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THE PALESTINIAN SHORT STORY BETWEEN 1944 AND 1967: THEMES AND MOTIFS

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ABSTRACT: *The Palestinian short story was typified with its inclination to be a historical manuscript, ruled by a sense of unease, muddle and dread of the future. The continuous depiction of painful confrontations with the authorities, including their various mechanisms, generated a large collection of motifs and themes colored with intense suffering and extreme pain and shaded with a permanent endeavor to detect a better and bright future. As a result, the stories functioned like real photographs of what was actually happening on the ground. Of these themes and motifs, one can read about the Nakba (calamity) and family reunion, land confiscation and Judaization, military rule, military courts, the role of Arab states, the role of the Israeli Communist Party and finding work, poverty, imposed marriages and other social topics.*

KEYWORDS: the Palestinian short story, *Nakba* and family reunion, land confiscation and Judaization, military rule, military courts, the role of Arab states, the role of the Communist Party, finding work, poverty, imposed marriages and other social topics.

INTRODUCTION

Initially the Palestinian short story was characterized with its tendency to be a historical document, dominated by a sense of anxiety, confusion and fear of the future. In addition, the constant depiction of permanent clashes with the authorities, including their various mechanisms, engendered a large collection of motifs and themes colored with intense suffering and extreme pain and with a long-lasting endeavor to present an enhanced and cheerful future. Accordingly, the local writers of literature especially the short story writers were prompted to cope with the factual reality and the changed facts away from the romantic doctrine. Put differently, they had to seek methods through which they could best express their demands and tell about their various conditions. It was only logical that the Communist Party and *Al-It-*

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Tihad reinforced this trend (Assadi and Abu Saleh, 2016 5-6). In an article published by this journal the chief editor asked his staff firmly to remain glued to the concerns of people. The newspaper wrote, "The editor-in-chief asked his staff to give readers materials which they can comprehend and address the problems and issues of interest to the readers in a simple and attractive style." He also insisted that they should take care of "the literary column in such a manner that fully reflects people's struggle, goals and aspirations." Furthermore, he asked the editors themselves to try writing stories derived from the core of real life concluding: "Be confident you can never develop your newspaper and widen its circulation unless you engage all your thoughts and time in your work and unless your writing comes from the innermost depths of the people" (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 13 1956).[1]

Although Zaki Darwish was not an editor, then, but a secondary school student, he got the message and molded his own personal experience into a short story. Darwish starts his story, "I Am Not Alone," by addressing the editor directly. He writes, My brother, editor of *Al-It-Tihad*. I am sending you this story detailing the bitter experience that every laborer experiences. I am a secondary school student. During the summer vacation, I tried in vain to find work. I was exhausted but eventually I returned home empty handed, a loser. (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 79, 1961)

Significantly, Zaki's personal incident was so effective that the greater mass of writers regarded it as a model to be duplicated. Thus, their stories centered on themes about the suffering of workers and peasants so much that these stories functioned like real photographs of what was actually happening on the ground. Of these themes and motifs, one can read about the *Nakba* (calamity) and family reunion, land confiscation and Judaization, military rule, military courts, the role of Arab states, the role of the Communist Party and finding work, poverty, imposed marriages and other social topics.

The *Nakba* and Family Reunion

The *Nakba* and its disastrous consequences of loss of home-country and, with it, damage of nation, culture, social web especially family structure and loss of future and hopes had an unparalleled impact on the short story. The subject of family dispersal and the efforts to reunite it occupied a central place in the Palestinian short story inside Israel. Many storywriters employed this motif extensively emphasizing the deep feeling of the Arab citizens that they were alone bearing the burden of the Arab Israeli conflict. Hence, their characters obtained from reality and typified by simplicity, were placed within an atmosphere packed with suffering, anxiety and nostalgia. In "We Are from the Dear Land," for example, Mohammad Khass presents the suffering the Palestinians undergo because of the devastation of the family tissue in a casual talk between the narrator, also the protagonist of the story, and a woman at Mandelbaum Gate in Jerusalem.

[1] . All quotations from the stories, Arabic or Hebrew sources including the titles of the cited sources were translated by the writers.

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In the beginning, they thought I was a pilgrim.
"What are you doing in Jerusalem, Mother?" I asked the old woman next to me.
"I have three children *there*, sonny!"
She told me fervently about four years of suffering which she spent trying to obtain a permit
"What about you, sonny? Who do you have *there*?"
"Many people, Mommy. A dear part of my people dwelling tents are *there*."
I walked ahead.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 67, 1960)

Khass also portrays the tough circumstances in which the Arab citizens pass through the Mandelbaum Gate in Jerusalem, showing the grief and anguish during inspection and the planned delay meant to abuse and humiliate them. The narrator points out the cruelty of the Israeli soldier, who regards every Palestinian as a suspect and resolutely does all he can do to disturb and harass the Palestinian citizen even if he or she were old or disabled:

One of the led suspects was a young woman who was mute and deaf. All her husband's attempts to explain her situation were futile. After she was searched for a few minutes, the young woman went out with darkened face. Her husband asked her to follow him. They crossed the border. She waited.

