

RETHINKING THE ARABIC LITERATURE CURRICULUM: A BRIDGE TO WRITTEN ARABIC (*FUṢḤĀ*) AND A MECHANISM FOR CULTURAL CHANGE – CASE STUDY OF THE PALESTINIAN MINORITY IN ISRAEL

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Abstract: As in neighboring countries, Palestinians living in Israel attend schools in which Arabic is the language of instruction. However, their situation is unique in that Arabic is the minority language, and students and teachers alike have to learn and function in the majority language – Hebrew – as well as the international language of science and commerce – English. In this article I present an overview of the particular problems this situation creates in terms of the accessibility of written Arabic – *fuṣḥā*. This inaccessibility is compounded by the choice of texts for the Arabic literature curriculum which neither engage the students nor contribute to the development of their critical thinking, that essential skill for progress and success in the 21st century era of pluralism, diversity and non-conformity. Within the context of the Sanctuary (*ma'bad*) Theory of Kamāl 'Abū Dīb and the Diaspora Theory of Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, I demonstrate a model of such teaching with a poem by the Syrian author, 'Adūnīs.

Keywords: *Arabic literature curriculum-Israel; teaching of Arabic; Non-conformist literature; Diaspora Theory; Sanctuary (ma'bad) Theory, Kamāl 'Abū Dīb; 'Adūnīs.*

2350 years ago, a dramatic event took place in Athens: Aristotle appeared at the gates of the Academy of Sciences and announced his resignation from that esteemed institution. What led Aristotle to take such an extraordinary, almost unprecedented step? Aristotle joined the Academy at the age of 17 and worked alongside Plato for 20 years. Plato died and Speusippos was elected to take his place as the head of the Academy. Speusippos was a mathematician. Aristotle claimed that a mathematician looks at the universe around him and sees a static, frozen, unchanging reality, while he – Aristotle – as a researcher of life phenomena, saw a world that was dynamic and constantly changing. According to Aristotle, these two worldviews contradict each other, and since a mathematician had been elected to lead the Academy, he chose to be outside it.¹

Introduction

Aristotle's view quoted above expresses the vitality and necessity of change in human lives. The Academy of Sciences in ancient Athens used to be a symbol of power because, according to Aristotle, its influence could affect all directions of human thought. Aristotle's position is a continuation of the comments of his mentor Plato who, in turn, related to

¹ Feldman, 2011, 74-81.

Heraclitus' view of the dynamic nature of the universe and the endless flow of the world's elements, their uniformity and contrasts. The views of Heraclitus illustrated the fact that truth and knowledge are constantly changing, as is human existence, which is an integral part of the cosmos. The basic understanding that constant change is an integral part of that existence appears also among modern philosophers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, and indeed underpins this article (Cartwright 1965: 466-485; Heidegger 1979: ix; Kahn 1981; Kirk 1951: 35-42).

The aim of this article is to answer the basic question: can Arabic literary texts create a linguistic and cultural change among readers and particularly among school pupils in the post-modern era, and if so, how? This article focuses on the teaching of literature within the school setting as a rich space where young people may structure their identity and autonomy. My belief is that the study of literature has the power to prepare pupils, as emerging human entities, for the era of pluralism, diversity and disagreement.

The theory underlying this article is the constructivist approach influenced by postmodern schools of thought whereby there is no absolute truth, since every individual understands the world in his or her own way. Literature is a key tool for instilling these values at school in order to prepare graduates for new and rapidly changing life experiences. Thus, the starting point for this article claims that the Arabic literary text can raise the level of contemporary existential thinking among Arab pupils and Arabs in general. To this end, I believe Arabic language and literature curricula must include specific texts that challenge the status quo within Arab society and help Arab pupils stand firm when faced with the frequent existential and intellectual changes, both local and global. Moreover, I believe that in order to encourage Arab pupils to engage with such texts, some of these must be chosen not only for their content, but also for their linguistic accessibility, given the tremendous diglossic gap between Arabic as it is spoken in various countries ('*āmmiyya*) and the written language (*fushḥā*). While this is true for all school systems in which Arabic is the language of instruction, this is particularly critical in Israel, the site of this case study, where the problems of diglossia are compounded by the fact that Arabic is the language of the minority and is spoken and used as the medium of instruction for some 20% of the country's population in Israel. As stated, however, the other driver to encourage students to overcome the difficulties of *fushḥā* is to select texts that challenge the students to think about issues relevant to their own lives.

