of the bag that just moments before had formed such great risk.*

*With her face flushed, the woman got down on her knees and started to gather her things, all the while cursing the bald man in coarse Arabic. The bus driver suddenly pulled over, even though it was not one of the stops. The passengers looked around surprised, as the doors of the bus opened. The woman searched the floor with her eyes, looking between the passengers’ legs for a few more seconds, then stood up frustrated and got off the bus. She got smaller and smaller, as we drove away, but I could still see how she stopped to wipe dry her face with one of the handkerchiefs.*

*I immediately searched for Said with my eyes, in an attempt to share with him this strange and uncomfortable burden of what had just happened, but he wasn’t in his place anymore.<sup>38</sup>*

### 3.2 *The Second Intifada and its aftermath*

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a long history that cannot be traced, or even outlined, within the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, taking into account the passage above and its author allows us to limit the purview in two ways. First, the bus-incident described involves Palestinian-Arabs in Israel; the main character, his friend Said, and the woman who becomes the subject of harassment. Second, Ayman Sikseck came of age in the late nineties of the previous century and early noughties of the current century. This period, in Israel, was particularly tense, with the events of October 2000 marking a watershed moment in the

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<sup>38</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 31-32. (All translations from the original Hebrew are my own).

relations between Jewish-Israelis and the state's Palestinian minority.<sup>39</sup>

The Second Intifada, or Al-Aqsa Intifada, broke out in September 2000, after politician Ariel Sharon visited Jerusalem's Temple Mount during his election campaign. The visit led to Palestinian demonstrators gathering at the Al-Aqsa mosque the next day, from where they threw stones at Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall. The Israeli army responded in kind by firing at the crowd, which resulted in casualties and ignited a wave of violence that would last years.<sup>40</sup> In October 2000, as the Intifada gained momentum all across the West Bank and Gaza, riots broke out in those areas of Israel with large concentrations of Palestinian citizens. Triggered by the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Palestinian-Israelis blocked roads, set fire to buildings and threw stones at both police officers and Jewish civilians, in a manifestation of anger and frustration over their plight in Israeli society and solidarity with Palestinians in the occupied territories. In response to the riots, in some mixed cities (i.e. cities with a large population of both Jewish- and Palestinian-Israelis) Jewish mobs took to the streets to attack their Palestinian fellow citizens and destroy their property. This unprecedented occurrence of inter-communal violence in Israel, now known as "the events of October 2000," left a deep mark on society.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of the violent riots of October 2000, the rift between Jewish- and Palestinian-Israelis deepened. For the state's Palestinian minority, the police's heavy-handed response to the protests, shooting live ammunition at protesters, attested to their inferior status in Israeli society. Feelings of dissatisfaction were further fuelled by the fact that Jewish-Israelis hardly, if at all, spoke out against the police killing Palestinian-Israeli demonstrators. Instead, Jewish-Israelis increasingly viewed their Palestinian fellow citizens with suspicion, regarding them as a disloyal fifth column and a threat to national security. For many Jewish-Israelis, it became apparent that those citizens whom they had long regarded as "Israeli-Arabs" were, first and foremost, Palestinians, sympathizing with Palestinians in the occupied territories and, even worse, bringing the violence associated with the West Bank and Gaza into Israel.<sup>42</sup> Not surprisingly, these sentiments left the two groups diametrically opposed.

A specific feature of the Second Intifada, and the years leading up to it, deserves attention in light of the passage at hand, namely suicide terrorism. The number of suicide

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<sup>39</sup> Dov Waxman, "A Dangerous Divide: The Deterioration of Jewish-Palestinian Relations in Israel," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2012), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Orna Ben-Naftali and Aeyal Gross, "Arab-Israeli War: The Second Intifada," *Crimes of War* (website).

<sup>41</sup> Waxman, "A Dangerous Divide," 11-12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, 12-19.

bombings in Israel soared in the first years of the Second Intifada. Groups such as Hamas, Fatah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad executed these attacks, which targeted public areas, such as cafes and markets, but also public transport. In addition to causing destruction, pain and casualties, the suicide bombings served as a psychological weapon. Suicide terrorism fed into the growing suspicion of the Jewish-Israeli majority toward the state's Palestinian minority, and instilled fear on Israeli society at large.<sup>43</sup>

Taking all of the above into account, this passage from *To Jaffa* portrays the fear of a society plagued by violent terrorism, and divided by distrust toward one another.

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<sup>43</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "The Rise and Fall of Suicide Bombings in the Second Intifada," *Strategic Assessment*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2010), 39-44.



#### 4. *Chag Sameach, Eid Mubarak*<sup>44</sup>: a religiously divided society

##### 4.1. *Happy holiday*

In the passage below, the main character and his friend Said look back on celebrating the Jewish holidays when they were still in school, and the meaning of it then and now.

*“What are they doing there?” With my chin, I motioned to the two overall-clad workers that were making their way downstairs. One of them was carrying a rolled up poster on his shoulder. They got to the van that was parked next to sidewalk, stuck the poster inside, and pulled out a new roll.*

*“I bet they are going to put up a “Happy Holiday” sign, like the ones they’ve spread all over Tel Aviv.”*

*“Happy Holiday?” I asked surprised. “But since when does Ramadan matter to the ...”*

*“Not Ramadan, you dreamer,” Said interrupted me and laughed out loud.*

*“Sukkot.<sup>45</sup> It starts in a few days, remember? How could you forget?”*

*“I remember,” I said.*

*“In primary school, they gave us the feeling that it was our holiday too,” he continued, partly satisfied, partly resentful. “Who was thinking about Ramadan at all?”*

*Every year, toward the end of summer, Samaher<sup>46</sup> and I would build a hut in the backyard of our house. Usually, mom agreed to contribute one or two sheets that she could miss and with those we would succeed in erecting a hut next to the lemon trees in the yard. The roof of our hut was always slanted, because instead of using poles we simply attached the ends of our sheet roof to the window bars in the back. With every other breath of wind, the sheet would come loose and collapse on our heads.*

*“Actually, it was nice,” he remarked and released another cloud of smoke. “We waited for it, like we waited for our own holidays, every year. There was something about it, that anticipation, right?”*

*“Sure,” I agreed, even though the memory was so distant now that it made me feel a strange kind of sadness and discomfort, as if I was secretly going*

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<sup>44</sup> *Chag Sameach* and *Eid Mubarak* are, respectively, the Hebrew and Arabic phrases commonly used when wishing one a happy (religious) holiday.

<sup>45</sup> *Sukkot*, or the Feast of Booths, is an annual Jewish festival commemorating the forty years of Jewish wandering in the desert and celebrating a fruitful harvest. As part of the celebration, Jews build a *sukkah*, a hut, in which they eat (and sometimes sleep) for the duration of the holiday.

<sup>46</sup> Samaher is the main character’s sister.

*through someone else's childhood pictures. "In primary school, there were many things that we thought were ours and then later it turned out they weren't."* I turned my back to the window. A small piece of fabric peeped out of the laundry basket that was next to the door, poking through the plastic grid of the basket like a long finger. A strap from Sharihan's red undershirt. I looked away abruptly. "Are your brothers also observing the fast?" I asked.

*"Everyone, it's not nice being the only one not observing the fast in a house like that. Everyone is fasting, because they're sure all the others are doing the same." He looked outside, kept silent for a long minute and then turned to me with a suppressed smile: "Tell me, do you remember the four species?"*<sup>47</sup>

*"Definitely not."*

*"I do," he said and he seemed satisfied. "Don't you think that's funny? In Iran, I'd already have been hanged for much less. We really are a couple of heretics, you and I, ha?" he added with a shaking voice.*

*"Every year, they would grind our brains with this in class." I felt I had to try and console him. "No wonder you remember this like you remember your own name."*

*Said took one last pull on his cigarette and flicked it away between two fingers, onto the street below. "You know," he said, his eyes focused on a point in the distance outside, "all this nonsense, the palm frond and the matzos for Pesach..." He stopped to swallow his saliva. "Only then did I feel I was part of all this," he fixed his eyes on me and hesitated for a moment whether to continue or not, "as if somehow all this is also mine."*

*I was about to say; "I understand," but his eyes told me that he wasn't expecting a response. So I kept silent without trying to look away from him.*<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.2 *Muslims in a Jewish state*

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, as read by David Ben Gurion in 1948, describes Israel as a "Jewish state," followed by the insurance of "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

Admittedly, Israel is not a theocracy and the epithet "Jewish" pertains as much to the ancestry and cultural identity of part of the nation's citizens as it does to their religiosity. Nevertheless, the Jewish religious identity in Israel figures prominently through, among

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<sup>47</sup> The four species, or ארבעת המינים, are four plants mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus 23:40) that are relevant to the celebration of *Sukkot*.

