

**Stepping over the Hyphen: Resistance Through
Assimilation in Sayed Kashua's *Second Person Singular*
(2012)**

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Abstract

In a world shaped mostly by colonialism and its impact, it is imperative to study its implications and consequences. This paper explores the Palestinian-Israeli identity under Israeli occupation in Sayed Kashua's *Second Person Singular*, originally published in 2010, translated in 2012, to understand how colonization and discrimination reshape the identity of the colonized. This paper examines the Struggle of Resistance within the context of the Palestinian-Israeli literature. Through textual analysis of the selected work, this paper investigates the role of colonization in shaping the identity of Kashua's Palestinian protagonists inside the occupied land. Kashua echoes the voices that emerge from the colonized land, narrating the dilemma of hybrid Palestinian-Israeli citizens who are ostracized from meaningful roles in society. The paper applies Frantz Fanon's assimilation and Homi Bhabha's mimicry to understand how colonization and discrimination reshape the identity of colonized Palestinians. Like his protagonists, Kashua has a hyphenated identity; he is a Palestinian-Israeli, which is a life problem and a continuous struggle.

Keywords: Assimilation, Identity, Colonization, Hebrew, Palestinian-Israeli

تجاوز الفواصل: المقاومة من خلال الانخراط في رواية "ضمير المخاطب"
(2012) لسيد قشوع

المستخلص

كان الاحتلال منذ قديم الأزل قوة غاشمة مؤثرة في تشكيل العالم، فافرض هويته باعتبارها السردية المتفوقة، ولهذا يتحتم دراسة الآثار والعواقب السلبية التي تترتب على ذلك. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الهوية الفلسطينية الإسرائيلية في ظل الاحتلال من خلال رواية سيد قشوع ضمير المخاطب (2012). إذ يركز هذا البحث بشكل خاص على أدب المقاومة في سياق الأدب الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي لفهم آلية تأثير الاستعمار والتمييز في إعادة تشكيل هوية وشخصية الشعب الفلسطيني المحتل، الذي يمثل جزءاً من نسيج المجتمع الإسرائيلي داخل الأراضي المحتلة، وتقوم الدراسة على تحليل الرواية المختارة باستخدام منهج نقدي وصفي للكشف عن عملية محاكاة الهوية، حيث يعكس الكاتب والصحفي الفلسطيني الإسرائيلي سيد قشوع واقع حياة الفلسطينيين من داخل المجتمع الإسرائيلي تحت سيطرة الكيان المحتل. كما يروي مشكلة الفلسطينيين الممزقين بين هويتين متضادتين، الفلسطينية والإسرائيلية. فبداخل الأراضي المحتلة، يعيش الفلسطيني كمواطن عربي إسرائيلي مختلط الهوية، ممنوع من المشاركة في المجتمع على الرغم من كونه صاحب الأرض الأصلي. ويطبق هذا البحث فكرة المحاكاة التي أسسها الناقد الإفريقي فرانتز فانون، ونظرية التقليد للناقد الهندي هومي بابا، وذلك لتحديد الأسلوب والطريقة التي يتعامل بها الاحتلال مع الفلسطينيين من تفرقة عنصرية وإعادة تشكيل للهوية كما يحدث لشخصيات الرواية، علاوة على هوية قشوع نفسه المشتتة الممزقة، ما تسبب في مؤسساته .

الكلمات المفتاحية: المحاكاة، الهوية، الاستعمار، العبرية، الهوية الفلسطينية-الإسرائيلية