A brief overview of the Arabic curriculum for the Arab schools in Israel reveals that there are no texts that question the social, intellectual, and existential status quo in Arab society. Non-conformism in this context is an important tool to change the thinking horizons among Arab pupils in Israel. I believe suitable literary texts may arouse new thought and empower the voice of the individual against the collective hegemony of a variety of axioms, traditions and norms that limit free thinking in an era characterized by uncertainty in all walks of life.

This article will suggest open-ended, non-conformist texts as well as a theoretical framework based on the Sanctuary Theory (*naẓariyyat al-ma'bad*) of Syrian author and critic Kamāl 'Abū Dīb (Abu Deeb 1988: 160-181; Abu Deeb 1997: 101-133) and the Diaspora Theory developed by Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2005). Such a framework can enrich educational and literary discussion as a progressive process centered on a non-conformist text. While this article does not suggest specific teaching methods, the examples provided

below lend themselves to fruitful dialogue within a democratic classroom setting. The provocative non-conformist text is essential for rethinking the values of Arab society and the real questions that lead to positive and productive thinking in all areas of life.

The teaching of written Arabic (F1) in Arab schools in Israel

The study of Standard written Arabic, as a second language, in Arab schools in Israel is a unique case in that, unlike in neighboring Arab states, Arabic is the language of the minority. Nevertheless, the problems of teaching Arabic language and literature presented below bear similarities to those in all Arabic-speaking countries. Hence the particular case study of Israel has implications far beyond its geographical boundaries.

The teaching of Arabic language and literature in Arab schools in Israel is affected by a number of elements. I refer to the reversal of its status as the dominant language – the superstratum – to that of minority language – the substratum. We must remain aware of the fact that Arabic is now the language of the national minority, with all that this entails.

This overview does not provide precise statistics but rather reflects and examines in depth the real problems inherent in the teaching of Arabic in Arab schools in Israel today. One might offer several descriptions of the state of Arabic teaching in these schools, but perhaps the most understated way would be to describe it as being in a painful state of crisis. By using the term 'crisis' I mean that, particularly at the high school level, not only is there no advancement, but the status quo is also not being maintained, and we are witnessing a worrying regression that is reflected in various aspects that can be measured by certain parameters that, together, create a very gloomy picture².

The first parameter is the matriculation exams taken in 12th grade (11th grade in some schools). The national average score is just under 60% and is 12% lower than the national average for Hebrew as first language in the Jewish schools. The second parameter is the scores for the verbal section on the psychometric tests for university admission. While Arabic speakers often receive an exemption from further study on the basis of their score for English, for the most part they receive a lower score on the verbal section for Arabic as first language. The third parameter is the MEITZAV³ tests (standardized tests administered nationwide in first language, math, and science in grades 5 and 8 as measures of school effectiveness and growth⁴). These results provide a very dismal picture among Arab elementary school pupils in general and reveal serious difficulties in reading comprehension and written expression in particular. The fourth parameter is the entrance exam for the Faculties of Arabic at Israeli universities and colleges, and the intra-faculty transition exams. Usually, a large percentage of the test-takers fail to reach the threshold score. The fifth parameter is the international PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – *al-imtihān ad-duwalī li-qiyās madā taqaddum al-qirā'a fī*

² For information concerning Arabic in Israel, see Amara, 2002; Amara, 202 (a), pp. 63-103; 'Amāra, 2010; Amara, 2013, 77-90; Ben-Rafael, 2006, 7-30; Ilan, 2002, 7-30; Yitzhaki, 2008.

³ applications/ims/homepage.htm/

⁴ *'imtihān maqāyīs al-namā' wa-l-najā'a fī al-madāris*

l- 'ālam) test⁵, which examines first language literacy. Without the average of the Arab students, Israel is ranked 11th out of 45 participating countries, and with the scores of the Arab students it drops to 32nd place. The scores of the Arab students on their own would place Israel in 42nd place.

