Hegemonic (Israeli) Time and Minority (Palestinian) Space: Sayed Kashua's Chronotopic Approach in Let It Be Morning

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ABSTRACT: Sayed Kashua, a Palestinian writer in Israel who has published novels exclusively in Hebrew, was celebrated as a successful writer and journalist in the Hebrew literary field. If the author's usage of Hebrew and his novels were examined from an Israeli and a Jewish perspective and from the prospects of minority speech acts, these critics did, however, situate his literature within the immediate political context, that of the impossible situation of Palestinians in Israel. This article reads his second novel, *Let It Be Morning* (ויהי בוקר), from a different perspective and considers Kashua's literary strategy that consists in transforming a futuristic and allegorist perspective into a chronotope set between hegemonic (Israeli) time and minority (Palestinian) space. This novel highlights, between text and context, different visions of the future: a dystopian situation reflecting both a disastrous outcome of the Zionist wing calling for the transfer of the Palestinians and an internal conflict between Palestinians (*fitnah*); the utopian vision of the writer, who used his writing in Hebrew to create a hybrid space of negotiation with the Hebrew reader and therefore suggesting literature as a way to prevent dystopia. This article emphasizes a futuristic storytelling from its content to its form used by Kashua as a literary strategy to express the impossibility of a Palestinian voice, his voice, in Hebrew fiction.

A PALESTINIAN HYBRID TEXT, BETWEEN A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE AND THE UTOPIA OF THE WRITER

> At long last, the Zionist dream is coming true…. The greatest threat confronting the State of Israel is no longer…. The Jewish identity of the state has never been clearer. The wise step taken by the present government was overdue, in fact. According to the figures we have, in less than two years the Palestinians living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean would have outnumbered the Jews. Now, we can expect an overwhelming and permanent Jewish majority. In fact, the Jewish population of the State of Israel has now become almost a hundred percent Jewish. At long last, a truly Jewish state.[1]

These lines from Sayed Kashua's second novel, *Let It Be Morning*, reflect the future time of the implementation of an exclusive Jewish space in Israel-Palestine. The Zionist dream is being accomplished by erasing the Palestinian space.[2] The word "threat" is not verbalized even though it affects 20 percent of the Israeli population: namely, Palestinian Arabs. Written in the midst of the Second Intifada,[3] *Let It Be Morning* narrates the realization of the above Zionist dream, but from the point of view of the Palestinian nightmare—that is, of their expulsion from their historical space. It is a futuristic story that does not celebrate some kind of community achievement, nor is it about a utopian future. Rather, it is a dystopian fiction written by an author whose utopia consisted of writing Palestinian stories in Hebrew in order to create a hybrid space that would tie the Hebrew reader to an alternative space of Hebrew-Arabic and Palestine-Israel.

Kashua maintains his own particularities in his dystopian novel since it involves the hybridity in the language[4] and in the identity[5] of the different characters shaped by the rhythm of a chronotope designated by the title, *Let It Be Morning*, as a biblical one.[6] It is undeniable that this literary text has political significance, even more that this novel is a political one since its author narrates within Jewish hegemony individual and collective Palestinian identity[7] in order to protest the fragile situation and the conditions of Palestinians in Israel. Although Kashua's first novel, *Dancing Arab*s, was autofictional, quite early in his literary career he chose dystopian fiction to narrate a lost utopia of a community or his own loss of a utopian Israeliness.[8] I would

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1 Sayed Kashua, *Let It Be Morning*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger (New York: Black Cat, 2006), 265. All quotations from this novel are from this translation, and page numbers are given in the text.

2 The Zionist dream in this essay is defined as one of "creating a monoethnic, monoreligious and monolinguist Jewish national society." Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15.

3 The Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, is the Palestinian uprising that started in 2000.

4 Although Kashua wrote the novel in Hebrew, it is, however, obvious from the text that the character is an Arabic speaker. In that sense, Arabic hides behind Hebrew script.

5 Most of the protagonists are Palestinians.

6 The title in Hebrew ויהי בוקר refers to the second day of the creation in Genesis:
"וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרָקִיעַ, שָׁמָיִם; וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר, יוֹם שֵׁנִי
(And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.)
https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0101.htm.

7 In this case it concerns the hybridity of the main character and the writer set between Palestinian identity and writing exclusively in Hebrew.

8 I assume that this is what Sayed Kashua was after. So this concept is somehow problematic in its definition when it comes to a Palestinian writer in Israel. In her *Multiculturalism in Israel: Literary Perspectives* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2014), Adia Mendelson-Maoz addresses the literary use of Hebrew by Palestinians in Israel and suggests this identity in her relationship to the language. Thus, she writes about Araïdi and Anton

like to emphasize in this article a storytelling that is futuristic from its content to its form and that is used by Kashua as a literary strategy to express the impossibility of a Palestinian voice, his voice, in Hebrew fiction.