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Introduction

Context of the Study

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been going on for 75 years and has inspired tremendous reactions socially, politically, and culturally. In 1948, the Israeli occupation crawled onto Palestine from different countries, to establish a Jewish national home (Flapan 34). In return, millions of Palestinians were forcibly evicted, displaced, and massacred by the armed forces of the colonizer state of Jewish immigrants. (Pappe 258). After the 1949 Armistice border, namely the Green Line, Palestinians were removed from their homeland, whereas others were kept within the borders of the colonizer state (Pappe 165). Kashua mentions in *Second Person Singular* (2012) the different segments of the Israeli society; “young, old, secular, religious, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Arab, and Jewish.” (47) Palestinian-Israelis are not referred to as Palestinians, but “Arabs”, which is a way of neutralizing their identity and stripping them of their indigenous identity and denying the existence of what is known as Palestine. The colonizer unlawfully steals the land by exercising military power over the people of the land. The Palestinians living in Israel have been struggling between two poles: Palestinization and Israelization. As Stuart Hall puts it, “In the relation of self and the other —Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between several intersecting discourses” (Hall, 1996).

The study investigates the discrimination in Israeli society despite its claims of democracy and freedom, which exposes its hypocrisy and racism against the native Palestinians. Sayed Kashua's trials of assimilation, hybridity, and mimicry through living and writing in Hebrew draw attention to the aspiration of some Palestinians in Israel to be accepted as equals. Despite his best efforts, neither Kashua nor his protagonists can cope with assimilation and mimicry because of different factors. Israeli Occupation, the personal moral beliefs (religious, cultural) of the writer, and the dogmatic

Zionist perspective towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are crucial factors that contributed to the failure of assimilation. The story follows two parallel plot lines of the protagonists' lives in Israel. The lawyer, well-established in Jerusalem, meanwhile, Amir, a social worker, takes on a part-time job caring for a Jewish man named Yonatan, who is in a vegetative state. Amir eventually assumes Yonatan's identity to gain access to better opportunities and life in Israel as a Jewish citizen. Both protagonists assimilate differently. The paper highlights that the protagonist, who is entirely detached from his Palestinian identity and seeks to become a full Jew, commits identity theft. He assumes the colonizer's identity and steals another man's past and name, thus turning into a fraud just like his colonizers. While the other protagonist, the lawyer who assimilates and mimics the Israelis, still carries parts of his old self and identity within him, and this is his act of resistance against the total surrender of identity, unlike Amir. In this context, the colonized has willingly chosen to surrender his identity and bury his existence and mutate into his colonizer. Kashua uses his protagonists to present the impossibility of receiving equal recognition, despite mimicking the colonizer's cultural, physical, and social aspects. Through the radical metamorphosis of Amir, Kashua hints that for a Palestinian to survive under colonization, one must turn into one of them.

About the Novelist: Sayed Kashua

Sayed Kashua is a Palestinian writer, journalist, and screenwriter born in 1975 in Tira, Israel. Kashua's works explore the complexities of Palestinian identity in Israel. He writes in Hebrew to the Jewish majority, regarded as the language of the Palestinian people's oppressor. His novels *Dancing Arabs* (2002), *Let it be Morning* (2006), *Second Person Singular* (2012), and *Track Changes* (2020) trace Kashua's evolving stance of assimilating with the colonizer, Israel, as a Palestinian. Kashua also created the popular Israeli TV series "Avoda Aravit" (Arab Labor) and wrote a weekly column in the Jewish Newspaper Haaretz, where he humorously tackles the challenges faced by Palestinian citizens in Israel. His work, primarily, is concerned with Palestinians living inside Israel, highlighting their struggle to fit into the community and pass as Israeli citizens (Hochberg). Kashua acknowledges that Palestinians in Israel are second-class citizens in their homeland; "To live under forced exile in the heart of my homeland or to live in voluntary exile as a resident alien—this is my choice. Either way, to be a stranger in a strange land." (Kashua).

Aim of the Study

This paper aims to highlight the concept of assimilation and mimicry in Sayed Kashua's *Second Person Singular* (2012), stressing colonization's debilitating impact on the colonized regarding identity and language. Kashua implies that total transformation into the colonizer's identity is the only way to slip through barriers of discrimination. While assimilation and hybridity of both identities could constitute a form of resilience and resistance, only if the colonized do not entirely abandon their identity.