The police officer led an old woman leaning on a stick to the tent. After a long period, the officer went out looking for her superior to whom the old woman showed a small can. He opened it and tried to identify its contents. "I do not know," he said. Subsequently, the turned to their superior who opened the can and recognized that it contained a chemical material called "z'out," causing sneeze. The old woman was released.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 67, 1960)

He also depicts accidental meetings of relatives or people supposedly from the same place while arriving at the gate or departing from it. Précising his experience at the gate, the protagonist concludes the story by quoting his friend's impression. The friend says:

"There were thousands waiting for us at the gate. Whenever someone went out, he would be asked dozens of questions: Are you from Haifa? Jaffa? Acre? Nazareth? Lyd? Ramleh? Do you know Mr.…? How is my mother? Brother? And parents? They embraced, the teas dropped, and the question is repeated. 'Are you from our homeland?' 'Yes, we are from the dear homeland, your homeland!'"
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 67, 1960)

Interestingly, the themes of *Nakba*, reunification, the severity and tough conditions the people experienced those days were not restricted to a mere presentation and documentation of events. Rather, the writers sought to affirm that the events of the *Nakba* and the consequent changes in the life of the Arab population will remain immortal in memory of the Palestinian people, and like heritage, the *Nakba* will be transferred from one generation to another. This is the conclusion that an Arabic teacher reaches after having finished checking the compositions of his students in "Such Are the Dreams of Our Children:"

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Allah is great! Even memories can be inherited. So I concluded with peace of mind that our people living in the diaspora and future generations will never forget the *Nakbah*'s events or the homeland. Nothing will delete them, not even the death of the fathers or the passage of time. Those who believe that only the old generations are the ones who bear the memories of the homeland are wrong. And those who bet that with the death of the old generation the cause will die, too—they are even more mistaken! (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 85, 1966)

Land Confiscation and Judaization

Land confiscation occupied a central place in the Palestinian short story. One could hardly find a writer who did not relate to this subject in general or particular because writers considered the policy of land confiscation a huge disaster that was molded to terminate the leftovers of Arab land ownership. Therefore, the majority of stories emphasized the great value given to the land, expressed patriotism and warned against all attempts to confiscate it because loss of lands meant loss of self, roots and identity. So writers called for peaceful resistance as the only way to recover confiscated lands, and stressed the necessity to remain glued to it and preserve what remained of their ancestors' inheritance.

The endorsement of this theme helped make the stories become more realistic, scholastic and enlightening. Yet, the tone in most stories did not achieve artistic sophistication. The stories were mostly conquered by preaching, guidance, explicit warning of wasting the land and against the practices of the Israeli authorities. Furthermore, the writers gave future scenarios stemming from losing the lands. Their sense of the threat of Judaization was sharp and clear. For that reason, it can be said that stories that dealt with the topic of land and the call to grip it have offered the purest and truest themes ever treated in the Arabic short story in Israel.

In "A Military Court," for example, Tawfiq Mo'ammar tries to submit a picture of horror, destruction and death caused by events of the *Nakba*, and the permanent attempts of the authorities to restraint the capacity of Arab citizens to survive and resist oppression. His goal is to depict his people's tireless efforts to defend their right to stay in their homeland and in the land of their parents and grandparents with all the honest crowds reinforcing and guiding them toward a more enlightened, prosperous future (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 38, 1956).

Likewise, in "My Friend, Abu Hassan," Michael Awad portrays the life of farmers who lost their land because of confiscation by the Government. Worse, having lost their lands, the farmers had no choice but to work as slaves in their own lost lands whose ownership was turned to the Jewish cooperative societies. They had to provide for their families. Worse still, some farmers were made to believe that this was the doctrine of God. Awad says,

In vain did I try to convince my friend that landowners were not as good as people would like to think and that the land they owned was not "given to them by God." Rather, their grandparents took it by force from the peasants' ancestors. Worse, after stealing the peasants' land, the landowners forced the peasants to farm the land, thus exploiting their force and sucking their blood. (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 25, 1949)

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The Military Rule

The military rule had evident milestones on the evolution of the Palestinian short story that directly expressed the atmosphere of anxiety and confusion caused to citizens. Writers also pointed out the long-lasting attempts of the military rule to humiliate the population, particularly by preventing their movement between villages and cities, except with the permission of the military governor. However, these stories were characterized with their focus on narrating and molding the events that were compatible with the desired target without regard to the artistic structure.