There are several solid reasons for this situation, which can be grouped into three categories, in my opinion: (a) issues intrinsic to Arabic; (b) the teacher; (c) the education system. I relate to each of these categories below.

Issues intrinsic to Arabic

Arabic is characterized by diglossia, or to be more precise – Arabic suffers from extreme diglossia, with a significant difference between the spoken dialects – mother tongue – (*'āmmiyya*) throughout the Arab-speaking world and the written language. This in itself makes it hard to acquire the written language, FL1 – (*fuṣḥā*) – because the pupils only encounter it in books and literature classes. But if this duality were not enough, the situation is even more severe for reasons connected to the situation of the Arab minority living in Israel, namely its exposure to Israeli society and to Hebrew. Moreover, globalization and the hegemony of the media further influence the language of the youth, who are developing their own language that differs both from *fuṣḥā* and from the regular local *'āmmiyya*. Consequently, the place of the Arabic that pupils learn at school and are tested on makes it hard to do well in reading comprehension, written expression and literature in Standard Arabic. We can rank the lingual habits of the Arab youth in Israel in the following order:

1. In the first place – “normative” spoken Arabic.
2. “Hebric” – a hybrid of spoken Arabic and Hebrew that is seeping into many areas of life for many different age levels.
3. “Arabish” – a mixture of Arabic and English – the language of the internet, chat rooms and social media websites.
4. Normative Hebrew, which Arab students must learn in order to function and advance in Israeli society.
5. Normative English, essential for admission to academic studies, but also affecting the youth through music, film, and television.
6. Classical Arabic, the language of poetry and literary prose, a language they are tested on to ascertain their levels in the four competencies of language learning: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The place of classical written Arabic is thus at the bottom of the list of priorities for most Arab pupils, who see its necessity as only marginal, apart from the religious Islamic aspect. The proper use of this language is not seen as a necessity that determines their daily existence, and thus their attitude towards it is also marginal.

⁵ For results see: <http://cms.education.gov.il/educationcms/units/rama>

The teacher

In no way do I underestimate the Sisyphean task the teachers of Arabic are faced with; the conditions they work under are very often difficult and frustrating. Nevertheless, this component contains three factors that prevent teachers from delivering the study content more effectively:

- a) **The deliverer factor:** Arab teachers, particular young teachers, who themselves experienced the situation described above regarding Arabic, are expected to be the agents of Classical Arabic, and pass on to their pupils the language that they, themselves, found difficult to acquire. I am referring not only to the teachers of Arabic, but to teachers of all subjects who have trouble expressing themselves in classical language, and papers they hand out to their pupil (exams, worksheets, explanations etc.) can be full of spelling, grammar, and syntax errors.
- b) **The default factor:** The admission threshold for many professions, particularly those held in high prestige, is set high and is hard to attain (this includes the psychometric tests mentioned earlier as an impeding factor). This situation, and students' fears about learning new professions and not finding work in them drives many Arab students to choose the teaching profession and teacher education colleges not as the realization of a dream or preferred choice, but rather by default – or as a 'lesser evil'. They complete their degree requirements, but in the field, they will not be teachers who can bring about any significant change even if they try hard.
- c) **The weak magnet factor:** Following on from the default factor, the teaching of Arabic and teaching in general cannot compete with prestigious professions such as medicine, hi-tech and nanotechnology, and thus there is no opportunity to attract people with high potential to teaching, and we cannot see any meaningful change in the foreseeable future for the teaching of Arabic or for teaching in general.

The system

I refer to a number of factors that are found in various environments in terms of the distance from the pupils as individuals, but which affect them directly or indirectly. In other words, the interaction between the individual and the different environments – those circles surrounding the individual constitute what Bronfenbrenner calls the “ecological environment”. The types of interaction in these systems change according to the degree of closeness between the system (the circle) and the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977(a): 199-212; Bronfenbrenner, 1977(b): 513-531). Bronfenbrenner's circles constitute four systems as follows:

- Microsystem – direct and immediate circle of family and peers
- Mesosystem – an interim circle of family and peers
- Exosystem – external circle such as neighborhood and the media
- Macrosystem – laws, history, culture, and socioeconomic conditions