Born in 1975 in Tira,[9] Sayed Kashua has published four novels, a short story, and an essay collection.[10] He was celebrated as a successful writer and journalist who belonged to the Hebrew literary field until he left Israel during the Gaza war in 2014.[11] Kashua was part of the small group of Palestinians in Israel who have published novels in Hebrew since 1966.[12] He is by far the one who persisted the longest in literary writing in that language. As a translingual, hybrid, and minority writer,[13] Kashua combines humor, irony, and sometimes mockery to tell stories set between optimism and pessimism. In that sense, he fits the position of a "Pessoptimist," a reference to Said, a character created by the Palestinian writer Emile Habibi whose new identity is shaped between optimism for having stayed in Palestine after 1948 and pessimism for having lost his space and its references.[14] To extend this notion to Sayed Kashua, I suggest that he is a Pessoptimist in languages: happy for writing his literature in Hebrew and unsatisfied for not mastering literary Arabic.[15] Irony and humor are deployed by the author as a maneuver and as a strategy to provide him with an illusory freedom to narrate the tragic situation of a minority, without disrupting either his position in Hebrew literature or his relationship with the Jewish reader.

Shammas that "in many cases, their use of Hebrew resulted from having lost their original language" (8). Mendelson-Maoz also comments that "bilingual writing—writing in Arabic and Hebrew or simply in Arabic—reflects assimilation into Israeli society" (24). Apart from the fact that I suggest reading these authors according to their own experiences with their Arab-Hebrew bilingualism, I have not limited these issues to an exclusive vision that assumes a loss of identity and heritage language, since these authors, including Kashua, practice bilingualism and are very attached to a Palestinian identity that is articulated in their literary works.

9 Tira is a Palestinian city in the Triangle region (Israel), which borders the West Bank.

10 Novels: *Dancing Arabs* (2002), *Let It Be Morning* (2004), *Second Person Singular* (2010), *Track Changes* (2017). Short story: *Cinderella* (2005). Essay collection: *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life* (2016).

11 This observation is based both on the articles critical of his latest novel, *Track Changes*, and on the writer's own view of his relationship to his literature written in Hebrew. The various articles that followed the publication of the novel were very critical of the repetition of the author's well-known identity theme. For example, in its edition of December 22, 2017, *Ha-aretz* announced the publication of the novel with the following title: "'Track Changes': Actually, There Are Not Enough Changes in the New Book of Sayed Kashua." Furthermore, when Kashua left Israel in 2014, he questioned his language of writing as follows: "I don't want to take any books, I decided, I have to concentrate on my new language. I know how hard it is, almost impossible, but I must find another language to write in, my children will have to find another language to live in" (Sayed Kashua, "Why I Have to Leave Israel," *Guardian*, July 20, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/20/sayed -kashua-why-i-have-to-leave-israel). I read this statement as the anguish of the writer who is leaving and is aware that he is leaving not only a place but also a reader and a language.

12 Atallah Mansour (1935–), Anton Shammas (1950–), Naim Araidi (1950–2016), Siham Daoud (1952–), Ayman Sickseck (1984–).

13 On Palestinian minority writings, see Hannan Hever, "Hebrew in an Israeli Arab Hand: Six Miniatures on Anton Shammas's *Arabesques*," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 47–76. On Palestinian novels in Hebrew, see Sadia Agsous, "Langues et identités: L'écriture romanesque en hébreu des Palestiniens d'Israël (1966–2013)" (PhD diss., Institut des langues et des civilisations orientales [Inalco]), 2015). On cultural and literary hybridity, see Yasir Suleiman, *Arabic in the Fray: Language, Ideology and Cultural Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

14 Emile Habibi, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, trans. Salman Khadra Jayyusi and Trevor Le Gassick (1974; Northampton: Interlink Books, 2008).

15 It is, however, important to mention that Sayed Kashua uses Palestinian colloquial Arabic for his TV and cinema scripts (*'Avoda 'Aravit, My Son*).

LET IT BE MORNING, THE NOVEL

> These are normal people who live in a situation that isn't normal.[16]

At first reading, *Let It Be Morning* appears to be a sequel to *Dancing Arabs* since the normal people to whom the author refers are similar to the characters in his first novel.[17] The story is told by an autodiegetic narrator, and Palestinian identity is once again at the center of the novel, but this time it is expressed in its collective form set in the space of a city-village that Kashua chose not to name.

Against the backdrop of Al-Aqsa Intifada, a revolt marked by the involvement of Palestinians in Israel, the main character, an unemployed journalist, returns to his home village:[18]

> I can recall the day when I was sent to cover the Arab demonstrations in Wadi Ara after the cabinet members put in an appearance at al-Aqsa Mosque.… Like me, the demonstrators have always thought of themselves as citizens of Israel, and never imagined they would be shot at demonstrating or for blocking an intersection. (18)

As a result of the deteriorating situation of the Palestinians in Israel, he went from being a good journalist at a prestigious newspaper, mastering Hebrew and being an expert in Arab affairs, to becoming a pariah and eventually losing his job.[19] This economic disaster forces him to return to his village, where his father has built a large house for him and his family.

One morning, the army seals off the village, isolating everyone from the outside world.[20] He is the only one who understands the magnitude of the situation, since water, electricity, and telephone are cut off and there is a shortage of supplies in the stores. Despite this dramatic situation, he and the other villagers remain convinced that it is a simple misunderstanding; Israel is not targeting its citizens.