One of the main events that was strongly associated with the military rule and played a chief role in the intimidation and humiliation of the Arab citizens in Israel was the Kufr Qassem Massacre, 1956. It was logical, therefore, that a great deal of writers wrote about this slaughter. Although some writers managed to create stories that were almost perfect in terms of their artistic and figurative dimensions, the majority of stories intensely deficient because of the obstacles imposed by the military rule. Significantly, the harsh practices of the military rule occurred at that period which represented the very inauguration of the art of the short story. The vision of the writers regarding the treatment of the art of fiction had not been molded yet. Nor had they been updated with its technical features. Furthermore, many writers in the field of education and governmental offices dreaded the hazardous consequences of their political activities and the possible loss of their livelihoods. Nonetheless, there were voluminous writers who published their stories choosing not to bow to military rule and its penalties. Even though their stories were mainly pictorial and documentary, and lacking in their structure and the portrayal of their characters, they opened the way for writers to move forward in the development of narrative art.

"October 29," by an anonymous writer, best illustrates the previously mentioned points. Happening on the eve of Kufr Qassem Massacre, the story features an extended tête-à-tête among a group of workers who hold a grudge against the practices of the military rules. Mahmoud, the protagonist, says,

"We hardly find work and when we do the military governor refuses to issue permits! Life is not easy! What does "our master," the governor want? Does he want us to starve? To leave our homeland? What does he want? Let him give his commands and we will abide!" (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 53, 1958)

Evidently, the irony of the talk not only reflects the workers' deep sense of bitterness and frustration but also records the severe practices of the ruler, who relaxes his grip over the workers' various aspects of lives, through the permits.

Similarly, in "And The Bullets Reaped the Sons of My Village**,"** the pseudonymous writer depicts the aftereffects of Kufr Qassem Massacre by tracing the life of a family that lost a son, named Riyadh, who went to call his father but ironically returned carried by his father after being mercilessly killed. The ruthless command of the officer inhabits the bereaved parent's head. Reminiscing the tragic event, the father clearly hears,

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"Reap them!" I found myself behind the fence covered with boards of cacti and darkness. The bullets reaped my child as well as the sons of my village. Returning home after spending one day at work trying to provide their children with daily bread. Neither the bread came nor those who were after it. (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 53, 1958)

Despite the sourness of the bereavement, the father dashes to rescue a Jewish child who runs after his dog that hides between two railway lines. The bereaved father rescues the boy from certain death at the time he is thinking of revenge.
Other stories focus on the impact of military rule on the swelling sense of injustice, the deterioration of life's conditions and alienation and estrangement of the people whose families were departed from their homelands to refugee camps in the Arab countries. As a result, a clear crisis in the Palestinian identity appeared on the surface.
In his "Long Live Qirqash," for example, Mohammad Khass presents other hardships the Arabs had to cope with under the military rule. These are the bizarre and inexplicable penalties imposed by the Israeli courts. The supposedly just verdict of the judge and his humane position towards the father are severely betrayed by his weird incrimination of a minor. More serious, the court procedures reveal the absurdity of enforcing a just law on a citizen who is not justly treated. Instead of protecting the minor and providing him with proper education and convenient life free from dangers and threats, the authorities punish him for attempting to provide for his old father and big family. Furthermore, the judge's sympathy with the old man in the end does not hide the authority's failure to provide him with an appropriate decent life. What's more, the judge's polar verdicts are reminiscent of Azdak's absurd approaches in Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Moreover, the procedures reveal the tough life of the Arabs who found real difficulty assuring their livelihood and who were prevented from moving freely in order to guarantee it.

The judge turned to the janitor and told him to call the father. An old man in his eighties came, leaning upon a walking stick. Before he was able to take his position on the witnesses' stage, the judge pestered him with questions: "How did you let him go? Why did you agree? And without a permit!?"

"I am an old, disabled man. My family consists of seven members. The eldest is the one standing before you, your honor. He is our provider. He had to go to Zikhron to work."
The judge listened attentively. He referred to a volume of laws before him then read his verdict: "The court believes the father is innocent and charges the son with 40 pounds or 20 days in prison. Good Bye!" (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 63, 1957)

Correspondingly, in "A Military Court," Tawfiq Mo'ammar depicts similar court proceedings with similar participants, conditions, elements and conclusion. Addressing the boy, the judge says,
"You are accused of violating material 2916, paragraph "c" of the emergency system by your presence in Ramleh City without a permit."
Ahmad Hasan replied, "But I pick olives in Ramleh with a group of workers. Our boss obtained a collective permit for all of the workers in Ramleh. I am one of them and here is the permit, sir. Our boss passed it to me upon learning about my trial."
The judge took the permit and examined it carefully then said, "This permit gave you the chance to travel to Haifa only. Your presence in Ramleh is, then, a violation of the permit's