Research Questions and Arguments

The paper tends to answer the following research questions: Why do some Palestinian-Israeli citizens resort to assimilation as an adaptation tool to merge into a discriminatory culture? How does assimilation help Palestinian-Israelis resist total surrender of their identity? Approval, equality, and acceptance are the sought-after advantages they yearn to have as citizens of the State, much like the Jews. All these desired qualities push them to be considered Jewish, not Palestinian. Thus, colonization not only manifests itself through land stealing and military control but also significantly and permanently shifts the colonized to depend on the colonizer for approval and acceptance as a form of cultural imperialism.

Theoretical Framework

The paper examines *Second Person Singular* (2012) from the lens of Resistance Literature. Palestinian literature exhibits themes of memory, displacement, and resistance. It contemplates diaspora and exile; hence, they are recognized as a "subaltern group" (Cohen). The paper applies Edward Said's concept of the other in his book, *Orientalism* (1978), Frantz Fanon's notion of assimilation, which he discussed in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Homi Bhabha's mimicry, which he introduced in his essay, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984), and hybridity from his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Assimilation

Frantz Fanon introduced the notion of assimilation with the oppressor in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon's ideas resonate with any colonial setting as they imply the psychological oppression of the colonized and the subsequent effects that follow. Fanon highlighted that any colonial project imposes its values and culture over the colonized, adding extra mental pressure and oppression on the colonized. For the native to take on the colonizer's identity and assimilate, he must leave behind some of his personal and "intellectual possessions in pawn" (49). He exclaims, "Adopting

another culture's language is, above all, to assume a culture" (8). He explained that the reason colonized people figuratively wear the white masks of the Europeans to cover up their black skin is to appeal to the dominant culture and refute being labeled 'the other.' Fanon argues that psychologically, an innate inferiority complex exists in the colonized psyche due to the demeaning image reflected on them by colonization. Fanon highlights the relationship between language, culture, and oppression. The colonized subject was forced to speak the language of the imperial power, forcing him to reject his own language and culture as being (Burney). The colonized live in a constant comparison to the colonizer, who is "whiter," leading to a process of othering, a term coined by renowned scholar Gayatri Spivak (Burney). The negro's desperation for white approval makes him shade his skin and put on a white mask to blend into the dominant society that only recognizes the white "I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human." (73).

Orientalism

Building on Fanon's ideas, in *Orientalism* (1978), Said reviews the narrow, imperialist vision of the East as savage, inferior, and exotic. (E. W. Said 72) Colonialism stigmatized the Middle East with the accusation of retarded beasts indulging in lust, slavery, and savagery. From this segregation, an urge to become more "Jewish" emerges for Palestinian Israelis to belong and become recognized and seen by the dominant Jewish society. Palestinian-Israelis suffer from a duality of consciousness since they are aware of their own culture and the sought-after Israeli one. Edward Said stresses the "us" vs "them," however, embracing the colonizer's culture while still retaining their indigenous identity, which results in hybridity. To achieve this cultural hegemony-dominance of one culture at the expense of the other, the dominant culture cements the inferiority of the colonized culture through media, books, and the school system. (E. W. Said 6). He believed hybridity often leads to compound and sometimes opposing identities. Individuals may struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural influences, leading to dislocation and displacement (Anil Lal and Vinay Lal 77). Edward Said pushed for the urgency of resisting and subverting imperial narratives as a form of resistance.

Mimicry

The Indian scholar Homi Bhabha re-emphasizes Frantz Fanon and Edward Said's ideas, introducing the notions of mimicry as adaptation tools utilized by the colonized to resist the colonizer in his essay, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984). Bhabha quotes Jacques Lacan, defining the effect of mimicry as "a camouflage" (125); Bhabha also borrows from Samuel Weber's definition

of colonial mimicry, “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (122). Bhabha affirms that there cannot be something such as cultural purity in the presence of colonization. He introduces the concept of Hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Hybridity is inevitable, as the purity of identity in the binary colonial setting is doubtful, so that the in-between place will take place regardless of the colonizer’s attempt at a one-sided narrative. Hybridity creates a third space of cross-cultural exchange between the two narratives and does not eliminate one at the expense of the other, unlike cultural imperialism. However, hybridity introduces a new cultural form, a blend of both identities, which in a way weakens the cultural superiority of the occupation and reverses its domination.