Let It Be Morning is a political novel that addresses Palestinian identity in its legal fragility and in its relationship with Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank. "These soldiers must have confused us with Tulkarm [a city in the West Bank]" (23), says one inhabitant. Thus, from that moment on, the fragile lines that separate Palestinians in Israel from Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are blurred. The residents of this besieged village are convinced that the illegal Palestinian workers, the Dafawiya (West Bank residents), are the targets of Tsahal (the Israel Defense Forces). They gather them one by one and offer them to the Israeli soldiers, who end up shooting at them.

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16 Sayed Kashua and G. Lustiger, "Regards sur la littérature israélienne (36/50), une heure avec Sayed Kashua (60 min)," Akadem, 2008, http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/israel-au-salon-du-livre/une-heure-avec-sayed-kashua-06-10-2011-12520_4195.php.

17 Sayed Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, trans. Miriam Shlesinger (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

18 This is a reference to Naïm Araïdy's best-known poem, "Back to the Village" (Hazarti ha-baita), in which the Druze poet praises his attachment to his native village. For the hero-narrator of *Let It Be Morning*, this return is not so cheerful; it is even a forced return because of the political situation. In both cases, the village, for the Palestinians of Israel, remains a safe haven.

19 The newspaper's name is not mentioned.

20 This confinement enforced by the army is probably a reference to the military regime that the Palestinians in Israel suffered from 1948 to 1966. Indeed, during these years the Palestinians needed authorization from the military authorities to circulate in their own space. This historical reference is to be found in the works of several writers and poets: for example, Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, Emile Habibi, Anton Shammas, Salman Natour.

Each crisis has its scapegoat, and in this case it is the illegal Palestinian workers who bear the consequences. "You wanted al-Aqsa, didn't you? Well, you are on your own. Just look what a mess you've made for us" (117). The decision to hand over some workers to Israeli soldiers was not a private decision but a collective one. It is on the initiative of the mayor of the village, who formed a committee with a representative from each family, that the Gazawiya (residents of Gaza) and Dafawiya over fourteen years old were arrested in order to be turned over to the Israeli army. This mention of age (fourteen) is a reference to the various Israeli military decrees that allow Palestinian children over the age of fourteen to be arrested and tried by an Israeli military court. However, in this case, it is no longer the Israelis who are in charge of implementing these laws but rather members of a minority using violence against those who are weaker than themselves.

The following description of the detentions of these Palestinian workers reveals the villagers' brutality toward the illegal workers:

> In the evening, several hundred young men are recruited to get the job done as quickly as possible. All those who'd spend the morning waving green flags and red flags and Palestinian flags[21] have volunteered to round up the illegal workers.... The operation began late at night, but still, many people are awake, peeping out of their windows, staring from their balconies, sitting in their yards and looking on. Some are even cracking sunflower seeds.... From time to time we hear the wail of a siren or the sound of someone screaming, probably egging the workers on. Why the hell can't they at least go about it less callously? (167)

From that point on, the journalist's verdict is irrevocable. If God created man in his image, he considers his people bullies in the image of their Israeli master. Palestinian workers are taken to the line that separates Israeli soldiers from the village. The mayor orders them to head toward the soldiers. The author's choice of the description of the roundup of the workers is not insignificant. It sends us back to the roundups of European Jews from the ghettos, helped by the *Judenräte*.[22] For instance, the following description of the roundup of Palestinians is disturbing:

> Three buses, belonging to the company that used to transport the workers to work and back belong to one of the richest men in the area, are lined up at the gate of the schoolyard at daybreak. I can see them from our rooftop, loading up the workers—more than one hundred in all.... The workers get out, their hands down, and march in the direction the villagers point to. From time to time, one of them sobs and begs for pity. The mayor orders his men to line up the workers. (169–70)

The inhumane treatment of these Palestinians by the villagers is abominable. The mayor, thinking of the soldiers' fear of dealing with human bombs, ordered his accomplices to strip the prisoners' clothes. This act of undressing is done with violence, revenge, and relentlessness:

> The mayor gives his orders and the sobbing workers are stripped brutally by thugs and by others who've always hated them. The workers who try to resist are kicked hard in the ribs. They curse the whole time, are slapped and clubbed and are made to line up again, wearing nothing but underpants. (171)

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[21] This is a reference to the different political tendencies among Palestinians: green for the Islamic movement, red for the communist movement, and Palestinian flags for the nationalists.

[22] The *Judenräte* were administrative bodies established in European Jewish ghettos by order of the Nazi government.

The use of violence, the beatings, and the insults relegate these villagers to the same role and violence used by the Israeli army against these Palestinians. The journalist's judgment is conclusive: "luckily, being Arabs, they're not drafted into the Border Police or the army. They'd make the most brutal soldiers in the world" (168).

This character-narrator, the journalist, intervenes again as the voice of conscience and not to act or to change the situation. All he can think about is the article that will get him his job back. However, his inaction does not reflect insensitivity to the fate of these workers; it expresses impotence in the face of an infinite circle of violence: that of the Israeli army and of the inhabitants of the village.