<sup>48</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 12-13.

other things, the observance of Sabbath and other religious holidays. Also, the Jewish identity of Israel is an issue of longstanding, heated debate, with opponents claiming that “(a)s long as being Jewish holds such a preeminent place in Israel, then Muslim and Christian Arabs will always be second-class citizens,”<sup>49</sup> and “(a) state that sees itself as 'a Jewish State' is inherently an exclusive state.”<sup>50</sup>

Most Palestinian citizens of Israel are Muslims, making Islam the second biggest religion in the state after Judaism. Facts and figures presented by Israel’s Mission to the United Nations stress the rootedness of Islam and Muslims in Israeli society. For example, Israel counts over 400 mosques, as well as eight regional Islamic law courts and one national appeals court, operating under the supervision of Israel’s Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, Muslims are well involved in Israeli academia and some even serve in the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>51</sup> Findings from Pew Research Center, however, reveal a less rose-tinted picture. A striking 83% of Muslims say there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in Israel, with one in six Muslims having faced travel restrictions, questioning by security forces, physical attacks or damage to their property because of their religious identity.<sup>52</sup> The religious divide is also evident in the views on intermarriage, with 97% of Jews stating they are “uncomfortable with the idea of their child someday marrying a Muslim, and the remarkably low percentage of close friendship across religious lines.”<sup>53</sup>

While the above passage does not overtly describe an instance of discriminative separation along lines of religion, it does disclose part of the predicament of growing up as a Palestinian-Israeli Muslim in a predominantly Jewish environment. Said’s and the main character’s reminiscence over celebrating Jewish holidays reveals an undeniable level of intimacy with the Jewish religion and culture. They have acquired this level of familiarity with Judaism and its holidays through their education. Now, however, the realization that those holidays, for which official celebratory posters are put up, are not the feasts of their own religious culture, stirs a sense of *otherness* in these young, Muslim men. They find themselves feeling like “a couple of heretics.” They no longer partake in the Jewish

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<sup>49</sup> Patricia Marks Greenfield, “An Israel equal for all, Jewish or not,” *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Noam Sheizaf, “Why I oppose recognizing Israel as a Jewish state,” *+927 Magazine*, September 11, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> “Behind the Headlines: Facts and Figures - Islam and Israel,” Mission of Israel to the UN in Geneva, June 9, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> It deserves mention that, since most Muslims in Israel are Palestinian-Arabs, it is difficult to distinguish between attitudes towards Muslims, because of their religion, and attitudes towards Muslims as Arabs, i.e. an ethnic group involved in the persisting Israeli-Arab conflict. (Nurit Novis-Deutsch, “What are the Attitudes of Religious Jews in Israel Towards Non-Jews?” in *How Jewish is the Jewish State? Religion and Society in Israel*, October 28, 2014, 19).

<sup>53</sup> Pew Research Center, *Israel’s Religiously Divided Society*, March 8, 2016, 226-228.

celebrations, nor do they observe the Islamic fast, like their fellow Muslims do. Said's realization that only through partaking in Jewish celebrations he succeeds in feeling "part of all this," can be read as testimony to the fact that Islam and its followers are not yet as at home in Israeli society as facts and figures would have us believe.

## 5. Sabbath is for synagogue and dodge ball: the religious-secular divide

### 5.1 *A first-time time Shabbos goy*<sup>54</sup>

In this scene, the main character enters the synagogue down the street from his house for the first time. He is asked by one of the congregants to turn on the lights in the building, a task that the man is prohibited to do himself before Sabbath ends.

*I was ten years old when I first set foot in the synagogue down our street. Samaher and I were sitting on the wooden seesaw that stood outside our house that summer, and mum was sitting across from us on the threshold, peeling clementines from a plastic bowl resting between her thighs. Dad had brought home the fruit the day before from Qalqilya in two overly stuffed, straw sacks. The clementines were bursting with juice and the fleshy, sweet chunks melted on your tongue. I had tastefully eaten piece after piece; much to the pleasure of my mum, who was quickly peeling more fruit.*

*Samaher was first to notice the young man in the black brimmed hat, nervously going from door to door. His eyes were wide open and he seemed hopeless. Summer was already coming to an end, but this was an exceptionally warm evening.*

*“Good evening,” he said, turning to mum. He removed his hat, revealing pearls of sweat all around his head. Mum nodded hesitantly in reply.*

*“I’m sorry to bother you, but the lights in the synagogue have to be turned on in a little while.”*

*Samaher looked at me and smiled conspiratorially.*

*“And Sabbath hasn’t ended yet,” he continued, drying his face with the back of his hand and smiling at our puzzlement.*

*“We need someone to turn on the lights in the building.”*

*“Ah ... I understand,” mum said relieved. “Of course.” She offered him the bowl of fruit and turned her face to me.*

*“Me?!”*

*“Yes, whom else? Me?” She laughed and put the bowl back.*

*The man was already making his way down the street. Nervously biting into a piece of clementine I had in my hand, I got up and followed him. I made sure to*

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<sup>54</sup> A *Shabbos goy* is a non-Jew who performs certain tasks that religious law prohibits Jews from performing on Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest that begins on Friday at sunset and ends the next evening after nightfall.

*lag a few steps behind, so I could shoot angry looks back at mum. Halfway along the road, some boys from the neighbourhood, who were just lining up in tight rows for a game of dodge ball, spotted us. They stopped what they were doing and curiously looked back and forth from me to the figure in black that was walking in front of me.*

*“What are you doing?” Nimrod called out to me, cupping his dirty hands around his mouth. He turned to look at the boys surrounding him, making sure they could all see. “Are you going with the cockroaches?”*

*I lowered my head in embarrassment and tried turning to the right in order to ignore the man in black that was leading me as best as I could. As far as I can remember, this was the first time that I wished my mother would die. I crushed what was left of the clementine in my hand and wished it was her head that was being squashed between my fingers, ripped apart, its fluids dripping on the asphalt and on my shoes. He really does look like a cockroach, I thought to myself. Goodness knows what they do in that synagogue; maybe this whole thing about turning on the lights is just a set up. Mum would feel so bad if something was to happen to me. If only something would happen, just so she would suffer and be eaten up by remorse.*

*We turned to the entrance of the building, the last one on the street, and entered the synagogue. It was completely dark and smelled of hot candle wax. I squinted my eyes in an attempt to make out the man leading me from the other figures in there. We moved on to a small, windowless area with a few old chairs standing in one of the corners. With his fingers he signalled to two boys who were standing there waiting, leaning against the wall, and then turned to yet another, broader entrance. I hurried after the man in order not to lose him, but before I could enter a strong hand suddenly grabbed my shoulder, stopped me in my tracks, and pulled me back. I couldn't see a thing. It was pitch dark and I wondered what they did here in the dark. My hands were sticky from the dried-up clementine juice. “Yamma,”<sup>55</sup> I said.*

*“This way,” a voice said over my shoulder and directed me to the wall on the left. I turned to the wall, carefully climbed onto the chair that was already put there and reached my hand to the light switches.*

*“Thanks,” he said, when the light in the room went on. Now, I could see that the man was smiling. His face was narrow and he had red blotches spread randomly across his forehead and his cheeks. The heat suddenly felt unbearable.*

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<sup>55</sup> In spoken Arabic, the expression *yamma* (אמא) means “mum” or “my mother.” It is also said when someone is scared or sees something scary, in which case it conveys a meaning similar to the English “oh my God.”