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conditions, the security regulations and a threat to the public security." (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 38, 1956)

Again the judge demonstrates his faithfulness to an assortment of seemingly fair laws but is blind to the unfair life that makes the boy violate these laws.
One considerably repeated motif in the Palestinian story that dealt with the theme of military rule and allied with it is the motif of collaborators, the eyes of the authority, their hands or its symbols. These symbols were not restricted to Arab agents. Some of these characters were Jewish, or British, disguised or unveiled. Naturally, these characters who played a very negative and crucial role in the conflict were depicted as malicious, spiteful, wicked and nasty people devoid of all moral values or attitudes. But unquestionably, the enmity and hatred was addressed particularly to local Arab characters that cooperated with the authority against the interests of the Arab minority in the country. One notable collaborator with the Israeli authority was the *Mukhtar*, the chosen one, who did his utmost to provide the authorities with any service to obtain their satisfaction.

"Nur's Red Wall-Cart" best illustrates this point. In a very vehement row between a militant youth and a collaborating *Mukhtar*, Mohammad Naffa' manages to portray the negative influence of the former on the everyday life of the people. Raging at the young man's courage to vote for a party opposed to the government's policy, the *Mukhtar* shamelessly, shouts, "It must be the rulers! The State has come. Nur, take the wall-cart away. You've corrupted our reputation…! Our God's up and the government's here! …. I am the son of the government and know more than you" (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 41, 1965).

Correspondingly, "In the Poor Neighborhoods**,"** Michael Awad presents a detailed picture of the *Mukhtar*'s role in serving the authorities.

Soon the Municipality sent its people in the tax bureau accompanied by a police force and headed by the *Mukhtar* Abdul Hafiz Abu Raji, wearing his elegant gown and silk *Koffiyya* with golden-striped headband and marching carefully to prevent the dirt of the alley from sticking into his glittering shoes. While walking, he did not stop shelling people with his nasty curses like: "These are a bunch of dirty people! Leaving all this dirt and mud before their houses to stick to the shoes of *Mukhtar*s and police officers!" Or "Indeed, these are shameless people!" He said the last curse unnoticing Um Mahmoud, who was sitting on the threshold of her house. The curse fell right into her ears causing her to shake in protest. She shouted in his face, "The shameless people are those who deprive the poor of their pennies and squeeze their blood, so that they can buy gold watches which they give as gifts to the military rulers, hold feasts offering rice and meat for foreign spies, or give salaries to relatives and supporters at the expense of the city affairs. Do you understand?"
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 34, 1953)

The extract indeed specifies the hideous function performed by the *Mukhtar* and illuminates the strong opposition of the citizens to his character and attitudes and to the authority behind him.

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The Military Courts

These courts represented the background scene for the State's policy and were regarded as the backbone of the military rule. Through the courts, the military rule could enforce its laws, preserve them and punish those who dared to violate them. More important, the courts abetted the military rule to show a face of a modern system that applies laws to keep order and administrates the life of the citizen who kept breaking the laws. In effect, the courts helped the military rule to devote its existence through functioning in accordance with antidemocratic and discriminatory legislations. Naturally, storywriters were conscious of the treacherous part playacted by these courts and therefore took upon themselves the task of stripping their face to reveal the true skin behind the mask. They described their placements, contents and elements, proceedings, context and rulings not without severe criticism.

One good example is "A Military Court," by Tawfiq Mo'ammar, whose selection of the title reflects his awareness of the momentousness of the courts no less than the content. He begins the story by describing its placement:

The court placed itself in the village's guesthouse. It turned the major room into a court hall, the kitchen into the judge's office, while the barn was used as the soldiers' room and a temporary jail for convicts. In front of the guesthouse, there was a small-unroofed yard. It was surrounded with a low, half-cycled wall next to which high eucalyptus trees higgledy-piggledy grew.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 38, 1956)

Behind the simplicity of the court setting, Mo'ammar intends to emphasize the sense of confusion and inappropriateness that prevails in the courts. Furthermore, the reestablishment of the court in the village's guesthouse, the place where the villagers receive and entertain their guests, is an intense violation of the villagers' moral values. More ironical, the stated reason why the court is moved to the village is "to ease their expenses and to alleviate their suffering in case they had to keep commuting to a major city on the coast." The proceedings and the verdicts issued, however, indicate otherwise. The villagers were under curfew, the proceedings dealing with the people who violated the curfew were ridiculous and the many fines imposed were very heavy and unreasonable.