In my opinion, all the circles of influence surrounding the individual, and in this case, the Arab pupil, are party to the crisis that Arabic teaching is undergoing. I do not share the currently popular belief that the Israeli government is the only, or even the prime factor for the failure of the Arab education system, particularly Arabic teaching. On the other hand, I most certainly do not want to free the government from the grave responsibility it bears with regard to the Arab education system in Israel. However, all the circles of influence – home, school, local authorities, the Ministry of Education, and the governments over the years – have played a part in creating and perpetuating this failure. I believe this is connected to what Muhammad Amara, following Giles (Giles, 1977, 307-343) defined as ‘ethnolinguistic vitality’, which is comprised of three variables: status, demography, and institutional support. The greater the linguistic vitality of an ethnic group, the greater the group's ability to preserve its social identity and mother tongue in various areas of life. The converse is also true, i.e. most of the circles of influence do not perceive Arabic as a central social, political, or even national tool. Despite the grand declarations of the exosystem and macrosystem about the essentiality of Arabic, these declarations are not put into practice when it comes to teaching Arabic in school. It is a language perceived as less central despite all the best intentions.

In light of all of the above, I propose one possible path that may enable a change in Arabic teaching, be it only partial. I propose teaching Arabic through the vehicle of non-conformist texts that arouse such interest that pupils will be motivated to make the effort to overcome the linguistic barriers. This motivation will be further fueled by a methodology of open discussion. Such discussion and debate will, by definition, enhance the pupils critical thinking skills and thus, the Arabic literature class will not only enhance proficiency in classical Arabic, an important goal in and of itself, but at the same time it will enable a profound change in thinking among Arab teachers and pupils alike. This is no easy path, as it will be filled with many social, religious, and even ethnic obstacles. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is essential if we want to create a society of young Arabs who are proficient and take pride in their first language and who question, investigate, and keep abreast of the surrounding global changes.

Non-conformist literature as a tool for change

In his poem “‘Awwal aš-Ši‘r” (The beginning of poetry)⁶, ‘Adūnīs (‘*Alī ‘Aḥmad Sa‘īd*, b. 1930) the Syrian poet says:

You can be beautiful if you shake spaces,
 And people? Some will say: you are a voice in the wilderness,
 Others: You are just an echo.
 You can be the most beautiful if you are a good example
 Of light and dark
 The final words will be yours, the first, too
 And people? Some will say: you are nothing but froth

⁶ Translation mine, for the purposes of this article.

Others will say: You are the Creator.
You can be the most beautiful if you are a goal –
A crossroads
Between speech and silence.
(’Adūnīs, 1988(a), *al-Muṭābaqāt wa-l-’Awā’il* – *Parallels and Beginnings*, 154).

The words of the Syrian poet ’Adūnīs are a strong foundation for the difficult and complex question: is it possible to bring about a cultural change through literature? The direct answer to this multidimensional question contains the hope that literature can indeed lead to cultural change, but this answer is also mixed with an obvious difficulty – that the impact of literature is very limited. A literary text is elitist, one that only few are exposed to or understand, so that it can only have a shallow impact on daily life experiences. The skepticism as to whether literature can, indeed, generate cultural change is both understandable and legitimate. Nevertheless, this article claims that a non-conformist literary text that is presented within the schools as a focus of discussion and debate among thousands of pupils may, indeed, be able to bring about social, moral, and cultural change. The text becomes the eye of the storm, part of the pupils' daily experience, allowing them to see things differently.

This type of discussion needs two basic elements to allow skepticism, welcome confrontation and questioning of human existence. The first element is the willing teacher, who must be prepared to neutralize any prejudices and initiate an open discussion of the text. The second element is the inclusion of non-conformist texts in the curriculum that can provoke pupils to examine and challenge existing norms, to raise difficult questions while broadening multidimensional thinking about life. Below I will present and analyze a non-conformist text as a model for discussion aimed towards change, within a theoretical framework that will guide the teachers as to how to manage the discussion.