*I bent over to get down from the chair and he held onto the backrest with his hand to keep it from collapsing under me. "You're welcome," I said and I realized I wasn't in the actual synagogue, but rather in a sort of rectangular shaped entrance hall leading to the synagogue.*

*(...)*

*Nimrod was waiting for me across from the bakery, his old football tucked under his right arm.*

*"Weren't you planning to play dodge ball?" I asked.*

*"Sure thing." He walked alongside me. "We played two rounds, I won both times."*

*"Already? How come?"*

*"How come you are hanging around with them?" he shot me an angry look. "My mum says it is forbidden to come near them. That they are thieves living on her salary."*

*(...)*

*"That it is their fault we can't go see aunt Yasmin on Sabbath morning, because they've decided it's forbidden for the busses to run," he continued. "They also call the police when you bring your dog to the park near the intersection, because they hate dogs."*

*"But what can the police do about a dog?"*

*"I don't know, kill it," he answered. "Anyway, you shouldn't be walking around with them. Did you forget that it's because of them that we had to end my birthday party in the winter? Even when you turn on a tape recorder, they get the police."*

*"But they asked for my help," I tried to explain. "They needed someone to turn on the lights. You couldn't see a thing in there. It was a little scary." I looked at him for a moment and then added, "And besides, my mum made me do it."<sup>56</sup>*

## 5.2 *Israel's Jews: the divided people*

This excerpt from *To Jaffa*, in which the main character unwittingly becomes a *Shabbos goy*, illustrates the religious-secular divide among Israel's Jews. Judging from his attire and strict observance of Sabbath, the man asking for the favour of turning on the light belongs to the ultra-Orthodox community. Nimrod, who is outside playing dodgeball on Sabbath, clearly does not. Not much is revealed about Nimrod's character. However, several reasons allow for the conclusion that he is,

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<sup>56</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 43-45.

most likely, a secular, Jewish Israeli neighbourhood friend of the main character. For one, Jaffa is known as one of few areas where Jewish- and Palestinian-Israelis have coexisted for many years.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in the previous section we have seen that the main character and his friend attended a school that celebrated Jewish holidays. Certainly, this would leave plenty of opportunity to befriend Jewish fellow students, religious or secular. Also, it is mentioned in the novel that Nimrod later joins the Israeli Air Force,<sup>58</sup> a position not open to Palestinian-Israelis, “because of the service’s elite status and because of the fear of their dual loyalty.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Nimrod tells the main character that the other boys were plotting to wait for him outside the synagogue and release a dog to chase after him as soon he would step outside, “because you’re Arab.”<sup>60</sup> It seems very unlikely that the other boys would discuss such a plan in the presence of Nimrod, if he were Palestinian himself.

The dichotomy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might give the impression that Jewish-Israelis are a unified group, as one pitted against Palestinians. However, this is not the case. Israel’s Jews are far from a homogeneous group. Virtually all Jewish-Israelis identify themselves with one of four religious subgroups. From most observant to least observant, these are: *Haredim* (ultra-Orthodox), *Datim* (religious), *Masortim* (traditional), and *Hilonim* (secular). These groups do not only differ in terms of religious beliefs and practices; they inhabit separate social worlds, each with their own lifestyle and politics.<sup>61</sup>

A typical example of discord between different groups of Jews in Israel is found in what media have dubbed Sabbath wars, on-going struggles over the character of public Sabbath observance in which ultra-Orthodox and secular Jews find themselves on opposite sides. Bones of contention include the opening of restaurants, cinemas and shopping malls and the operation of public transportation, which to the ultra-Orthodox all constitute a desecration of the holy day. Secular

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<sup>57</sup> Esther Zandberg, “Challenging Assumptions About Coexistence in Jafa,” *Haaretz*, October 15, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 45.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Silverstein, “First Arab Woman Serves in Israeli Air Force ... by Mistake,” *Tikun Olam*, April 20, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 45.

<sup>61</sup> Kelsey Jo Starr and David Masci, “In Israel, Jews are united by homeland, but divided into very different groups,” *Pew Research Center*, March 8, 2016.



Jews, on the other hand, “feel religious strictures are impinging on their freedom.”<sup>62</sup> Already in the 1950s, shortly after the State of Israel was established, did ultra-orthodox Jews take to the streets of Jerusalem to oppose the opening of roads and restaurants on Sabbath.<sup>63</sup> The dispute continues to this day and has even made its way to Tel Aviv, a city usually known for its secularism, where in the late summer of 2016 maintenance on railway tracks was suspended on a Saturday after complaints from Haredi politicians.<sup>64</sup>

Deeper issues underlie the Sabbath wars. At the heart of the antagonism between Israel’s ultra-Orthodox and secular Jews is the challenge of determining exactly how Jewish the state should be, or, if you will, how exactly the state should be Jewish. Despite the fact that they only make up about 9 per cent of the population,<sup>65</sup> the ultra-Orthodox hold the monopoly on myriad religious affairs, shunning pluralism and advancing their own brand of Judaism. Through the Chief Rabbinate, the Haredi establishment firmly controls matters of marriage, conversion, *kashrut*<sup>66</sup> and, as discussed above, the observance of Sabbath.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Israel’s system of proportional representation has enabled the ultra-Orthodox political parties to exert considerable power and influence. Reaping the benefits of their role as king maker, Haredi politicians have successfully pleaded for, among other things, exemption from military service and the obligation to teach core curriculum subjects.<sup>68</sup>

Secular Jews, as well as other non-Orthodox groups, do not identify with the Jewish identity the *Haredi* establishment strives to impose on all of Israeli society. For them, “being Jewish” is predominantly a matter of ancestry and culture, not religion. To give an example, secular Jews assign greater value to the state’s democratic values than they do to *halakha* (Jewish, religious law).<sup>69</sup> The ultra-Orthodox community is considered a thorn in the flesh of the State of Israel by the

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<sup>62</sup> “‘Sabbath war’ heats up in Israel, secular-ultra Orthodox tensions felt in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv,” *Daily Sabah*, September 21, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> “Raising hell over Israel’s holy days,” *The Economist*, September 17, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> J.S. Herzog, “Five minutes before Shabbat: Israel Railways ordered to stop all work,” *Ynet News*, September 2, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Star and Masci, “In Israel, Jews are united by homeland, but divided into very different groups.”

<sup>66</sup> *Kashrut* is the set of Jewish laws dealing with what foods can and cannot be eaten and how these foods should be prepared.

<sup>67</sup> Shoshanna Keats-Jaskoll, “How is Israel faring on issues of religion and state?” *The Jerusalem Post*, August 10, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Aron Heller, “Israel’s ultra-Orthodox poised for political return,” *The Times of Israel*, May 7, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Pew Research Center, *Israel’s Religiously Divided Society*, March 8, 2016, 6.

secular majority for different reasons that all tie together. To start, members of the *Haredi* community are exempt from military service, which is considered “an affront to the Haredi lifestyle.”<sup>70</sup> This provokes outrage, as the ultra-Orthodox community enjoys the benefits of a strong national army, but does not contribute to the burden of national security. Instead of serving in the army, *Haredi* men dedicate themselves to, sometimes lifelong, study of traditional religious texts. As a result, many do not join the nation’s workforce. They live of stipends, government benefits and, in some cases, income generated by their spouses.<sup>71</sup> This has led *Haredim* to rank among the poorest communities in Israel.<sup>72</sup> Other causes for concern are the community’s high birth rate<sup>73</sup> and the fact that ultra-Orthodox educational institutions receive state funding, even when they do not include subjects as math, science and English in their curriculum.<sup>74</sup> All these factors taken together have the secular population concerned, and angry, that the rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox community will increasingly strain both the state’s economy as well as its democratic, liberal and pluralistic identity.

In this passage, the way in which Nimrod refers to the ultra-Orthodox as *cockroaches*,<sup>75</sup> while his mother describes them as *thieves living on her salary*, unmistakably relates to the secular majority’s complaint that ultra-Orthodox Jews are merely profiting from the state’s welfare without contributing. Nimrod’s recollection of the ultra-Orthodox’s impact on his daily life pertains directly to the arguments and sentiments involved in the Sabbath wars.