Likewise, in "Long Live Qirqash," Mohammad Khass describes the setting, the procedures and the judgements of a military rule to affirm its absurdity. Khass remarks that since the court was held in a closed area or a security zone, nobody could attend the sessions save the convicts. Ironically, he affirms that no other attendees could appear in the court due to lack of permits. Then he resumes the story by describing the location and its contents including the furniture. The goal is to indicate the unsuitability of the courtroom, its sessions and its rulings. He says,

The court was held in a distant village inside a small room. The room was empty of everything save black rectangular chairs and a round table on which there were a copy of the *Holy Quran*, a copy of the *New Testament* and a copper sign with the slogan, "Justice is the Principle of Reign." The audience at the scene was no other than the suspects themselves. No one else could reach the closed room in the closed village situated in the closed security zone.

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(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 63, 1957)

Oddly, the copies of the *Holy Quran* and the *New Testament* in addition to the copper sign stressing the prominence of justice are in sharp contrast with the court's placement, setting, context and content.

Some writers focused on the absurdity and incongruity of a series of military orders issued by Israeli military leaders. They also dealt with the procedures of arresting Arab citizens emphasizing the ill-treatment these citizens received. Writers indicated that the military courts operated random proceedings, released contrasting verdicts of similar cases, adopted illogical lows, and issued farcical decisions that were subject to the judge's personal vision. The decrees of the military courts, as maintained by *Al-It-Tihad*, varied in terms of intensity and leniency in accordance with the various judges, their political beliefs and their outlooks of the motives that lied behind each violation of the law (1956, 38). Besides, the writers remarked that many confessions were extracted under torture and threats and in consequence were considered evidence to convict the Palestinian citizen and send him to jail or fine him heavily.

The list of the stories that dealt with the queer official treatment of the Arab citizens is long. One such story is "In the Poor Neighborhoods," where Michael Awad depicts the blindness of the law to the needs of the poor citizens and the cruelty of those who enforce it. Answering a delegate of a deprived neighborhood who ask their mayor to exempt an underprivileged woman of the taxes, the mayor rudely answers,

"We cannot exempt the poor of taxes. The majority of the population are poor. If the poor do not pay taxes, who will pay, then?" the mayor answered. He cleared his throat then proceeded, "We need money to pay the salaries and do our duties towards our foreign guests. The month has ended and the box is already empty of money." (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 34, 1953)

The mayor's answer is absurd and reveals his failure to understand the need of the poor.

Tawfiq Mo'ammar's criticism of the authorities and the courts is harsher. In his "A Military Court," he vows to disclose the incongruity and the subsequent harshness of the verdicts. When the convict, originally sentenced arbitrarily, failed to meet the imposed payment, he was imprisoned instead. If the accused were juvenile, his father or any relative close or far would confront the punishment. After nonsensically dealing with a case involving a minor, the judge reads his bizarre verdict. He says,

"Verdict: Taking into consideration your young age and your good record, Ahmad Barakat named Ziko Flamitiko Hasan you are charged to pay 100 pounds. In case you fail to pay, your uncle Tahesh Al-Belbend Al-Hind Bendy will be sentence to jail for three months under heavy work in accordance with material number 2916, paragraph 2 (C) of the emergency regulations."

Upon hearing this verdict, Tahesh lost his mind. His vision grew dim and had to stand still in his place though his thoughts were discrete. He uttered no word and made no gesture until he eventually cried aloud, "People of the world! Listen. The boy is sentenced and it is me who has to pay! Is that logical? Have you heard such a sentence before?"

"Yes. You must pay because you are his uncle. You are his custodian; isn't he an orphan?"

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Tahesh shouted in the judge's face, "I entered the court as a visitor not as a suspect or a criminal. This is injustice. In fact, this is racism, an act of acrobatic."
While he was increasing his verbal assault against the court, two soldiers came quickly and caught him asking him whether he preferred paying or jail.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 38, 1956)

The judge's efforts to create the atmosphere of a real court inspired by democratic laws are betrayed. The names of the different people involved, their behavior, the proceedings and the verdict, the whole court including its elements are indeed rib tickling. However, these elements of comedy are a noticeable confirmation of the farcicality, iniquitousness and vindictiveness of the military courts and the military rule imposed on Arab citizens. In fact, the readers are transferred into the same world of absurdity depicted in Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Other writers were concerned with the unjust decisions of the judges in the courts, in relation to Jewish and Arab citizens. Jewish and Arab violators of the same law got different penalties. Among many other themes, Mohammad Khass also dealt with this discrimination. In "Long Live Qirqash," a title which is meant to revive the strange, unjust and stupid anecdotes and jokes attributed to a ruler by the same name who lived in the 6th century according the Islamic calendar, Khass depicts two similar cases. In the first, the convict is a Jew, who receives a light penalty:

"Enough. I see. The court sees depending on the fifth paragraph of the seventh item from martial code one thousand and thirty one of the *Legislation Ruling Magazine* that the calf is not to be convicted for entering the closed area. However, the convicts will by no means be absolved of all responsibility for the calf. Considering their success in locating the calf, it was ruled that Shlomo and Gdalya will be charged 100 pence."