The resolution of this situation is as sudden as the Israeli army's siege of the village. Suddenly, one morning, the army withdraws and everything is restored, including Internet connection. Egyptian radio reports that a historic agreement has been reached between Palestinians and Israelis: Israel has agreed to share Jerusalem and the Palestinians keep three-quarters of the West Bank. However, a slight detail annoys the journalist:

> Our village is colored in blue. All of Wadi Ara and Triangle are in blue! It must be a mistake. Some idiot graphic artist who always thought that Wadi Ara and the Triangle are both located on the West Bank. (271)

People are happy until they discover that they are no longer Israelis. The journalist is confronted with the reality of this peace agreement. "Now the population of the country is almost one hundred percent Jewish. We finally have a true Jewish state" (275), comments a professor from a prestigious Israeli university. Indeed, the agreement sets the borders of the newly born Palestinian state and the village of the journalist is now part of it.

Suddenly, these Palestinians cease to be Israeli. Palestinians, former Israeli citizens, residing in the mixed cities of Haifa and Jaffa are no longer Israelis, but "they will be like temporary residents, like foreign workers" (280). Kashua exposes the irony of the situation through the indignation of the village residents following the establishment of the Palestinian state. It is, after all, a claim that dates back to 1948, but from the villagers' viewpoint, it concerns only the other Palestinians; the villagers are different, they are Israelis.

"The Jews have sold us down the river" (227), says the grocery store owner, who joins his voice to the majority refusing the new official Palestinian nationality. As for the journalist, he does not express any particular reaction. He simply reports the opinions of others as if nothing concerned him. His professional future seems to be brightening up. His former Israeli editor in chief finally reaches him, congratulates him on his new Palestinian citizenship, and offers him the job of being their correspondent in Palestine, but in an exchange for a Palestinian salary. "So it won't be the way it was before, but your cost of living is going to be much lower now anyway, isn't it?" (281), says his Israeli new foreign director. This time, the ironic situation applies to the main character. He seems dissatisfied with the political victory of the Palestinians but happy to have his job back.

DYSTOPIAN FICTION AND A MARGINAL IDENTITY

This literary hybrid text[23] addresses the uncertainty of the collective Palestinian identity in Israel at the turn of the new millennium. It is indeed a question of a minority whose existence goes back to 1948; nevertheless, the essence of this minority and their belonging are still subject to a public and political debate in Israel in 2004. The writer, through a politicized novel, becomes a spokesperson for the minority collective.[24] Two main reasons explain the choice of this political theme: the political project of the expulsion of Palestinians from Israel by Avigdor Lieberman and the consequences of the Second Intifada and the Wadi Ara events for members of the Palestinian minority in Israel.

Let It Be Morning was published when Avigdor Lieberman, then Israeli foreign minister and leader of the political party Yisra'el Beytenu (Israel, our home),[25] suggested a peace plan in which the Arab villages of Wadi Ara would be transferred to the Palestinian Authority in exchange for land occupied by Jewish settlements in the West Bank. According to his plan, Palestinians who wanted to keep their Israeli nationality would have to pledge allegiance to the State of Israel as a Jewish state. This is a problem that Sayed Kashua regularly addresses in his articles. In one of his columns dealing with the Lieberman phenomenon, Kashua states: "The Western world has discovered the natural phenomenon known as Israeli Arab citizens, and to the best of my knowledge, the patent is registered under the name of a Russian scientist called Lieberman."[26]

However, if *Let It Be Morning* echoes Lieberman's program of transfer by highlighting the tensions between Palestinians who are Israeli citizens and Palestinians of the Territories, it portrays the confused and complex identity of those who became Israelis after 1948. A resident of the village complains about the blockade by saying, "For the Jews, those of the Territories and us, it is the same, we are all Arabs" (21). The army's encirclement of the village does not ultimately unite Palestinians on all sides; quite the contrary, it handed over the holders of Israeli citizenship to their most primitive instincts. Here, we are in a position to question the meaning of being a Palestinian.

In *Dancing Arabs*, the main character narrates an episode from his childhood in which the teacher at his school in Tira asks the students about the meaning of being a Palestinian.[27] No one could answer:

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23 Suleiman, *Arabic in the Fray*. These literary texts combine the Palestinian Arab identity of the writer with Hebrew writing, and in that framework Suleiman labels them hybrid texts: "Hybrid texts (prose-fiction) are texts written by authors of Arab origin—descent or heritage—not in Arabic, but in another language, such as French, English or Hebrew, among Palestinians in Israel. These texts are assigned to different cultural locations, which may be defined by the dominant language of the text, the background of the author or in a third space or twilight zone between these two worlds" (167).

24 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). "The connection of the individual to a political immediacy" (18) supported by Deleuze and Guattari is relevant to the case of Kashua. His novels attach significance to Palestinian individual identity in Israeli society, and yet Kashua, the writer, insists on his distance from collective representation and sometimes depoliticizes his remarks. However, the fact of being Palestinian and writing his intimacy and individuality in Hebrew turns his writing into the political rhetoric of a minority literature since "the individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (17).

25 Avigdor Lieberman has been the Israeli minister of defense since 2016. He was elected to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in 1999, and since then he has served in several positions in the different Israeli governments. Kashua referred regularly to Lieberman's ideas in his journalistic columns published in *Ha-aretz*.