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<sup>70</sup> Naomi Zeveloff, “Ultra-Orthodox Celebrate Rollback of Israel Draft Law,” *The Forward*, May 6, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> “Eat, pray, don’t work,” *The Economist*, June 27, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Ben Sales, “22 Percent Poverty - and 5 Other Revealing Facts About Israel’s Economy,” *The Forward*, January 2, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> “Eat, pray, don’t work,” *The Economist*, June 27, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Moran Azulay, “Knesset votes to cancel core subject requirement for Haredi schools,” *Ynet News*, August 2, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> The term *cockroaches* is sometimes used by secular Jews when speaking about ultra-Orthodox Jews. (Edzard Lutz, *Language as a Medium of Legal Norms: Implications of the Use of Arabic as a Language in the United Nations System* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998), 163).

## 6. Between Bialik and Kanafani: a generational divide

### 6.1 Remembering Bialik in the land of sad oranges

On a bargain hunt in the city, Said and the main character stumble upon a small store run by an elderly shopkeeper. The following scene describes their encounter with the man.

*Standing in the door opening of a small, windowless shop, an older man, short and chubby, was smoking a cigarette and patiently staring out.*

*“There isn’t a single customer there.”*

*“Let’s see what he has at the entrance.”*

*We approached the store. Left from the threshold stood a reproduction printed on extra thick canvas attached to the frame with pushpins: a naked woman pointed at a male figure trying to erupt from inside a globe as if he were hatching from an egg. And whilst cleaving his way through, his blood was flowing. A small child, crouched at the legs of the woman, watched the scene in fear.<sup>76</sup>*

*“Dali?” I asked.*

*“Didn’t I tell you there was a surprise in store for us?” he said, his eyes twinkling.*

*We entered the shop. Said lifted the picture with one hand and with the other hand he motioned to the shopkeeper.*

*“Fifty shekels,” the shopkeeper said without any introductions. “And take that thing of my hands already. For months, I’ve had it here, but nobody wants it.”*

*Said fell silent and seemed offended. At that very moment, he looked so much like Sharihan. He had the same reproachful frown and pouted his lower lip in the same childish way.*

*“This is Salvador Dalí,” he said.*

*“Listen, I don’t care if it’s Dalí or Baba Sali,” the chubby man laughed sneeringly. “If you have fifty shekels, it goes.”*

*Said took a folded bill from his pants’ pocket and gave it to the shopkeeper with a straight face and I guess that he would have signalled to me that we were leaving immediately, if he hadn’t had the sneaking suspicion that he might discover another Dalí between the old books and the high stacks of records on the floor.*

*“So, what did you say before about Bialik?” he turned to me, trying to take his mind of the insult.*

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<sup>76</sup> The picture described here is Salvador Dalí’s *Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man* (oil on canvas, 1943).

*“It’s the anniversary of his death,” I replied. “It is mentioned in all the weekend newspapers this morning.”*

*“Bialik? This is what you remember?” the shopkeeper asked in Arabic and he came closer toward us.*

*Said and I looked at each other surprised.*

*“I want to show you something,” he continued and his facial expression became more appeasing. He climbed onto a small chair, extracted a white book from one of the shelves and handed it to me.*

*I read the Arabic letters on the cover out loud, “Ghassan Kanafani.”*

*Said looked at me, confused.*

*Now, the eyes of the old man darkened and his voice sounded grumbling again and impatient.*

*“Clearly, you don’t know who this is,” he said. “Does anyone your age, today, know who Ghassan Kanafani is? You only ...” He was about to raise his voice but changed his mind, stopped abruptly and sat down in a chair across from us.*

*“It’s not your fault,” he said with a dismissive wave of his hand. “It’s the anniversary of Bialik’s death, and this Dali you are so crazy about. But someone gives you a book in Arabic and you’re confused, you’re not familiar with the letters.”*

*“I actually do know who Ghassan ...”*

*“Many call him ‘the prince of Palestinian literature,’” the old man continued calmly. “Until you’ve read *The Land of Sad Oranges*, don’t talk to me about literature. This man, of whom you know nothing,” he got up from his seat and looked at Said, “has written things that Bialik would never want to tell you.”*

*He spoke with such excitement and awe that his words spurred us into listening and, without moving, we stayed put for an extra half hour of a rambling sermon from a man who sounded as if he hadn’t been listened to in a long time. When we got up to leave, I gave him back the book, but he rested his hand on his chest as if he was offended by my offer, and the book was left in my hand. As we made our way through the alleys, I pondered how it came to be that I remembered precisely the anniversary of Bialik’s death, but had forgotten most stories from *The Land of Sad Oranges*.<sup>77</sup>*

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<sup>77</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 23-24.

## 6.2 Generations worlds apart

Before discussing the divide Sikseck addresses in this passage, it is necessary to briefly elaborate on the authors mentioned, Bialik and Kanafani.

During his lifetime, Haim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) was known as Israel's national poet, a title that remains to this day. The anniversary of his death is commemorated annually with, among other things, speeches of praise delivered at his grave site.<sup>78</sup> Bialik, dubbed "the greatest Hebrew poet of modern times,"<sup>79</sup> is accredited with having been "a moral and political guiding light" in the formation of the national identity, a creator of (modern Jewish) culture and having resurrected the Hebrew language.<sup>80</sup> Throughout Israel, Bialik's work is still widely read and appreciated; some of his writings have even been put to music by much esteemed composers.<sup>81</sup>

Both the life and work of Ghassan Kanafani, a leading Palestinian political writer, are illustrative of the plight of many Palestinians. Born in Acre, in 1936, Kanafani and his family fled Palestine in 1948. Exiled from his native land, he lived successively in Lebanon, Damascus, Kuwait, and again in Lebanon, Beirut. After working as a teacher, he went on to become a journalist, and official spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In 1972, Kanafani died in a car bombing, presumably executed by Israeli soldiers. To this day, he is revered by Palestinians and considered a martyr.<sup>82</sup> At the time of his death, Kanafani had written three novels, and over fifty short stories.<sup>83</sup> One of those stories is *The Land of Sad Oranges*, in which a Palestinian boy tells the story of being forced out of Israel. Kanafani's fiction raises awareness for the experience of refugees, recounting the effects of exile on the psyche and the difficulty of identity formation under these circumstances. The title refers to the land; the majority of displaced Palestinians lived in the coastal plains between Acre in the north and Al-Majdal in

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<sup>78</sup> Shmuel Avneri, "More Than a National Poet: On the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Haim Nahman Bialik's birth," *Haaretz*, January 4, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel Leiter and Ezra Spicehandler, "Bialik, Hayyim Nahman," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 561.

<sup>80</sup> Avneri, "More Than a National Poet."

<sup>81</sup> "Hayyim Nachman Bialik," *Jewish Virtual Library*.

<sup>82</sup> Elias Houry, "Remembering Ghassan Kanafani, or How a Nation Was Born of Storytelling," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2012/2013): 85.

<sup>83</sup> Hilary Kilpatrick, "Tradition and Innovation in the Fiction of Ghassān Kanafānī," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 7 (1976): 53-54.

the south, which were mostly planted with orange groves. Before *al-Nakba*,<sup>84</sup> the success of the orange-growing industry constituted a source of national pride for the Palestinians. However, when Zionist militias took over these lands, for Palestinians the orange came to represent loss, both of the land and of nationhood.<sup>85</sup>

Now, let us return to the scene at hand. What ensues when the protagonist and Said enter the shop of the elderly man is an encounter between two generations worlds apart. Speaking in Hebrew and remembering the anniversary of Bialik's death, the young men represent those Palestinian-Israelis for whom the State of Israel, and following from that their hybrid cultural identity, has always been a reality and Jewish culture is an intrinsic part of life. The shopkeeper, on the other hand, emblemizes the older generation who hold Kanafani in their hearts as "the prince of Palestinian literature" to whom Bialik is no match. Speaking about his parents in an interview, Sikseck very poignantly shed light on the experience of the older generation:

*They both had other identities, other cultural contexts, another history, (...) and they both woke up one day to find that the State of Israel had been established around them and were given a new identity, an Israeli one, with the traditional blue ID card.*<sup>86</sup>

Thus, radically different experiences have driven a wedge between these generations, leaving each with their own cultural frame of reference. Ostensibly living in the same city, the youngsters live their lives in Bialik's Israel, while the shopkeeper resides in Kanafani's land of sad oranges.