In the second, the convict is an Arab who receives a heavy sentence for the same violation. The judge says, "The court believes the father is innocent and charges the son with 40 pounds or 20 days in prison. And Good Bye!" (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 63, 1957.)

The Role of the Arab Countries

Among the topics dealt with by the Palestinian short storywriters is the Arab systems by capacity of the strong correlation between the Arab sphere and Palestine. It is a fact that whatever happens in the Arab world has automatic influence on the Palestinian issue. In other words, the deterioration of the Arab domain or its rise and cohesion leave their imprints on the case. Storywriters recognized this reality and dealt with it in their stories focusing on the negative attitude of the Arabic systems towards the Palestinian cause. Besides, they shed lights on the different sorts of harassment and ill-treatment that the Palestinians get from these systems. Other writers, like Mohammad Khass, concentrated on the large extent of cooperation and coordination existing between the Israeli and the Jordanian armies in their persecution of the Palestinian citizens. In his "We Are from the Dear Land," which depicts the passage of the Palestinians through the Mandelbaum Gate, Khass comments on this shameful relationship. He says,

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The distance between the Israeli tent and the Jordanian was only a few meters. The guards in civic dress from both tents would occasionally come so close to each other that the only difference was the head cover used by the Jordanians. He who entered the Israeli tent would after a few moments discover himself entering a Jordanian tent set for similar purposes.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 67, 1960)

The Role of the Communist Party

The Palestinian Communist Party, the first socialist party established in Palestine in 1919, came to root the principles and values of international socialism and communism in the first years of the British mandate in Palestine. It was widely believed that the ideology of Marxism-Leninism reflected the vital interests of the working class and promoted a system of ideas and common values that their supporters struggled to settle and accomplish. Because of the closeness between the Soviet Union and the current of the Arab nationalists in 1950s and 1960s, the Palestinian Arabs saw in this party, now the Israeli Communist Party, a venue that represented their national goals and interests and strived to attain them (Abu Saleh, 2010 84-101**).** Therefore, many writers joined this party, supported it or illustrated its attitudes and recruited support for its doctrines whether publicly or secretly. Mohammad Khass, for example, turns his story, "Two Hundred Humans Work with Soil, Eat with Flies and Inhale Hideous Odors," into a direct preaching for Marxism as the only solution for the distress of the working classes and their only hope for a promising future. He says,

"Have you heard about a better life?" They looked towards Carmel full of glittering lights. I understood but I asked again, "I mean better life for us, we, the laborers."
"Who has not heard about Russia? About Communism?"
Even here in this place, geographically close to Haifa but far from the features of life in it, look at the future and see it in communism.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 47, 1957)

Behind his preaching, Khass opposes capitalism, false appearances, glittering lights to Marxism, authenticity and inner reality, and Haifa with its beautiful exterior to the dump with its ugly scenery and dirty people and present to future.

Mohammad Naffa', too, calls directly for the support of the Communist Party. In "Nur's Red Wall-Cart," which depicts the period of hot elections, he, through his major young character, expresses an explicit invitation to vote for the Israeli Communist Party despite the vehement opposition of the *Mukhtar,* who addresses a young child:

"What is this, people? What is this wall-cart? He turned his head towards the crowd.
"This is the letter 'O'!" he said with his mouth full of bread.
The *Mukhtar* was mouthed-open as if he was smiling deeply, allowing his few yellow and long teeth to appear.
"This is the Communists' Party sign!" the crowd roared with laughter!
"What! Comm..nist!!" he found difficulty uttering the word properly.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 41, 1965)

Markedly, Naffa' veers the quarrel between the *Mukhtar* and Nur into a fight between two generations, camps, philosophies and practices: the first represented by the *Mukhtar*, who stands for old traditions, submission, ignorance and lack for any initiative. Nur, however, represents the younger people with all their aspirations for

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modernism, liberation, leadership, wisdom, knowledge, initiatives, and promising future.

In "By God, I Have Never Betrayed You Except Once," George Gharieb features the states of solidarity with the Soviets, the joy of the people over the Soviet Union's victory in its fights, and asserts that this victory is a good omen for all peoples of the world who dream of prosperity, liberty and equality.

There was a pause, which gave way for the transistor to dominate the scene. Suddenly they all realized it was talking aloud, and so they listened to it, their thoughts distracted until the broadcaster stated, "The Communist-led guerrilla forces, the Vietcong, destroyed an American base in South Vietnam."