26 Sayed Kashua, "New Species," *Ha-aretz*, February 2009, https://www.haaretz.com/1.5077883.

27 Arabic is the main language in Arab schools in Israel.

> Then he asked contemptuously if any of us had ever seen a Palestinian, and Mohammed the Fatso, who was afraid of having his knuckles rapped, said he'd once been driving with his father in the dark and they'd seen two Palestinians. That day, the history teacher rapped every single one of us on the knuckles, launching his attack with Mohammed the Fatso. He whacked us with his ruler, ranting, "we are Palestinians, you are Palestinians, I'm a Palestinian! You nincompoops, you animals, I will teach you who you are!"[28]

While Kashua has raised these questions of identity in *Dancing Arabs*, his second novel, *Let It Be Morning*, is a sophisticated and ironic examination of the problem of belonging to the Palestinian minority in Israel. Before him, Atallah Mansour[29] had introduced the Palestinians of Israel as authentic Palestinians, followed by Emile Habibi,[30] who assigned them the role of maintaining and safeguarding the Palestinian dialect. But Sayed Kashua's particularity is to have explicitly narrated the Palestinians in his literature as subject to the contradiction of belonging to Palestine and of being loyal to Israel.

Indeed, part of this narration highlights this allegiance to the State of Israel—first, by the reaction of the family members to the Israeli army's closure of the village. They remain convinced that the army's fire and the deterioration of the situation are the result of a simple mistake. However, they are well aware of the tragic situation of the Palestinians of Israel, who are considered a "cancer at the heart of the nation" (סרטן בלב האומה), a "fifth column" (גיס חמישי), and "a demographic problem that threatens to undermine the Jewish fiber of the state" (116). This is how, for instance, the journalist expresses the excuse that his father, a former Nasserist, gives for the closure:

> My father says we are exaggerating. True, he hasn't come across a tank shell since '48, but it must be a regrettable mistake for some soldier who misinterpreted a command when he saw the pickup coming straight at him and thought it must be a terrorist and a car bomb. Those soldiers have been in the Territories and Lebanon, and all of them are so panicky they can't tell a loyal Arab from an enemy. (118)

This is about demonstrating the difference between Palestinians in Israel and other Palestinians. The former are loyal while the latter are terrorists. The following quotation offers a further argument for this loyalty:

> They no longer dreamed of being part of the big Arab world stretching "from the ocean to the Gulf" the way they used to. On the contrary, the idea of becoming part of the Arab world even began to frighten them. They truly believed the Israeli politicians who claimed that "relative to the Arab states, the situation of the Israeli Arabs is amazing," a sentence that always shut the people up when they started talking about discrimination.... People were afraid they

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28 Kashua, *Dancing Arabs*, 104.

29 Atallah Mansour, *Still Waiting for the Dawn: Palestinian Long Life with His Step-father* (Createspace, 2013).

30 Kenneth Brown, "Emile Habibi Porter: Deux pastèques dans une seule main; Un entretien avec Kenneth Brown, Aix-Marseille, May 1994," *Revue Méditerranéennes* 6 (1994). Habibi stated to Brown: "I find that our Arabic, and particularly its folklore, as for all living languages, is the most useful and the most effective way to convey the experiences of the elders to the next generations. I believe that the safeguarding of the cultural heritage is the primary task of the writer, especially when it belongs to the Palestinian Arab people, whose many generations have suffered ruptures, scattering, massacres, and political fragmentation. Hence the importance for a writer to know his country's literary heritage, style, and folklore sui generis."

wouldn't get their National Insurance allowances anymore, or that a day would come when they'd find themselves in a country without medical insurance welfare, pensions for widows or single parents or the next of kin, allowances for the elderly and the disabled, unemployment benefits and subsidies. (118)

The better material situation of the Palestinians in Israel is positioned to explain this faithfulness to the Israelis and to understand the alienation from the other Palestinians: this "other familiar" is responsible for this instability. Palestinian identity, in Kashua's novel, is not monolithic, as it can appear in the novels of Emile Habibi and Alaa Hlehel,[31] for instance, but he discusses the very essence of the Palestinian nation in its form, its richness, but also in its divisions.

A CHRONOTOPE SET BETWEEN JEWISH-ISRAELI TIME AND PALESTINIAN SPACE

The space that occupies a strategic position in Palestinian literature is closely linked to this Palestinian identity, which comes first and foremost from the memory of the land of this space lost since 1948. In *Let It Be Morning*, Kashua conveys this space by a return to the village, to the source, to history, and makes a shift in the time, since he moves it from the memorial time of 1948 to the dystopian futurist one. Kashua writes the future in a specific combination of time and space. If there is inextricable connectedness in chronotope, there is, however, a priority given to time, as asserted by Bakhtin: "in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time."[32] The space in the novel is transparent despite the fact that Kashua doesn't name places, starting with the journalist's village. This is why Kashua has given priority to time as a symbol of Hebrew-Israeli domination. I will briefly consider the structure of the novel in order to highlight this domination.

First, the novel has a title, *Let It Be Morning*, that reminds us of the Genesis creation story in the Bible.[33] As for the structure, it imitates the time of the creation, that is to say, the six days of the creation. Thus, time in the novel is a biblical one. If God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, Kashua imagined the disastrous future of the Palestinians in Israel from a creation or "re-creation" perspective ending with a sixth chapter, leaving the reader wondering about the sequel to this story.