It deserves mention that the generational divide discussed here can be regarded in two ways. First, this particular scene from *To Jaffa* can be taken to illustrate a generational divide specific to the Palestinian citizens of Israel. In that case, *Al-Nakba* is the pivotal, historical moment that separates the two generations from each other. However, the generational divide can also be considered a universal phenomenon. Certainly, Palestinian-Israelis are not the only group to

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<sup>84</sup> *Al-Nakba* (lit. the catastrophe) is the Arabic designation for the establishment of the Jewish State following the Israeli War of Independence and the subsequent displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian-Arabs. (Elon Gilad, "What is Nakba Day? A Brief History," *Haaretz*, May 14, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Nasser Abufarha, "Land of Symbols: Cactus, Poppies, Orange and Olive Trees in Palestine," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 15, no.3 (2008): 348-349.

<sup>86</sup> Sudilovsky, "Writing His Way Into Existence," 42.

experience divisive consequences from defining moments in history. For instance, one can imagine that a similar generational rift exists between Jewish-Israelis for whom the State of Israel is a hard-fought reality and younger generations for whom the state has always been a reality. Broadening our scope beyond the borders of Israel, throughout the world historical turning points have drastically influenced the experience of generations coming of age after the events, setting them apart from their predecessors. Examples include, to name a few, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of Apartheid in 1994.

## 7. Final thoughts and conclusion

### 7.1 *A mosaic society*

In *To Jaffa*, seemingly mundane and insignificant occurrences and encounters bear testimony to the fact that Israeli society is divided in a great number of ways. The parts I have translated and discussed in the foregoing sections do not, however, constitute an exhaustive list. Throughout the novel, the observant reader can discern other dividing lines. To give one example, the frailty of inter-minority relations becomes apparent when the main character's mother, a Palestinian-Israeli and thus a minority within Israel, is very distrustful of a Chinese worker who offers to help her carry her heavy bags of groceries.<sup>87</sup> Sikseck lays bare the mosaic make-up of Israeli society and has his storyteller walking the lines.

### 7.2 *From hyphenated identity to hybrid identity*

From the outset, Israeli literature has reflected the intricacies involved in constructing Israel's cultural identity. As a result, the controversy over its definition remains ongoing. Firmly rooted in Zionist discourse, Israeli literature was originally intended to represent Israeli culture as distinct from both Jewish Diaspora culture and Palestinian culture. However, with Jewish-Israeli authors addressing the suppressed history of their Palestinian countrymen and Palestinian-Israeli writers sharing their stories in Hebrew, Israeli literature quickly veered of its intended course.<sup>88</sup> Ayman Sikseck's work constitutes the latest chapter in this development toward a more inclusive and diverse Israeli literature. Though often named in one breath with Sayed Kashua, Sikseck sheds a new light. Kashua often presents the Jewish-Israeli and the Palestinian-Arab identity as irreconcilable; his characters turn off, as it were, their Palestinian-ness to pass as Jewish-Israeli and vice versa. By contrast, Sikseck's characters consistently meander in the grey area where Jewish-Israeli culture and Palestinian culture blend together rather than collide. To my mind, Sikseck introduces into Israeli literature characters that have surpassed the stage of hyphenated identities, be they described as Palestinian-Israeli, Arab-Israeli or Israeli-Arab, and instead are slowly coming to terms with hybrid identities.

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<sup>87</sup> Sikseck, אל יפו (*To Jaffa*), 38.

<sup>88</sup> Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably bonded*, 4.



### 7.3 *Rethinking society*

*To Jaffa* is an account of Israeli society that is at the same time critical and disarming. Sikseck puts his finger, or rather his pen, on society's sore spots by pointing out the many ways in which it is divided. However, he regards these societal flaws through the eyes of a vulnerable main character, which struggles to find his way. Through his unnamed protagonist, Sikseck succeeds in bringing a personal Palestinian-Israeli story across to a Hebrew-speaking readership, which entails the Jewish-Israeli majority as well as the Palestinian-Israeli minority. For both groups, *To Jaffa* could be a stepping-stone toward critically appraising society. Throughout the novel, Sikseck's protagonist finds himself in different social scenarios and goes from feeling "part of it all" (to use Said's word) to being an excluded *other*, and back again. The novel illustrates the fickleness of the sense of belonging; a notion that should speak to both Jewish- and Palestinian-Israelis, given their respective histories and shared future.

Though *To Jaffa* gives readers an insight into Israeli society through a minority lens, the issues addressed are universal; diversity, inter- and intra-communal strife and negotiating disparate identities. For this reason, Sikseck's novel could be of great value to an international readership. With large parts of the world caught in a downward spiral of increasing intolerance and xenophobia, *To Jaffa* brings attention to social issues that deserve awareness in Israel and beyond.

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## 9. Appendices

The following appendices contain the original Hebrew text fragments.

Unfortunately, the novel *El Yaffo* was no longer available for purchase at the time I started my research. Through the digital bookstore *E-vrit*, however, I was able to buy the e-book. The appendices contain screenshots made from this e-book, which explains the less than optimal quality, for which I apologize. All page numbers correspond to the page numbers in the e-book. The titles given to each fragment are my own and do not appear in the original Hebrew novel.



אותה על הספסל בתחנה. לקחתי את ידה ושקעתי שוב  
בנעשה במסגד. ניכר היה שחלק מהמבקרים זיהו אותי  
מהימים שבהם הייתי בא עם אבא לתפילה מדי ערב, וכמה  
מהם נעצרו כשהבחינו בי ושלחו אלי מבטים משתוממים.

כשהאוטובוס היה בחצי דרכו לתל אביב הסקתי שאין  
עוד אפשרות להתחרט, ותחושה של הקלה עמוקה  
התפשטה בי. הנהג עבר בחוסר סבלנות בין תחנות הרדיו  
השונות, וניצן השעינה את ראשה על כתפי ושקעה. שני  
גברים שגיטרות תלויות על כתפיהם ירדו מהאוטובוס, ואז  
הבחנתי בסעיד, היושב במושבים המקבילים לשלנו, לבדו.  
לפני שהספקתי לשובב את מבטי, הוא הבחין בי, ומיד קם  
מכיסאו והתקדם לקראתי בהתלהבות. "גם אתה?" הוא  
לחץ את ידי ושאל בחצי חיוך. התפלאתי מאוד על  
ישירותו, ובלבי תהיתי אם יהיה זה חכם להיראות משוחח  
איתו, בהתחשב בשם שקנתה לה משפחתו בסביבתנו  
הקרובה. הוא טפח לי קלות על הכתף, בתנועה שנראתה  
לי ידידותית במידה מוגזמת, ופרש בחזרה למקומו לפני  
שהספקתי להגיב.

"ראית את זה?" ניצן משכה בזרועי, והצביעה לעבר  
הנוסעים שנוספו בעצירה האחרונה. ליד הנהג עמדה

אישה כבת גילה של אמא, מטפחת מוסלמית מסורתית לראשה ובידיה תיק צד גדול.

"אתה חושב על מה שאני חושבת?" ניצן לקחה את כף ידי וקלעה את אצבעותיה באצבעותי.

"על מה את חושבת?" היתממתי.

"זה נראה לי חשוד."

"מה פתאום חשוד?" הרגשתי את לחיי מאדימות. "בגלל שהיא ערבייה היא נראית לך חשודה?"

ניצן הביטה בי המומה ונאלמה דקה ארוכה. "מה פתאום!?" הפטירה לבסוף. "ראית את התיק הזה שהיא מחזיקה ביד? בגללו היא נראית לי חשודה. וחוץ מזה, תסתכל מסביב. כולם פה מפחדים."

"אף אחד פה לא מפחד, התעקשתי. הנהג השתיק באחת את הרדיו כדי להיטיב לבחון את התיק שבין ידיה.