The discussion about the subversive aspect of a modern Arabic literary text leads us to a meaningful discussion of the textual activity of the modern Arab author, but it is also a discussion of a text that has the power to generate cultural, social, educational, and existential changes. The very act of looking into literary texts (prose and poetry) places the author on the seam between two poles: the first pole is the past, immersed in the united triangle of religious, patriarchal and establishment symbols. The other pole is the creative individual, filled with the spirit of freedom and rebellion that places human intelligence center stage and reconsiders the axioms that dictate predetermined thinking. Before dealing with the subversive views of this Arab poet, we can determine from the outset that his main achievement lies in our renewed examination of accepted mindsets, how he looks at the world anew, while trying to upset its tranquility. The author has refused to accept the existing literary frameworks as sacred, and discusses them, offering alternatives that suit his view of the future. His rebellion has become an ideology that has implications for both literature and culture.

We can divide modern Arabic non-conformist poetry into two main parts: first, the more direct and obvious, as in ‘engaged’ literature through which an author writes hegemonic literature, but not in the sense that Antonio Gramsci gives this term when saying: dominant discourse that creates and constitutes an outcome of consensus that balances between the ruler and the ruled: in other words, the ruling group concretely adapts

itself to the general interests of the groups inferior to it, and life in the state is thus perceived as the ongoing creation of unstable balances that are resolved (within the framework of the law), balances between the interests of the dominant group and those of the inferior groups, balances in which the interests of the dominant group supersede the others, but up to a certain point (Gramsci 1971: 215, Mumby 1997: 347-357; Ives 2004: 63-81; Ramos 1982: 34-42). Actually, in the case of engaged Arabic literature, the author undermines the ruling establishment and aspires to change the structure of the regime and the power relations in civil society – that civil society that Gramsci describes as a political and cultural hegemony that one social group has over the whole society, in other words, that hegemony as the ethical content of the state. (Gramsci 1971: 216). The “inferior” groups constituted the national, Marxist opposition forces, especially between the 1950s and the 1970s. Yet here, the author represents the consensus of the people and not of the ruling hegemony in the form of the various Arab regimes. However, that same hegemony also created a balance of interests when it was in control. The prose and poetry of the engaged Arab author is an ideological national civil literature that was usually identified with pan-Arabism and preaching in favor of a united Arab nation from the Persian Gulf to the Ocean (*'umma 'arabiyya wāḥida min al-muḥīt 'ilā l-ḥalīġ*).

Palestinian authors were an excellent example of the engaged subversive text which strove diligently to change the national and political Arab list of priorities. These authors worked alongside Arab authors from other Arab states and were deemed the Arab national moralists seeking to shake up the political and national order and status quo.

Nevertheless, in this context one must mention that engaged literature seeks to imprison the literary work within a framework with rigid, pre-defined community and even literary boundaries. “These boundaries will turn literature into a place, and the authors themselves will become a tool in the hands of the powers of the State, of society, the regime, the ideology; they will become the guardians of the collective memory”, as Kizel writes; “[t]his memory is borne by the myths and rituals infused with engaged poetry, the formal tools of the civil religion. This memory serves to define ideological groups that each foster a different memory, and thus in the field of struggles for domination, in the historical and political arena, poetry will be engaged to constantly compete between the memories that become a home, that become a sacred place” (Kizel 2010: 57).

The second type of modern Arab subversive literary text is one that seeks to undermine the existing scale of values and confront the existential definitions this scale represents. This is literature that not only undermines the existing political, national regime, but more profoundly questions the existential guiding principles of the Arab individual in general. This subversion may be closely examined within the emergence of the prose and poetry of a group of authors who arbitrarily undertook to cease being the voice of the collective and opted for literary writing that seeks to debate the deep existential questions and desires relevant to the changing life of the Arab individual.