Analysis

The deliberate choice of the title, Second Person Singular, underscores Kashua’s attempt to directly address and communicate with the Jewish community, playing on the grammatical concept of “you.” This choice reflects the novel’s deep engagement with personal identity and the way individuals perceive themselves versus how they are perceived by others. The novel intricately weaves two parallel plotlines centered on the lawyer and Amir, showcasing their divergent approaches to identity. Kashua provides two examples of how his characters attempt to mimic their colonizer through the application of mimicry or passing in Jewish culture. While passing indicates wearing “a Jewish mask,” as Fanon would describe it, to blend into the Jewish society, to avoid detection and hence discrimination as ‘the other’, it does not guarantee that their true identity is permanently concealed, as it is a cultural assimilation, not an actual physical passing. Even among Jews, those who are from lower backgrounds, like the Mizrahi Jews, strive to pass as Ashkenazi Jews, as they were the European elite group, and they symbolized white supremacy despite sharing the same Jewish identity (Harris). Throughout the novel, Kashua draws comparisons between the Palestinians and Jews in various aspects, including education, names, language, social life, housing, work, and even facial features.

Role of Language in Social Advancement

Arabic and Hebrew in Kashua’s works stand in stark opposition. In Kashua’s works, the characters strive to master Hebrew as it is the gateway to success and prestigious careers in Jewish society; it is the only means to have a pseudo-normal life inside Israel. Amir understands that mastering Hebrew can shield him from working in a menial job. In a colonial society, Hebrew symbolizes the language of the elite, while Arabic is the language of the subordinate. The lawyer speaks Hebrew and

Arabic, representing his Arabic clients in Hebrew courts. He admits that people like him, Palestinian citizens of Israel, are “divorced from the locals” and will always be “strangers, somewhat suspicious, but wholly indispensable.” That is because the country's official language is Hebrew, and if not for bilingual lawyers like him, who would represent local Palestinians in “Hebrew-speaking courts and tax authorities against the insurance companies and the hospitals? (Kashua 10,11) The locals do not have a chance against the ruthless Hebrewized legal system, leaving Palestinians under the mercy of a foreign, antagonistic system that does not accept their language and forces them to seek the help of other Palestinians who have embraced the language. The system in Israel does not allow people to go up the career ladder unless they have a good command of Hebrew, as with the lawyer's wife, who managed her place of work with “a high hand” since she gained “a firm command of Hebrew.” (16)

One of Amir's friends, Ayub, told him that he “played it right because I knew that the only thing I'd be able to do with a teaching degree from the West Bank was to wipe my ass, so I spent the year after college working on my Hebrew.” Ayub emphasizes the worthlessness of education from the West Bank or Jordan regarding job prospects; he continues, “What's a Jerusalem resident going to do with a degree from there? Everything here's Israeli.” So, for any Palestinian resident to have a chance at a promising career inside Israel, they need to be fluent in Hebrew and have an Israeli certification to be considered eligible and accepted. Amir gets the chance of a lifetime working with Osnat in nursing Yonatan only because he fits the criteria they were seeking in a care worker: “quality person, someone who knows Hebrew.” Under the Israeli occupation, a quality person is someone who speaks Hebrew, someone who submits to the terms of the colonizing society, and the Palestinian locals understand the importance of learning the colonizer's language to fit into a better, advanced society. Spending his shifts at Yontan's, Amir gets selective with the books he chooses to read, as he prefers to read “Hebrew fiction.” Amir slowly transforms into an Israeli as time goes by; he flaunts his perfect Hebrew and contemplates working for social services, and his argument is, “My Hebrew was as good as any native speaker's” (182), which is a condition for finding a good government job.