"אבל אני כן מפחדת!" היא החזירה בכעס.

בתוך כך, שתי נערות שישבו על זוג המושבים הראשונים וניהלו כל אותה שעה שיחה ערה ברוסית, אספו כעת את ילקוטיהן ופינו את מקומן, ועד מהרה נעלמו בחלקו האחורי של האוטובוס.

"גברת, מה יש לך בתיק?" קול צרוד בקע לפתע מירכתי

האוטובוס. איש קירח ועגלגל התקדם לקראתה בצעדים בוטחים. "הלו, את לא שומעת?" הוא הרים את קולו ומחא כף בהתגרות מול פניה, "שאלתי אותך מה יש בתיק." אבל היא לא השיבה, רק משכה קלות בשולי המטפחת שלראשה והידקה אותה סביב פניה. "תני לי את התיק הזה," הוא נשען לקראתה ועקר במשיכה זריזה את התיק מבין ידיה. היא פלטה צעקה מבוהלת, אלימה, ושלחה מיד את ידיה לעברו במאמץ להשיב את התיק. "חכי רגע," הוא הדף אותה. "קודם נראה מה יש לך פה."

רגלי נעשו כבדות ובטני התהפכה לפתע, כמו בשעות הראשונות שאחרי הידבקות במחלה. הוא פתח בזריזות את כפתוריו הרכוסים של התיק ושפך את תכולתו על הרצפה. לבי הלם בתוכי כמו להקה של תופים. סגרתי בכל כוחי על כף ידה הקטנה של ניצן. ארנק עור לבן וישן למראה נחת ראשון בין רגלי הנוסעים. אחריו נפלו עיפרון ופנקס קטן, צרור מפתחות רעשניים ומצית אדום. הוא ניער את התיק נייעור אחרון, ולערימה היתוספו כמה ממחטות נייר. ניצן ואני הבטנו

פעורי עיניים בדלות תכולתו של התיק שעד לפני כמה רגעים היווה סכנה גדולה כל כך.

סמוקת פנים היא רכנה על ברכיה והחלה לאסוף את חפציה, מקללת את האיש הקירח בערבית עסיסית. הנהג עצר לפתע את האוטובוס, שלא באחת התחנות, והנוסעים הביטו סביבם בהפתעה. דלתות האוטובוס נפתחו. היא תרה בעיניה עוד כמה רגעים בין רגלי הנוסעים, ואחר קמה מתוסכלת וירדה מהאוטובוס. דמותה קטנה והלכה ככל שהתקדמנו, אבל הספקתי לראות אותה עוצרת כדי לנגב את פניה באחת הממחטות.

עכשיו חיפשתי בדחיפות את סעיד בעיני, כדי לנסות לחלוק איתו את נטל המועקה המשונה הזאת, אבל הוא כבר לא היה במקומו.

"תראה מה מצאתי," קראה ניצן בירידה מהאוטובוס, ושלפה מכיס מכנסיה בקבוקון זכוכית קטן, מלא למחצה בנוזל אדמדם, "זה כנראה מה שהיא חיפשה." היא התיזה מעט מהנוזל על צווארה. "זה בושם. מריח טוב דווקא. תשמור לי?" היא טמנה את הבקבוק בכף ידי.

בהפסקה הראשונה בסרט קמתי לצאת לשירותים. תחושת

אמו הקישה על הדלת ונכנסה. "תשים את הבגדים מהבוקר," אמרה והניחה בכניסה סל כביסה מלא למחצה, ופנתה לצאת.

"מה הם עושים שם?" החוויתי בסנטר אל שני הפועלים בסרבלים, שעשו בינתיים את דרכם למטה, הכרזה מגולגלת על כתפו של אחד מהם. הם ניגשו למסחרית שחיכתה לצד המדרכה, תחבו אל תוכה את הכרזה ושלפו משם גליל חדש.

"בטח מתכוונים לשים פה שלט של חג שמח, פיזרו כאלה בכל תל אביב."

"חג שמח?!!" שאלתי מופתע. "אבל ממתי הרמדאן מעניין את -"

"לא הרמדאן, עפיפון," הוא נכנס לדברי וצחק בקול. "סוכות. זה עוד כמה ימים, שכחת? איך אפשר?" "אני זוכר," אמרתי.

"ביסודי נתנו לנו להרגיש שזה גם החג שלנו," המשיך, ספק בשביעות רצון ספק בתרעומת. "מי חשב אז על הרמדאן בכלל?"

מדי שנה בשנה, לקראת סוף הקיץ, סמאהר ואני היינו מקימים סוכה בחצר האחורית של הבית. אמא הסכימה

בדרך כלל לנדב סדין או שניים שהניחה שלא יחסרו לה, ומהם היינו מצליחים להעמיד סוכה לצד עצי הלימון בחצר. התקרה היתה תמיד משופעת, מכיוון שבמקום להיעזר במוטות קיבענו את קצותיה אל סורגי החלונות האחוריים, כך שהסדין היה משתחרר וקורס על ראשינו עם כל משב רוח שני.

"דווקא היה נחמד," השיב ושחרר גל נוסף של עשן. "חיכינו לזה, כמו לחגים שלנו, כל שנה. היה לזה טעם, לציפייה הזאת. לא?"

"נכון," הסכמתי, אף שהזיכרון נראה עכשיו רחוק כל כך, עד שהעלה בי מין עצבות משונה ואי-נוחות, כאילו עלעלתי בסתר בתמונות הילדות של מישהו אחר. "ביסודי היו הרבה דברים שחשבנו שהם שלנו והתברר שהם לא," סובבתי את גבי אל החלון. מסל הכביסה שעמד ליד הדלת נגלה סרט בד דקיק, שנשלח כמו אצבע ארוכה מבין חישוקי הפלסטיק של הסל. רצועת הגופייה האדומה של שריהאן. הפניתי ממנה את מבטי באחת. "גם האחים שלך צמים?" שאלתי.

"כולם, לא נעים להיות היחיד שלא צם בבית כזה. כל אחד מאיתנו צם כי הוא בטוח שכל האחרים יצומו גם."

הוא הפנה את מבטו החוצה, שתק דקה ארוכה ואז פנה אלי, מבליע חיוך, "תגיד, אתה זוכר את ארבעת המינים?"  
"ממש לא."

"אני דווקא כן," אמר ונראה מרוצה, "זה לא מצחיק אותך? באיראן היו מזמן תולים אותי על פחות מזה."  
"ממש זוג של כופרים אני ואתה, אה?" הוסיף, לא עקבי בנימת קולו.

"כל שנה היו טוחנים לנו את המוח עם זה בכיתה," הרגשתי שעלי לנסות לנחם אותו. "לא פלא שגם אתה זוכר את זה כמו את השם שלך."

סעיד שאף שאיפה אחרונה מהסיגריה והעיף אותה בשתי אצבעות למטה אל הרחוב. "אתה יודע," אמר, עיניו תלויות בנקודה רחוקה בחוץ, "כל השטויות האלה, הלולבים והמצות של פסח," הוא עצר לבלוע את רוקו, "רק אז הרגשתי שאני חלק מכל זה," הוא הביט בי מרוכז ורגע היסס אם להמשיך, "כאילו כל זה הוא גם שלי איכשהו."

התכוונתי לומר "אני מבין", אבל ממבטו ניכר שלא ציפה לתשובה. שתקתי ולא ניסיתי לחלץ את מבטי משלו.  
"תראה, הם סיימו שם למעלה," אמר לבסוף. "שמו כבר

הייתי בן עשר כשביקרתי בפעם הראשונה בבית הכנסת שבמורד הרחוב שלנו. אני וסמאהר ישבנו על נדנדת העץ שעמדה באותו קיץ מחוץ לבית, ואמא ישבה על המפתן מולנו וקילפה קלמנטינות מקערת פלסטיק שהניחה בין ירכיה. אבא הביא אותן יום קודם לכן מקלקיליה, בשני שקי קש כרסתניים. הן התפקעו מעסיס, ונמסו בנתחים בשרניים ומתוקים על הלשון. אכלתי פלח אחרי פלח בתיאבון, לשמחתה של אמא, שמיהרה לקלף עוד ועוד מהפירות.