Abu Saber could not help stop a smile from creeping onto his face, for he found in the news a support for him in this meeting.

"By God, they are heroes. Long live people of Algeria!"

(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 43, 1965)

Coincidentally, the news of the communists' victory gives the underprivileged Abu Saber a boost in his attempts to get rid of the unwanted guests, representing imperialism.

The delight of Abu Saber mushrooms when he is behind the curtains to practice his right to vote. Describing Abu Saber's triumph, the narrator says,

He saw an array of small ballot papers with letters standing for the competing parties. Among them was the letter endorsed by the Communist party. His heart's beating increased. It grew intense, more intense. Once every four years he could get revenge on the government's policies directed against his own people. Only through this tiny paper could he gain any comfort. How much he wished to hold dozens of letters and insert them into the ballot box. He would certainly express the desire of many people like him and would contribute in achieving the dignity of his people.

(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 43, 1965)

Interestingly, the writer makes it clear that his call for a change and support of communism should be practiced in the elections rather than violence.

And in "The Alleys' Dust," Salem Haddad depicts the glee of people celebrating May 1st, the Labor Day:

The younger ones raised the red flags, slogans and big paintings while loudspeakers announced the start of the keynote speech usually delivered on such occasions. Right away the crowds grew silent, stopping their songs which grew every year together with the crops.

(*Al-It-Tihad*, 1966 23)

Finding Work, Poverty, Marriages and other Social Topics

In addition to the previously mentioned themes interconnected with politics, writers did not pass over other persistent concerns with which citizen were confronted in their daily life. They tried to expose the difficult living conditions in this period, and the people's assiduous endeavors to get a workplace and maintain it so that they could provide for their families. In most cases, people's maintaining their livelihood meant tolerating, harsh working conditions, ill-treatment they received from employers, continuous threats of being inexplicably expelled from work and low wages.

One good example that treats all these themes straightforwardly is "I Am Not Alone," where Zaki Darwish features the attempts of a young man to find a job. The moment his frustrating search leads him to the idea of putting an end to his life, he happens to

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meet a group of children who confront the same difficulty with a determination to survive. He concludes,

I wondered how these children had determined to survive, while I was determined to leave life quickly. I was alone in misery. There were many people tortured on earth. I went towards them, and after a while we were all in my small room together. The terrible thought flew away. I must do something to get rid of this condition. I was not alone.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 79, 1961)

Obviously, on top of the teething impediments the Arab youths face in order to locate a job, the writer reveals how the authorities fail to provide work for their citizens and, above all, leave the minors unattended. More important, Darwish stresses the significance of solidarity among the oppressed in bringing temporary solutions in absence of the authorities' true care.

Likewise, in "Two Hundred Humans Work with Soil, Eat with Flies and Inhale Hideous Odors," Mohammad Khass describes the suffering of the Arabs in "the Dump Neighborhood," near the Shell Bridge at the East gate of Haifa:

Amid the hills of grimy dirt, the piles of rusty metal and the accumulations of animal bones live two hundred people, children, women and men who work with soil, eat together with flies and breathe hideous odors, mixed with the smoke of burning garbage. Here is the "Mizbalah[2] Neighborhood," near Shell Bridge at the eastern Haifa gate.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 47, 1957)

Interestingly, this extract is reminiscent of a very famous scene depicted by F. Scott Fitzgerald in his fascinating novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Describing a dump outside New York, he says,

About half way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (1950, 29)

Both scenes are a striking description giving the sense of strange places that exhibit unhealthy, even monstrous expansion. Yet, while Khass resorts to straightforward imagery to portray his scene, Fitzgerald employs verbal irony. The ashes are compared to growing wheat. The very houses and indeed even the people are so mingled with ashes that they appear to be composed of ash. The two scenes are some kind of huge dumping ground, where the poor and the dispossessed live. The two dumps form a conscious contrast with the wealthy resorts of Haifa and East and West Egg, and therefore serve as an ugly aide-mémoire of the underbelly of society. Literally and symbolically, both places suggest utmost hopelessness, frustration, despair and decay. However, the Valley of Ashes and the Dump Neighborhood do not simply represent impoverishment and desolation; they denote the immorality and degeneracy of society as a whole.

[2] . A garbage dump.

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Similarly, in "It Is A Strange Story, Indeed! An Israeli Story," Ali 'Ashour deals with people's hunger, and feeding on remnants of junk. Although Najeeb Susan talks about the underprivileged people in "Bewilderment," he discusses another problem they cope with. It is the exploitation of poor workers when it comes to paying the bills of water and electricity, the room rents and taxes.