The final confrontation between Amir and the lawyer signifies a clash of two cultures. Amir has fully assimilated and passed over as Yonatan and has stopped speaking in Arabic. The lawyer confronts Amir, realizing what Amir did and his theft of Yonatan's identity. Ironically, the

lawyer confronts Amir using Arabic to expose his true identity. As they agree to turn an eye to the situation, the lawyer visits Amir/Yonatan's art exhibition by the novel's end: "They would surely speak in Hebrew, only in Hebrew." (343). By letting go of Arabic, Amir bids farewell to his Palestinian identity, symbolically buries his old self, and welcomes the resurrection of Yonatan.

Features and Appearances Role in Determining Identity

Kashua masterfully highlights the love-hate relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Amir goes through a gradual transition of identity, "swapping" with the Jewish Yonatan. His fascination with Yonatan's belongings and interests grew over time while he was in Yonatan's attic. Since Yonatan is vegetative¹, Amir gives himself the liberty to invade the latter's identity through Yonatan's music records, pictures, and clothes. A rising sense of self-loathing hits Amir as he watches Yonatan's pictures of his old life and how interesting a person he was. He inspects his pictures from school and university, even analyzing the features of his classmates:

It was always fun looking for his face in the pictures and once I found it I'd look carefully at the other kids. They were all white and they almost all had European names, some of them Hebraized. (Kashua 185)

The fact that Amir focuses on their features and how they are all white with European names indicates the comparison between him, a Palestinian native, and Yonatan and his peers. This remark signifies the inferiority he feels when he looks at the Jewish kids in the elite school. As Amir goes to bury Yonatan in the Palestinian cemetery, the Palestinian taxi driver does not recognize that Amir is a Palestinian, and it is probably on account of "physical appearance" or "clothes." This is when Amir realizes that he is unrecognizable as a Palestinian anymore; he has become a Jew, with the symbolic burial of Amir, the physical death of the real Yonatan, and the resurrection of a new Yonatan. Amir has fully metamorphosed into Yonatan; he even embraced his photography art of taking close-up pictures of people in black and white, which indicates that Amir has no true character; he needed to fit into someone's identity to exist. Amir highlights the merits of having a name like Amir Lahab/Lahav as it helped him merge into the crowds without being identified as a Palestinian. To find a good job in Israel, one must not be a definite Palestinian, or at least close to a Jew, as much as possible. The Jewish sound of Amir's name saved him from many unpleasant situations and

¹ A vegetative state is when a person is awake but is showing no signs of awareness.

helped him pass as Jewish when he used the Hebrew version. "It no longer bothered me and I was actually happy to have my name Hebraized, a phenomenon that saved me many a sideways glance." (300). Amir hints at the racism he faced when he identified as a Palestinian, while being a Jew opens doors for opportunities. He confesses, "how scared I was the first time I'd identified myself as a Jew." (202).

Amir fits into Israeli society perfectly as Yontan; he feels he belongs to this community for the first time, and ironically, he finds the bravery and confidence to dance with Noa, he does not feel inferior or ridiculed, as now he is an Israeli. Dancing here symbolizes his movement within the society, which is swift and seamless, unlike when he attempted to dance with Laila in front of other Palestinian guys. He kept thinking, "I want to be like them." (302) This impulsive desire in him to become an Israeli, "them," the one, not the other, shows his innate focus on his goal to become and be them. His thoughts symbolize what he hates about being a Palestinian; he does not want to be subjected to hate, oppression, bullying, or religious control.

Israeli Vs Palestinian Education: A Discriminative Tool of Cultural Imperialism

It is noticeable that the Jews and Palestinians were exposed to remarkably different skills during their school years, as Amir realizes from Yonatan's school transcripts. For example, Jews are equipped with essential modern knowledge of "English" and "French" as a foreign language requirement, and "art and computers." In the village, the Palestinian kids study dated skills like "carpentry and metalwork and Islamic religious studies." (185) The kids are being forced into inferiority to stay subjugated and oppressed; as education provides better opportunities, they are hindered and pulled back. To keep the colonized in check and under control, the Palestinians need to stay inferior, and it starts with disempowering their kids from attaining the proper education and training.