סמאהר הסבה את תשומת לבנו לאיש הצעיר בעל המגבעת השחורה שהתקדם בצעדים מתוחים מדלת לדלת. עיניו היו קרועות לרווחה והוא נראה אובד עצות. הקיץ כבר עמד להסתיים, אבל באותו ערב עדיין היה חם מהרגיל.

"ערב טוב," הוא פנה בסופו של דבר אל אמא והסיר את מגבעתו, ובתוך כך חשף מתחתיה חישוק של אגלי זיעה. אמא השיבה לו הנהון מהוסס.

"מצטער להפריע לכם, אבל בבית הכנסת צריכים



להדליק אורות עוד מעט."

סמאהר הביטה בי וחייכה כמו כדי להמתיק סוד.  
"ועוד לא יצאה השבת," הוא המשיך, "ייבש את פניו בגב  
כף ידו וחייך לעומת תימהוננו. "אנחנו צריכים מישהו  
שידליק את האור בבניין."

"אה... הבנתי," אמרה אמא בהקלה. "בוודאי." היא  
הרימה לקראתו את קערת הפירות והפנתה את פניה אלי.  
"אני?!"

"כן, אלא מי? אני?" היא צחקה והניחה את הקערה  
במקומה.

הוא התחיל להתקדם במורד הרחוב. קמתי והלכתי  
אחריו בעודי נוגס בעצבנות בפלח הקלמנטינה שבידי,  
והקפדתי לפגר אחריו בכמה צעדים כדי שאוכל להשליך  
אחורה מבטים זועפים אל אמא. לקראת אמצע הדרך  
הבחינו בנו כמה מילדי השכונה, שבאותה שעה התאספו  
בשורה צפופה למשחק מחניים, ונעצרו להעביר עיניים  
סקרניות ממני אל הדמות השחורה ההולכת לפני ובחזרה.  
"מה אתה עושה?" צעק אלי נמרוד, מקמר שתי ידיים  
מלוכלכות סביב הפה, והעביר מבטו על הילדים שסבבו  
אותו לוודא שכולם יכולים לראות, "אתה הולך עם

הג'וקים?"

הנמכתי את ראשי במבוכה וניסיתי לנטות ימינה בשביל, כדי להתנכר ככל האפשר לאיש השחור שמוביל אותי. זו הפעם הראשונה שאני זוכר שאיחלתי לאמא שתמות. ריסקתי את שארית הקלמנטינה בכף ידי ורציתי כל כך שזה יהיה ראשה שנמחץ כך בין אצבעותי, נקרע ומגיר את נוזליו על הזפת ועל נעלי. הוא באמת נראה כמו ג'וק, חשבתי, והשד יודע מה הם עושים שם בבית הכנסת הזה, ואם כל עניין הדלקת האורות אינו אלא תחבולה. היא כל כך תצטער אם משהו יקרה לי, והלוואי שיקרה, כדי שתתייסר ותיאכל מחרטה.

פנינו אל הכניסה לבניין האחרון בדרך ונכנסנו לבית הכנסת. הוא היה חשוך לחלוטין, וריח של שעווה חמה עמד בו. צמצמתי את עיני כדי לנסות להבחין בין האיש שהוביל אותי ובין שאר הדמויות שהיו שם. התקדמנו אל חלל קטן ונטול חלונות, שכמה כיסאות ישנים עמדו באחת מפינותיו, והוא סימן באצבעו לשני בחורים שהמתינו שעונים אל הקיר ופנה אל כניסה נוספת, רחבה יותר. התקדמתי אחריו במהירות כדי לא לאבד אותו, אבל לפני שהספקתי להיכנס לפתח את כתפי כף יד חזקה, בלמה את

התקדמותי ומשכה אותי אחורה. לא הצלחתי לראות עוד דבר. כל כך סמיכה האפילה בחלל הזה, מה הם עושים כאן בחושך? כף ידי נעשתה דביקה מעסיס הקלמנטינה היבש. יאמא, אמרתי.

"זה מכאן," אמר הקול מעבר לכתפי, וכיוון אותי אל הקיר משמאל.

פניתי אל הקיר, טיפסתי בזהירות על הכיסא שהונח שם מראש ושלחתי יד אל שורת המפסקים.

"תודה," הוא הוסיף כשהאור עלה בחדר. עכשיו אפשר היה לראות שהוא מחייך. פניו היו צרות וכתמים אקראיים של סומק פשו בהן, לרוחב מצחו ועל לחייו. נעשה לי חם במידה בלתי נסבלת.

התכופפתי לרדת מהכיסא, והוא שלח את ידו אל המשענת למנוע את נפילתו תחתי. "בבקשה," אמרתי, ושמתי לב שאיני נמצא בבית הכנסת עצמו, אלא במין מבואה מלבנית המובילה אליו. מזווית עיני ראיתי שהטיח על הקיר מולי החל להתקלף, וחשף פסיפס של צבע ירוק בהיר, דומה לצבעם של קירות הבית החיצוניים שלנו. "אני חייב ללכת," פניתי ממנו והלכתי הלאה בקו ישר בקצב לא עקבי, ובמבטי ביקשתי את הדרך החוצה.

"ימינה," נענה קול מאחורי ומיד עם פנייתי מצאתי עצמי שוב על המדרכה.

נמרוד חיכה לי מול המאפייה, הכדורגל הישן שלו תחוב מתחת לזרועו הימנית.

"לא התכוונתם לשחק מחניים?" שאלתי.

"בטח," הוא הלך לצדי. "היו לנו שני סיבובים. ניצחתי בשניהם."

"כבר? איך זה יכול להיות?"

"איך יכול להיות שהלכת איתם," הוא נעץ בי זוג עיניים כועסות. "אמא שלי אומרת שאסור להתקרב אליהם. שהם גנבים שאוכלים מהמשכורת שלה."

לימים היה נמרוד מתגנב לחצר בית הכנסת כדי לעשן. בשעות אחר הצהריים היינו מתאספים סביבו, כמה מילדי השכונה, בזמן שישב על היחידה החיצונית של המזגן בבית הכנסת, וצופים בו בהשתאות בשעה שינק מהסיגריות יניקות ארוכות ונשף החוצה את העשן בקור רוח. הסיגריה היתה עוברת בין כולנו, ואחד אחד היינו משתעלים, מתקפלים בכאב ומעבירים אותה הלאה, עד שהיתה חוזרת לנמרוד, שהשקיף בשביעות רצון על

המתרחש. בכל פעם מחדש היה אחד המתפללים מבחין בנו בסופו של דבר, ויוצא לקראתנו עם המטאטא הישן שעמד דרך קבע בכניסה. אז היינו מזנקים ממקומנו ורצים במורד הרחוב, מתפקעים מצחוק, ומתלווים לנמרוד בחזרה לחצר למחרת.

"באשמתם אנחנו לא יכולים לנסוע בשבת בבוקר לדודה יסמין, כי הם החליטו שאסור שיהיה אוטובוס," הוא המשיך. "והם גם קוראים למשטרה אם אתה מביא את הכלב שלך לפארק שליד הצומת, כי הם שונאים כלבים." "אבל מה משטרה יכולה לעשות לכלב?" "לא יודע, הורגים אותו," הוא ענה. "ובלי קשר לא היית צריך ללכת איתם. אתה זוכר שבגללם היינו צריכים לסגור את מסיבת היומולדת שלי בחורף. גם אם אתה מדליק טייפ הם מביאים משטרה."

נמרוד התגייס בשנה שעברה. שמעתי מסעיד שהוא בחיל האוויר. כבר שנים לא החלפנו מילה. עולה בדעתי שעלי לספר לו שבית הכנסת נמצא עכשיו בסכנת הריסה. "הם ביקשו ממני," ניסיתי להסביר. "הם היו צריכים

שידליקו להם את האור, לא ראו שם כלום. זה היה קצת מפחיד." תליתי בו רגע את מבטי ואחר הוספתי, "וחוץ מזה, אמא שלי הכריחה אותי."