However, the persistence of the complex political problems and tough conditions of life did not prevent writers to relate to the strong relationship connecting people to each other. These writers noticed people's awareness of the same destiny and knew that what happened to one person inevitably would to others. Therefore, the writers showed how people spared no effort to stand next to each other and help each other materially and spiritually.

In his story, "In the Poor Neighborhoods," Michael Awad addresses this issue giving a good model to be imitated:
The inhabitants of the neighborhood, dozens of poor men and women, her partners in the disaster, gathered in front of Um Ghazi's house. Their presence granted the widow power and determination. She, therefore, stood on the threshold of her house like a tiger trying to stop the police and the tax collectors from entering her house.
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 34, 1953)

Owing to people's support, the woman is empowered. In stressing people's joined efforts and cooperation, the writer guides the people how to make their struggles successful.

Another social insistent phenomenon that the writers addressed was the issue of women. In their stories, writers portrayed the extremely tough life women experienced in their daily lives. In addition to her suffering initiating from her ethnic belonging, the Arab woman takes full responsibility for the household, bears and rears children, and often works outside the home in order to increase the family income. In "It Is A Strange Story, Indeed! An Israeli Story," Ali 'Ashour gives a detailed picture of the Arab woman's hard work. In the context of describing the various worries and tasks of a journalist, the narrator details the various tasks of his wife. He says,

He had hardly had the chance to say hello to his wife when she intensified her sighs and increased her complaints about tiredness that she had experienced that day. She asked her husband to tend to the baby until it slept. Sami took his baby and started to swing him around, though he was overwhelmed with anger caused not by his wife but by this universe, which did not secure tranquility to its inhabitants. His poor wife had gone out very early to work that day and had returned in the afternoon though she had just recovered from her previous illness that had lasted for a week. She often returned home from work exhausted, and she had to do the housework that was waiting for her. Worse still, her old mother, who took care of the baby during the mother's absence, would wait for her impatiently just to throw the baby into her lap saying, "Take your baby! It has worn me out."
(*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 13, 1956)

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Clearly, 'Ashour's point is to show the couple as equal partners who not only share the all domestic responsibilities but also have mutual appreciation and love and join common worries and concerns.

The theme of marriage as a whole and arranged marriage in particular with all the possible consequences and dimensions occupied a good place in the Palestinian short stories, too. Owing to cultural, social and religious factors, arranged marriages were the common rule of conduct in the Arab world for long periods. It was believed marriage is a method of assuring women's future and guarding them. Occasionally, some marriages were conducted without the approval of the married couple whether a man or a woman, or before both or one of them had attained the age that legally allowed a legal marriage. Today, however, Arab women have more education and therefore are more likely to pursue careers outside their homes for personal promotion and financial freedom.

Aware of the significance of this topic, writers depicted this issue reflecting the changes that took place in the Arab world concerning the status of the woman. In "The Victim: Every Day's Story**,"** 'Aref Al-'Azzounie depicts the love affair between two young people which closes with the young man's travel abroad in search of a better future. The frustrated girl has no choice but to submit to her father's tip to accept Mr. Sami's proposal to secure a luxurious life though she is years younger than him. The girl thinks:

> He had loved her perhaps in secret, as she sometimes thought. Her father was right to say that she was entitled to live in comfort and luxury. Why should she tire herself with hesitance?
> Zainab was a sort of a woman who accepted in advance the idea of retreat and defeat. She also recognized the value of love and knew that Mr. Sami, who was honest in his love, was in the autumn of age. He had ventured and cruised around the earth during the past twenty-five years without hopelessness or monotony, and now he came to offer her his name and fortune as a gift. Could we not qualify this man as a man of generosity and bounteousness? Was it possible that he could not love? Here Zainab lifted her head and said to her father, "I accept." (*Al-It-Tihad*, issue 3, 1946)

Evidently, the extract is of great significance. In contrast to the traditional view of the Arab woman, Zainab is a modern, independent girl who enjoys a deep sense of self-awareness. She diagnoses her situation very intelligently, knows how to be practical and pragmatic and can compromise. She recognizes how to evaluate people and appreciate their motives. The fact the she thinks of a past love affair is striking. Above all, she has the liberty to choose for herself. Her relationship with her father is warm, intimate, healthy and far from all forms of coercions and impositions.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning, the Palestinian short story verged on historical documents that faithfully portrayed the everyday life of the people pregnant with a lot anxiety, bewilderment and panic ensuing from the constant clashes with the authorities. Along with the intense suffering and extreme pain, the short story writers managed to affirm their long-lasting endeavor to present an enhanced and cheerful future. This type of

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life engendered a great assemblage of motifs and themes such as the *Nakba* and family reunion, land confiscation and Judaization, military rule, military courts, the role of Arab states, the role of the Communist Party and finding work, poverty, imposed marriages and other social topics.

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