Palestinian-Israelis are torn between the desire to belong to the cultured Israeli society, while also lamenting the lack of Palestinian influence in their kids' lives. The Palestinian narrative is absent within the "Israeli Ministry of Education's curricula for the Arab citizens of Israel" (37). A Friend confirms this by studying and comparing the guidelines, especially for subjects such as "homeland studies, geography, history, and civics." (37) She argues that the "collective history" of Arab-Israelis was intentionally "erased" and the Palestinian narrative was "trampled." The Palestinian students were "force-fed the Zionist version of events." (37) This blurring of the Palestinian history and "identity" was intentionally

wiping the narrative, causing a deeply rooted identity and “cultural” crisis, aiming to “strip” the Arab students of their “true sense of national belonging.” (38) The assimilated group does not show genuine concern despite the facts proposed by one of them, as they do not sincerely care if their kids learn about their background, they have them in Jewish schools specifically to be more ‘Jewish’ than ‘Arab.’ However, the lawyer contemplates his and his guests’ humble beginnings and education compared to their Jewish counterparts, as this shows the internal desire of the colonial subject to be on the same ground as the colonizer, which is never attainable. This highlights the weaponizing of education as a form of cultural imperialism. This poor background symbolizes and cements the typical oriental view of the colonized as primitive and simple; the Palestinians were merely uneducated farmers who knew very little and had no proper tools against the powerful, educated colonizer. Nonetheless, the parents of the current generation of grown-ups understood the urgency of sending their children to Jewish establishments to get the proper education they needed to move up the social ladder, as embracing the colonizer’s dominant culture is the way to improvement and advancement(39) The lawyer knew within that the valid hidden reason for founding the shared ‘Arab-Jewish’ schools was not as advertised: to promote co-existence and share ideals but to soak up their children with Jewish culture and acquire from the Jews what was not offered to themselves, even though the lawyer feels that they were sending their kids into the heart of a “foreign culture” like “spies” or “double agents.” (40) Palestinian kids singing “On Rosh Hashanah, On Rosh Hashanah,” about “Israel, Hanukkah, and Passover,” in comparison to one mere poem by Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian symbol of resistance, which does not constitute a proper Palestinian curriculum in the face of the Zionist one. (40) Palestinian kids are being culturally imperialized, spoon-fed their colonizer’s ideals, and their collective cultural identity.

Israeli Vs Palestinian Lifestyle

Kashua wittingly portrayed the hypocrisy of the Palestinian-Israeli lawyer through his inner thoughts that reflect his deeply rooted inferiority towards anything that is Palestinian. The lawyer believes that Palestinian locals should not be in the same category as the Palestinian immigrants who hold Israeli citizenship. However, despite the lawyer’s need to show off and get the most expensive sushi to brag in front of his snobbish guests, he also drifts thinking that a simple meal at his parents’ home in the village of “eggs” and “onions” would be better than the expensive, fancy sushi, which communicates Bhabha’s notion of unhomely and

Said's alienation (22). This further channels Fanon's remarks on the self-othering of the colonized as well as the discrimination of the Senegalese by the Antilles, who regard themselves as more European and whiter than the primitive Senegalese. This is evident in the ostracization of local Palestinians by other Palestinians of different statuses or who are not technically citizens of Israel. The lawyer signifies the restless Palestinian-Israeli citizen who knows he is neither a Palestinian nor a pure Jewish Israeli. He showcases his disdain for other Palestinian parents at his daughter's school when he compares their cars to the cars of the Jews who usually drive "modest," "affordable" Korean or Japanese cars, unlike the Palestinians who prefer "expensive and German" with "massive engines under the gleaming hoods and dashboards full of accessories; many of them were luxury SUVs." As trivial as this comparison may be, Kashua aims to showcase the mentality of both groups for their choice. The lawyer believes that Palestinians "felt they had to prove their success to their peers," unlike the Jews, who did not need to prove anything and occupied a variety of jobs in different fields (13). The lawyer is a perfect example of the internalized inferiority complex of the colonized, for he criticizes other Palestinians for their ostentatious possessions and lifestyles. Nevertheless, he does the same and thinks that his black luxury Mercedes -ironically, a German car- is essential for clients to find him credible as a successful lawyer, pointing to the mentality of the colonized and the yearning to be a part of the dominant culture.