Let It Be Morning is organized according to the six days of the creation and the future of a minority which is achieved in six stages/chapters. In the first chapter "Everything Must Be Wonderful," the author sets the situation of the plot. He describes the position of his Palestinian characters in Israeli society and the fragility of the journalist who once believed in the utopia of belonging to the hegemonic space. The return to the village is underlined by the description of the space: his parents' house and his new house. He feels safe among his own people, and the description of his parents' house is in fact a trip in childhood memories. In some ways, this chapter represents a Proustian moment. The second chapter, "The Village Is Surrounded," describes the army blockade and is dedicated to the space of the village in all its variety: the houses, the

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[31] Alaa Hlehel (1974–) is a Palestinian writer and journalist from Acre.

[32] Mikhaïl Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 85.

[33] The Hebrew title is ויהי בוקר. It was borrowed by Kashua from Genesis 1:5 (in Hebrew):
"Naming the light, Day, and the dark, Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָאוֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לָיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד׃).

mosque, the shops. These are Palestinian spaces of daily life. The drama unfolds in the third chapter, "The Paper Didn't Arrive This Morning Either." The military shutdown creates a sense of superiority among the Palestinians of Israel. This chapter clearly differentiates between them and those from the occupied territories who live illegally in the village. The local violence against the alien Palestinians is verbalized in the fourth chapter, "Sewerage." In the midst of the hegemonic violence, another violence is set in motion to be used against the weakest. The fifth chapter, "The Armed Parade," clearly refers to the internal conflict between the Palestinian residents caused by the food shortage. It is civil war in its Arabic sense, a *fitnah*,[34] a feared moment for the writer since he describes it in detail in his novel. Finally, the sixth chapter, "A New Era," describes the return to normality: water, electricity, TV, and phone are reconnected. However, the old way, the past, is over, and they are experiencing a new beginning. The essence of Genesis is to be found in this chapter. The sixth day in the Bible is about the creation of man, whose domination over the rest of creation starts from that moment![35] These Palestinians are "created" and born again as if they didn't have any past. As in 1948, when they were separated from their majority and found themselves creating a new life in the Hebrew hegemonic state, they now have to start again with a Palestinian hegemonic state. Kashua doesn't provide us with a seventh chapter to tell us what happens next. We know that god rested and these Palestinians are being left to their fate. Kashua has used one of the founding references of Judaism to talk about the faith of his own community.

In its declaration of independence, Israel appealed "to the Arab Inhabitant of the State to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions."[36] Indeed, this represents a Zionist utopian moment that matches Kashua's utopian literary space, but his dystopian novel creates a contradiction. By using this Jewish reference set in the past, maybe as an ideal and as a utopian reference, Kashua provided a dystopian orientation to his fiction by using the same reference as an appeal to the Jewish Hebrew reader. It is important to highlight the role of the language since it is used by Kashua in his novel to provide a double sense of the title *Let It Be Morning*.[37] On the one hand, in the Bible each day of creation ends with "and there was morning" (ויהי בוקר), and this represents the utopian moment of creation. On the other hand, the phrase "let it be morning" is related to the Palestinian dystopian time of the novel. Kashua

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34 *Fitnah* is used in modern Arabic to describe sedition, riot, discord, dissension, and civil strife. In the Quran it is referred to as follows: "*fitnah* is greater than killing" (al-Baqarah: 217).

35 "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and they shall rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the heaven and over the animals and over all the earth and over all the creeping things that creep upon the earth'" (http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/OTpdf/gen1.pdf).

36 http://www.archives.gov.il/en/chapter/the-declaration-of-independence/.

37 Important, also, is the translation of Kashua's novel into English, French, and Arabic. Although the Bible reads "and there was morning," the title of the English translation of Kashua's second novel by Miriam Shlesinger is "Let It Be Morning." This provides a futuristic aspect to it. But in the biblical text, this sentence is more complex because the future tense of the verb "to be" is *ihieh*, and it is followed by the inversive vav (וו הַהִפּוּך), which changes the interpretation of conjugated verbs from future to past tense and vice versa. In my opinion, the French and Arabic translations of the title seem more accurate. The title of the novel in French is "Et il y eut un matin" (Paris: Points, 2008), and this is exactly the same sentence we can read in the Bible in French: "Dieu appela la lumière jour, et il appela les ténèbres nuit. Ainsi, il y eut un soir, et il y eut un matin: ce fut le premier jour." In Arabic, the title is ليكن صباحاً (Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, 2012). The translator, Marie Tawk, is from Lebanon and rightly uses the past tense in the title since she didn't know Hebrew and her translation was made from the French. But she is not that far from the translation in the Arabic Bible: *walyakun sabahan* 5 ودعا الله النور نهارا والظلمة دعاها ليلا . وكان مساء وكان صباح يوما واحدا.

borrowed this symbol in order to build a dystopian novel based on a utopia. From that moment, the language receives a new meaning and serves a different time: it substitutes the past, the time of creation, for the future, with a dystopian perspective since it concerns Palestinian space and identity, which are excluded from another utopia, the Zionist utopia.