הוא שמט את הכדור מידו והחל מדרדר אותו לפניו. "קבענו לשחק ביחד היום, זוכר?"

"בטח שאני זוכר," אמרתי. "אני מוכן עכשיו. בא לך לאסוף את כולם מול המכולת ונתחלק לקבוצות?"

"לא," הוא משך בכתפו ולא הרים את עיניו מהכדור. "החברה כבר התפזרו, אין פה מספיק למשחק."

"אז מחר?" שאלתי, אבל הוא לא השיב, והמשיך להתקדם איתי לכיוון הבית, בועט מדי פעם בכדור בתנועה עייפה.

"אתה יודע," אמר כשהתקרבו אל מפתן הבית, והנמיך את קולו. "החברה בכלל רצו לתת לכלב הגדול של דניאל לרדוף אחריך. תכננו לחכות לך מחוץ לבית כנסת ואיך שאתה יוצא לשחרר אחריך את הכלב."  
"באמת?" ניסיתי להפגין אדישות.

"כן, זה כי אתה ערבי," הוא הסביר והנמיך שוב את קולו. "כי הם גזענים כולם, ככה אמא שלי אומרת. לא מכבדים אחד את השני."

סימטריים.

"תראה איזה יופי," הוא אמר והצביע אל שולחן עץ קטן ועגול, שסימנים מדויקים של עבודת יד נמשכו לאורך רגלו המתקמרת. הנהנתי בראשי להסכמה. סעיד החליק את ידו על פני השולחן בעדינות, עד שאצבעו נתקלה בתג המשתלשל מצדו. הוא הפך אותו ובחן את הכתוב, ואז חייך אלי ואמר, "טוב, אולי באיקאה יש כזה בזול."  
שוטטנו עוד במעברים הצרים, והחלפנו מבטים להבעת התרשמות מהמוצגים או לפסילתם.

כשניגש אלינו לבסוף אחד המוכרים והתעקש ללוות אותנו ולהסביר ארוכות על כל רהיט שהבענו בו עניין, החלטנו לצאת.

אולם לפני שפנינו הלאה באותה סמטה לכיוון החנויות האחרות, משך סעיד בזרועי לעצור בעדי והחווה בעיניו לכיוון השני. "מה זה שם?"

הבטתי לכיוון שאליו הצביע. חנות קטנה ונטולת חלונות, ובפתחה איש מבוגר נמוך קומה ושמנמן, מעשן סיגריה ומבטו שלוח קדימה בסבלנות. "אין שם אפילו לקוח אחד."

"תראה מה יש לו בכניסה."

התקרבנו אל החנות. משמאל למפתן עמדה רפרודוקציה על בד עבה במיוחד, מקובע אל המסגרת בסיכות משוננות: אישה עירומה מצביעה אל דמות גברית המנסה לבקוע מתוך כדור הארץ כמו מתוך ביצה, ובתוך כך מבתקת אותו ומקיזה את דמו. ילד קטן כורע מול רגליה של האישה, מביט בבהלה במתרחש.

"דאלי?" שאלתי.

"אמרתי לך שמצפה לנו הפתעה או לא?" אמר, עיניו נוצצות.

נכנסנו לחנות וסעיד הרים את הציור בידו האחת, מחווה בידו השנייה למוכר.

"חמישים שקל," אמר המוכר בלי הקדמות. "ותיקח את הדבר זה מהידיים שלי כבר. חודשים אני מחזיק אותו פה ואף אחד לא רוצה אותו."

סעיד השתק ונדמה היה שנעלב. כל כך דמה באותו רגע לשריאהן. אותו כיווץ מלא תוכחה של העיניים, אותו שרבוב ילדי של השפה התחתונה. "זה סלבדור דאלי," אמר.

"תשמע, לא אכפת לי אם זה דאלי או באבא סאלי," צחק השמנמן בזלזול. "אם יש לך חמישים שקל, הוא שלך."



סעיד הוציא שטר מקופל מכיס מכנסיו והגיש אותו למוכר בפנים חתומות, ואני מניח שהיה מסמן לי שנצא מיד, אלמלא חשד שיתגלה עוד משהו של דאלי בין הספרים הישנים וערימות התקליטים הגבוהות שעל הרצפה.

"אז מה אמרת קודם, על ביאליק?" הוא פנה אלי, מנסה להסיח את דעתו מעלבונו.

"זה יום השנה למותו," השבתי. "מציינים את זה הבוקר בכל עיתוני סוף השבוע."

"ביאליק? זה מה שאתם זוכרים?" שאל המוכר בערבית, והתקדם לקראתנו.

סעיד ואני הבטנו זה בזה מופתעים.

"אני רוצה להראות לכם משהו," המשיך, ופניו כמו התרחבו בפייסנות. הוא טיפס על כיסא קטן וחילץ מאחד המדפים ספר לבן והושיט לי אותו.

קראתי בקול את האותיות הערביות על העטיפה, "ע'סאן כנפאני."

סעיד הביט בי מבולבל.

עכשיו נעכרו עיניו של הזקן וקולו נשמע שוב נרגן וחסר סבלנות. "ברור שלא תדעו מי זה," אמר. "מי בגילכם

יודע היום מי זה ע'סאן כנפאני? אתם רק -" הוא עמד להרים את קולו אבל עצר באחת ונמלך בדעתו, והתיישב על הכיסא מולנו. "אבל אתם לא אשמים," אמר, מנופף בידו בתנועה מבטלת. "זה יום השנה למות ביאליק והדאלי הזה שאתם כל כך אוהבים. נותנים לכם ספר בערבית ואתם מתבלבלים, לא רגילים לאותיות."

"אני דווקא יודע מי זה ע'סאן -"

"הוא מי שהרבה מכנים 'נסיך הספרות הפלשתינית', המשיך הזקן בשלו. "עד שלא תקראו את 'בארץ התפוזים העצובים' אל תדברו איתי על ספרות. האיש הזה, שאתה לא יודע מי הוא," קם ממקומו והביט בסעיד, "כתב את הדברים שביאליק לא ירצה לעולם לספר לך."

הוא דיבר בהתרגשות וביראה כאלה, שדבריו עוררו בנו חשק להקשיב, ובלי משים נשארנו במקומנו לחצי שעה נוספת של דרשה בלתי סדורה מפיו של אדם שנשמע כאילו איש לא הקשיב לו זה זמן רב. כשעמדנו לצאת הושטתי לו את הספר בחזרה, אבל הוא הניח את כף ידו על חזהו כאילו נעלב מהצעתי, והספר נשאר בידי.

כשעשינו את דרכנו בין הסמטאות חשבתי איך קרה הדבר שדווקא את יום השנה למותו של ביאליק זכרתי,

ואילו את הסיפורים של "בארץ התפוזים העצובים" שכחתי ברובם. הדרך נעשתה מאובקת כל כך מריבוי המבקרים, שעניי דמעו והרגשתי יובש בפי. הבטתי בסעיד וחיפשתי סימנים של מורת רוח בפניו, אבל הוא היה שקוע בלוח הבד שהחזיק בשתי ידיו.

האבק הוסיף לעלות אל פנינו תוך כדי הליכה, ושפשפתי את עיני עד שכאבו. בסוף המסלול עמד מזנון קטן של פלאפל וסעיד הציע שניכנס אליו. הנערה מאחורי הדלפק הגישה לי תפריט כתוב בכתב יד מסולסל.

"נו, נראה טוב?" הוא שאל.

"אני לא יודע," אמרתי והעברתי שתי אצבעות על האותיות. מבעד למסך המים הסמיך בעיני הן נראו מעוותות, נוזלות זו אל תוך זו. "אני לא יודע," אמרתי שוב והושטתי לו את מלבן הנייר. "אני לא מצליח להבין את מה שכתוב."

עשיתי את הדרך הביתה לבד. באותה שעה נטו השמים להשחיר ובאוויר עמד מין דכדוך עמום של סוף החג. החלטתי לעבור דרך העיר העתיקה ולבלות את תחילת הערב במקום הקבוע שלי עם שריהאן. בכניסה לעיר, איש