Amir desperately looks at life in Israel through the lens of the colonizer, as he admires the Yontan's pictures and the people in them. The pictures, which are always in black and white, reflect the binary opposition of the Palestinian-Israeli identity situation and the lack of a middle ground between them. He grows more confident and less hesitant with every bit of identity he loses. He started crawling into Yonatan's identity by using his name to get privileges he had never had access to before as Amir. He starts applying using Jewish identification to get a better job; it was what he always wanted, to get rid of the stigma of being a Palestinian in a Jewish society. Palestinians in Israel are given dehumanizing jobs and inferior tasks to their Jewish peers, as they are considered less intelligent and untrustworthy.

Back then, I couldn't imagine lying to other people about my identity, although, after spending a night practicing the signature he'd left in his books, I had opened a bank account in Yonatan's name. I told myself that my lie was solely for the purposes of work, and it could not be allowed to spread to my

personal life, even though I wasn't sure I had one of those. (204)

This indicates Amir's lack of self-worth and perception of identity. The title of the novel, *Second Person Singular*, is a grammatical concept that means "You." It highlights the absence of a sense of national or personal identity as a Palestinian-Israeli; Amir does not have a clear "I" in the sense of Palestinian identity; he does not feel his worth until he uses a Jewish identity.

Difference in Living Spaces between Israelis and Palestinians

The lawyer's desire to increase his clientele and income pushed him to rent an office in a Jewish neighborhood, ironically, the destination of local Palestinians of East Jerusalem for hiring a reputable lawyer. The mere location of a professional's office determines the business's prestige, and most Palestinians flock to ones in Jewish neighborhoods as it implies a higher quality of service (15). Despite coming from the Palestinian area himself, also referred to as "The Triangle," the lawyer despises this part of the city even if he does not admit it, which is evident in his views of the people living there when he convinces his intern not to return to the Galilee arguing that the young intern would work for the "village car thieves" and going back to be with his family is not an excuse. "Why go back?" asks the lawyer, casting severe doubts into the intern's heart, persuading him to stay and deal with "the real thing" in Israel (15). The concept of 'return' has been the sole aim of the Palestinian cause over the past decades, so the lawyer's question indicates that Palestinian-Israelis do not share the same goal and aim of the Palestinians who seek to return to their homes and lands. The conflict of the lawyer's feelings reflects his confusion with his stance regarding his own identity. The lawyer wants to be perceived as Jewish, as he distances himself from the Palestinians by adopting a Jewish lifestyle and looking down at Palestinians as backward and pretentious, which is ironic since he does the same thing subconsciously. Even though he acknowledges that he is the landowner, living on his land as a second-degree immigrant exiled in his own country, he does not wish to be affiliated with the rest of his people, as they are perceived as inferior. The Israeli part of the country is modern and civilized, which is alluring to Palestinians from the Triangle, who do not enjoy the same lifestyle. Though the lawyer poses as a Palestinian with the intention not to look "too Arab" or less than the Jews, he knows and understands that he is trying to be a counterpart to his Jewish peers.