CONCLUSION: PALESTINIAN DYSTOPIAN FICTION OR THE LOSS OF PALESTINIAN UTOPIA

The title *Let It Be Morning* provides from the very beginning a divine aspect to the Israelis who decide the faith of the Palestinian space. The village is a metaphor for the Palestinian minority in Israel. The time of this space is a biblical time, which becomes a metaphor for the power that the Israeli discourse can represent. Sayed Kashua uses a complex strategy in connecting a dystopian future with his proper chronotope that combines hegemonic time and minority space. This strategy fits what Bakhtin calls "creators of the text":

> In the very real time and space in which the work resonates, in which the manuscript or volume is situated, the real man, who composed this discourse, this writing, this book, is also found, as well as the true beings who listen to or read the text. Clearly, authors, listeners and readers can be (and often are) situated in different times and places, sometimes separated by centuries and enormous distances, but it doesn't matter: they are all united in a single, real, unfinished, historical world, separated by a brutal and rigorous border of the world represented in the text. We can therefore present this world as the creator of the text: all its elements—reflecting reality, that the author's performers ... (if they exist), and finally the listeners-readers who reconstitute and, in doing so, renew the text, all participate equally in the creation of a represented world. From the real chronotopes of this creative world, the reflected and created chronotopes of the world, whose work (the text) gives the image, emerge.[38]

If Kashua novels address Palestinian identity in all its forms (collective and individual) linked to a particular space and time and a particular history starting with the Nakba,[39] it is a fact that this articulation is specific to Palestinian literature produced in Israel, whether it is written in Arabic or in Hebrew. However, it is perhaps less obvious to consider a continuity between its themes and those of novelists such as Salman Natour, Ryad Baydass, and Ibtissam Azem who proclaim in an overwhelming manner the remaining Palestinian space and the memory of the Nakba in their novels written in Arabic.

For instance, this memory is essential for Salman Natour, who made it permanent and gave it a central place in the Arab novel to become the writer of memory. For instance, his novel *Zakira* (Memory) is a literary account organized around a long project led by Natour among Palestinians in Israel to collect their memories of the Nakba, memories not considered by Israeli historians and not expressed by the defeated for fear of seeing once again their links to their ancestral land called into question.[40] The character of the al-Sheikh, whose wrinkled face bears the marks of the ancient geography of Palestine, narrates these memories. It is indeed these testimonies, written in Arabic, that have escaped Israeli historiography because they are considered inferior to archival

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38 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 394.

39 I refer here to *Dancing Arabs*, in which the character of the grandmother is a symbol of the Nakba moment.

40 Salman Natour, *Zakira* [*Mémoire*] (Bethlehem: Badil, 2006).

documents and because most Israeli historians, like other researchers in other disciplines, don't master the Arabic language.[41]

Kashua, since the beginning of his literary career, has been inscribing his novels in that memory through the theme of filiation. This theme is revealed in *Dancing Arabs* through the character of the grandmother. It imposes itself on both the implicit and the explicit and is written in such a way as to underline the attachment to this Palestinian identity and by extension to the writer. This lady, with her face marked by the long years of internal exile, and who reminds us of the character of al-Sheikh of *Zakira*, is the symbol of the Palestinian minority who have remained in what has become the State of Israel. Moreover, they have not enjoyed the right to return to their ancestral lands and to these villages, most of which have been destroyed or inhabited by Jewish residents. This grandmother is the emblem of those "absent presenters," separated from the Palestinian majority in 1948 and discriminated against within Israeli society itself. To understand *Let It Be Morning*, one must restore the link between Sayed Kashua, a writer in Hebrew, and Arab Palestinian literature or at least some its themes such as space (as described above) or dystopia. Indeed, Ryad Baydas's *Mahw* المحو (Erase) and Ibtisam Azem's *Sifre al-ikhtifaa* سفر الاختفاء (The book of disappearance) bring to the heart of Arabic literature the faith of Palestinians in Israel set in a dystopian future.[42] Baydas imagines the disappearance of Palestinian space in Eats-Jerusalem, and Azem narrates the disappearance of Palestinians from the Israeli space.[43]

Recognizing this link to Arabic literature is essential for gaining a better understanding of Sayed Kashua's novels. Kashua, who writes in Hebrew, has not lost his mother tongue and he does not feel integrated into Israeli society. Kashua created a hybrid novel, which combines his Palestinian identity and the Hebrew language, with the hope of reaching the Hebrew reader. To create his utopia, he chose to write a dystopian novel.

But in 2014, ten years after publishing *Let It Be Morning*, Sayed Kashua questioned, using humor, Israel's policies in the occupied territories during the Gaza war.[44] By slightly altering his discourse during a period of war and national unity, Kashua definitely lost part of his link with the Israeli Jewish Hebrew reader,[45] an element essential to his utopian space. This is why he rushed his departure with his family to the United States and extended his American exile. Kashua, shortly after his departure, recovered a sense of freedom in his speech. The most significant word to recall is "Palestine," a word that reflects the identity he wanted to translate to the Hebrew reader:

41 Yehouda Shenhav, "Arab-Jews, 'Population Exchange' and the Palestinian Right of Return," in *Exile and Return: Predicaments of Palestinians and Jews*, ed. A. Lesch and I. Lustick (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 225–45.

42 Ryad Baydas, *Al-mahw* المحو (Haifa: Dar Raya, 2006); Ibtisam Azem, *Sifre al-ikhtifaa* سفر الاختفاء (Beirut: Manshurat alJamal, 2014).