What is the modern Arab subversive text based on? I choose to explain the features of this kind of literature by means of what the Syrian author and critic Kamāl 'Abū Dīb calls Sanctuary Theory (*naẓariyyat al-ma'bad*). 'Abū Dīb clearly outlines the subversive aspect of modern Arabic literature, focusing on poetic text. But these characteristics should be understood as applicable to all subversive Arabic literary texts. 'Abū Dīb claims that the

deep meaning of the new Arabic poetry is expressed in the terms “shock”, “release”, “unmodeled”, “uncentered”, “lacking a single guideline”, and “lacking organic connection”. In contrast, there are the concepts of the sanctuary, the place of prayer, concepts that frame the modern poetic process. In the sanctuary, people behave according to the rules it dictates, there is a sense of centered stability. Those who come to the sanctuary uniformly believe in the idea upon which it was established. They are committed to a certain ideological content. In the sanctuary, literature has a center with very clear features, there is certainty, ready-made answers, stability, and the outcome of the sanctuary experience is the dominant text. The sanctuary school of thought believes in one-directionality. According to 'Abū Dīb, Arab text must free itself from several bonds:

1. Contemporality – belonging to a predetermined time and place. The poetic text should not be slave to time or place.
2. Ideology – which closes the door on debate with myself and the other. It should not prevent the author from writing artistically or from any discussion with the self and with the other.
3. Cerebrality – writing cerebral poetry. According to the “sanctuary” approach, everything is known in advance and nothing should be questioned. One must be liberated from any pre-determined mode of thinking.
4. Centrality complex (one ruling school of thought) – all other issues pertaining to variety, diversity and acceptance of others are nullified. Diversity enables everyone to have space and time, and there is no single dominance.
5. Essence of relationship – one must free oneself of any pre-determined relationship. The patriarchal structure has natural hierarchical relationships that are known in advance (e.g. the male rules the family). In literature, the relationship between the author and the text is also known in advance. If the author changes the relationship through the use of a new metaphor, for example, it will be considered a poetic flaw. When an author tries to change the relationship with the text, he encounters the strong objection of the literary center.

Consequently, 'Abū Dīb offers the term “fragmentation” for the new Arab poetry. This is a term that redefines the connection with the text and the language. In order to initiate new modes of expression, a deep shock is needed, liberation from the center and its one-way approach, extreme fragmentation into parts. The intention is to break out of the single center framework, i.e. no longer the solid, known themes, the idea that there is no longer one single school of thought but rather a broad fragmentation in all directions; there is no longer a single truth, but rather partial truths that reflect a variety of legitimate opinions. Another dimension of literary and educational subversion that intersects with what 'Abū Dīb mentioned above can be seen in the Diaspora Theory. In this article I will focus on the concept of place or home as reflected in this theory. Belonging to a single home means a definite framing of identity. The concept of home or place deeply impacts the components of a person's identity. The fixation of identity leads to monotonous thinking and prevents people/pupils from frank and universal critical thinking. Diaspora Theory offers the frankness and universal experience of contemporary man. The identity permanence of one single place is a factor in creating a person who does not participate in the open global space. Such permanence preserves mental stability and certainty and prevents any

confrontation with the essential elements of the post-modern world, i.e. mobility and uncertainty (Kizel 2010: 49-59).

The two theories briefly described above emphasize the tremendous necessity of liberation from stereotypical thinking in order to generate a literary text that leads to the creation of a new human being. The starting point for the theories of both fragmentation and diaspora are diametrically opposed to the essentialist mindset (Sayer 1997: 453-487). Essentialist philosophy believes that, like everything else in the universe, humans belong to a predetermined essence. This approach emphasizes a person's solidity and axiomatic attribution regardless of any other constructive processes. This approach confronts, or even opposes in certain aspects, the relativist approach that does not believe in a single truth, value structure or patriarchal hierarchy (Davies 1995: 1-18). In the literary/educational process discussed here, the relativist principle is of the utmost importance. It is crucial because it bridges between traditional experience based on the one single truth and on solidity and religious, social, and epistemological commands that motivate human thought. The subversive literary text is actually one that offers a way to connect to the relativism that can overcome the gap between traditional educational thinking and constructivist education that encourages individual critical thinking processes and a break away from the existing cultural, mental and existential status quo (compare with Postman 2009).

The textual corpus: 'Adūnīs as a textual model

As an example of a text than might generate existential cultural change, I have chosen to focus on the poetry of the Syrian poet 'Adūnīs ('*Alī 'Aḥmad Sa 'īd*). 'Adūnīs' poem "The New Noah" used to be the only poem in Israel's Arabic literature syllabus that might fall under the category of being non-conformist or subversive. Moreover, this poem was only encountered by pupils taking the advanced literature exam. But even this poem was removed from the syllabus as of September 2014.