The Mother: A Symbol of Home and Land

Amir's troubled childhood in the village later explains his fear of social exclusion and his desperate attempt at forging/stealing an Israeli

identity. Amir has struggled with his identity since childhood, as he always felt that he was an alien: "I was a stranger in school, a stranger in the village with a weird last name just like all the other strangers in Jaljulia" (99). His need to use a different identity started early when he used Um Bassem's last name to sign school forms and papers, even though they were not blood-related. Amir had to be removed from his late father's hometown, Tira, and moved to Juljulia with his mother due to family feuds, and that contributed to his feeling that he does not belong in that village. This alienation only contributed to Amir's detachment from his homeland and identity, as he grew up not using his name but chose to identify as someone else. Amir managed to achieve what other characters of Kashua could not, which was to transform into a Jew. Amir suffers from a deep sense of shame because of his real mother, who was accused of having affairs with strange men. When he was young, all the kids made fun of him at school: "My mother's honor, all the kids knew, was free for the taking" (272). His deep shame from his mother reflected on him mentally, and it caused their relationship to be strained and lacking emotions. His mother signifies his identity and Palestine; he was ashamed to belong to both his mother and his Palestinian community. He found comfort in the old landlord, Um-Basssim, who used to deny all these accusations and assert that his mother was, in fact, a moral woman: "Your mother is more honorable than all the rest of this trashy village. You must know that." (273) This defamation of Amir's mother breaks the usual tie between a mother and her son. Also, mothers symbolize home and land, and this estrangement between them mirrors Amir's alienation at his village home. With Um-Bassem's death, Amir literally cuts ties with his hometown and figuratively cuts the umbilical cord that connected him to his land and birth mother.

Ruchaleh plays the role of a surrogate mother who gives birth to the new Jewish Amir, who later transforms into Yonatan. However, she still cannot view him as anything but a Palestinian when she ridicules him, "and don't stare at me with that pitying look." (314) Unlike his real biological mother, whom he cannot hug or have any warm feelings towards, he yearns for love and affection from his adoptive mother, Ruchaleh. She knows his truth, and he is still an "Arab" to her, which confirms the impossibility of removing the boundaries between both identities. Ruchaleh witnessed Amir using her son's belongings without showing any sign of objection, which encouraged Amir to discover Yonatan's belongings further. Amir understands he does not belong in that society, so he is always worried and agitated, like a crook waiting to get caught, as he knows he "didn't belong" (199). Amir confesses: "I felt like

a new man, strong, proud, unafraid, marching toward a revolution with a spade in one hand and a rifle in the other.” (127, 128) which indicates that he is already holding a spade to bury the Arab identity, and with the other hand he is carrying a rifle, symbolizing his transition into the identity of the colonizer.

Conclusion

Kashua communicates that the pressure to assimilate grows with constant friction against the dominant colonizing culture. The comparison Kashua set to highlight the differences between his two protagonists indicates the truth about the Palestinian-Israelis and how they perceive their identities differently. His Palestinian characters living under Israeli occupation assimilate into the Jewish Israeli culture by embracing the Hebrew language, othering their Palestinian heritage, and physically looking as Israeli as possible. Kashua delivers a message through the lawyer and Amir, hinting that a Palestinian can never pass as an equal citizen in Israel unless he transforms into one of them. Amir’s unrealistic solution requires that a Palestinian become an identity thief, a colonizer himself, and steal another man’s existence, just as the Israelis are doing to the Palestinians. The colonized subject mimics the colonizer by wiping out another person's existence. It is an act of subversion and rebellion against imperialism, as it defies the advertised purity of the exclusive Jewish society. However, the lawyer is still attached to his roots on the inside. He does not resist looking like an Israeli, but he subverts the purity of the colonizer’s identity by introducing a hybrid persona that is unwilling to erase their people’s history. The lawyer also recognizes the history of his people, and that is why he enrolls his daughter in inclusive schools for Jewish and Palestinian kids. Hence, between Amir and the lawyer, the latter is the person who is resisting total identity surrender. Kashua eventually stresses through Amir that the debilitating effect of occupation and the constant prolonged demoralization of the colonized have eventually turned the colonized to imitate the colonizer by becoming one of them, a thief who stole another man’s identity and existence.

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