43 I provide these arguments in order to align Sayed Kashua, as a Hebrew-language writer, with the tradition of Palestinian Arabic-language novelists in Israel. In a different article I will extend this theme.

44 See Ruth Margalit, "An Exile in the Corn Belt: Israel's Funniest Palestinian Writer Decamps to the Midwest," *New Yorker*, September 7, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/09/07/an-exile-in-the-corn-belt.

45 The writer-reader relationship is complex. In the case of Sayed Kashua, he always made sure that his Hebrew reader understood what he was writing about. However, *Track Changes* is a kind of bilingual novel. Indeed, Kashua transcribed the last discussion he had with his father on his deathbed in Arabic without providing a translation into Hebrew. The few lines in Hebrew are crossed out. I'm providing here the translation of these lines into English: "To find a way to translate the last conversation with my father. To look for a way to translate the expression '*istawa al-adass*' (lentils were cooked). To find a way to translate the pain when I tried to put flip-flops on Daddy's swollen legs. To find a way to translate this last smile." Sayed Kashua, *Track Changes* (Kenneret, 2017), 193.

I wanted to tell, in Hebrew, about my father who sat in jail for long years, with no trial, for his political ideas. I wanted to tell the Israelis a story, the Palestinian story. Surely when they read it they will understand, when they read it they will change, all I have to do is write and the occupation will end. I just have to be a good writer and I will free my people from the ghettos they live in, tell good stories in Hebrew and I will be safe, another book, another movie, another newspaper column and another script for television and my children will have a better future. Thanks to my stories one day we will turn into equal citizens, almost like the Jews.[46]

This statement underlines both the subject of a Palestinian Hebrew literary writing (Palestinian identity) and specifies the obstacles that Kashua is facing along with other Palestinian writers before him. In other words, Kashua's experience confirms that, for a Palestinian, writing in Hebrew does not grant him the same freedom, political freedom, that an Israeli Jewish writer enjoys. Moreover, this freedom is limited to the borders of fiction; as soon as the author's opinion exceeds them, the privileged bond between Palestinian author and Jewish reader collapses as well as the frail position of the Palestinian writer within Hebrew literature.[47] Kashua's case echoes Anton Shammas's experience as the writer of *Arabesques*.[48] Indeed, it was none other than A. B. Yehoshua, the well-known Israeli writer, who expressed the dismissal of Shammas's Palestinian identity when he declared in *Politika* in 1986: "I say to Anton Shammas—if you want your full identity, if you want to live in a country that has an independent Palestinian personality, that possesses an original Palestinian culture, rise up, take your belongings, and move 100 meters to the east, to the independent Palestinian state that will lie beside Israel."[49]

This statement by a major Hebrew writer directed toward a Palestinian in Israel is undoubtedly a more elaborate expression of the fulfillment of the cultural Zionist dream in its exclusively Jewish character. Dystopia in *Let It Be Morning* addresses not only the issue of a population "transfer" within the Israeli context but also the cultural and the intellectual transfer of those Palestinian writers who are unwelcome in Hebrew literature because of their Palestinianness. Kashua tells us a story of a journalist who lost his status within Hebrew media and translates his fear as a writer who is being alienated within the Hebrew cultural field. Can this novel be considered a futuristic vision of Kashua's own fate? Such a fate is set up as a chronotope that confronts identities, languages, and histories to fit Bakhtin's conception of chronotope in literature when he underlines that a "literary work's artistic unity in relation to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope."[50] It is from this specific context and reality that this article attempts to understand Sayed Kashua's choice to orient his second novel toward the future by using biblical (hegemonic) references and by confronting center and margins through the clash of space and time, between Palestinianness and Israeliness and between Kashua and his Hebrew readers.

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46 Kashua, "Why I Have to Leave Israel."

47 The best example is that of the Israeli writer Ronit Matalon (1959–2017). Before her death, the author of *And the Bride Closed the Door* (2016) was awarded the prestigious literary Brenner Prize. Yet Matalon was very critical of Israeli policies toward Palestinians and referred to Israel as an apartheid regime. See Itay Stern, "Ronit Matalon, Renowned Israeli Author, Dies at 58 after Battle with Cancer," *Ha-aretz*, December 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/ronit-matalon-renowned-israeli-author-dies-at-58-1.5629849.

48 See Anton Shammas, *Arabesques*, trans. Vivian Eden (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Shammas's novel is considered to be a metaphor for his Palestinian identity card within Hebrew literature.

49 David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel* (New York: Picador, 2003), 250.

50 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 243.

If the novel has allowed Kashua to transcribe an individual and a collective posture, the use of dystopian fiction in *Let It Be Morning* has only precipitated the anguish of the author, whose vision of the future could only be devastating. In 2014 Sayed Kashua wrote the following about his deception as a Hebrew Palestinian novelist:

> Twenty-five years of writing in Hebrew, and nothing has changed. Twenty-five years clutching at the hope, believing it is not possible that people can be so blind. Twenty-five years during which I had few reasons to be optimistic but continued to believe that one day this place in which both Jews and Arabs live together would be the one story where the story of the other is not denied. That one day the Israelis would stop denying the Nakba, the Occupation, and the suffering of the Palestinian people. That one day the Palestinians would be willing to forgive and together we would build a place that was worth living in.[51]

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51 Kashua, "Why I Have to Leave Israel."