For my textual analysis I have chosen "aṭ-Ṭūfān" (The Flood) by 'Adūnīs:

The Flood

Go dove, we do not wish you to return
 They surrendered their flesh to the rocks
 and I – here I am advancing towards the deepest point,
 entangled in the ship's sails.
 Our flood is a planet that does not revolve
 It is flowing with waters and ancient
 Perhaps we might inhale from it the scent of distant times
 Perhaps we prefer this authentic encounter
 So, go, dove, we do not wish you to return⁷. ('Adūnīs 1988, vol.1: p. 400)

⁷ My translation for the purposes of this article.

The title of the poem has a sub-text that “is at the same time both separate and connected” (Hollander 1985: 212-226; Wilsmore 1987: 403-408). It contains complex associations ranging from the past to the present and from place to place and from text to text. “The Flood” is an abstract and complex text (Hering 1961: 43-48) that requires close examination and general knowledge. In this poem, the level of *fuṣḥā* is not a challenge in terms of lexis or syntax; the challenge lies in revealing the hidden message that this text seeks to convey. The theme of the poem does not readily yield its true meanings, and thus must be reread and elucidated by an experienced reader (Rosenblatt 1994). The reading of this poem will strengthen the pupil’s divergent thinking (Lewis 2013: 46-58), which involves consideration of more than one solution to a problem. This kind of thinking can strengthen pupils when confronting the complex problems of modern existence. This text, like most of ‘Adūnīs’ repertoire, is open (Bondanella 2005); its vagueness allows for a multifaceted discussion encompassing a wide range of opinions and perspectives. It is a lyrical poem that presents the author’s personal existential, philosophical, and religious view without any dramatic developments or diversity of voices, even though one can point out the basic narrative trend of a story. The speaker in the poem is part of the poetic creation, whose perspective is subjective and closer to the events. There is no plot or sequence of events, nor are there many figures or voices.

The word *tūfān* (flood) is loaded with the notion of utter destruction that distorts patterns. The first association leads us to Noah’s Ark,⁸ but this is misleading. The poet is expressing a wish – he wants the flood to continue. This is an odd wish that shatters the expectations of the reader. The poet does not want the dove to announce with an olive branch that everything is over, and we should return to what we had before as commanded by that God. The end of the flood symbolizes a return to the familiar framework – the familiar life cycle, overt, hierarchical, with man controlled by God, following a prescribed existence. The poet explains why he doesn’t want the dove to return: “*They surrendered their flesh to the rocks*”. In other words, people had become slaves to the rocks, to the land (they followed what was fixed and certain – rocks are immobile).

The speaker in the poem is apparently entangled in the sails of his ship. Yet he talks of an alternative – rocks are found on the surface, the shell. This is not something deep. The poet strikes out against the fixed place, standing still, and in fact declares that he is moving forward, while they are as if on a treadmill, not advancing anywhere. If the rocks are on the surface, the shell, then the poet has another task – to delve into the depths and seek how not to remain static. He is caught in the sails, and this, in fact, is an indication that the ship is not anchored, but rather sailing, moving toward the deep waters. The ship is not sinking in that sense, but rather it symbolizes continuous, never-ending discovery of the depths. All this is in opposition to the static nature of life people will return to once the flood has ended. The poet is dynamic, and this is the alternative he offers. He hopes the flood will be everlasting, unchanging, or revolving, constant – and that is how our lives should be – continual movement over the seas to enable ongoing discovery. The poet writes that our flood is ancient, and thus it requires the dynamism of discovery. It is not a rock that we can look at once and understand its existence, it is constant motion. Henceforth,

⁸ In both versions of this story in the Torah and in the Qur’ān see: Genesis 6:9 to 11:33, in the Qur’ān in several sūras, mainly sūra 71 verses 1-28; sūra 11 verses 27 and 57, sūra 26 verses 105-121.

there is a different kind of dependence of man on God. It is not a dependence that requires the usual submission to God or the traditional hierarchical relationship – it is something else entirely. The word “surrendered” is not unfamiliar – it is what man does when submitting himself before God.⁹

The poet intends to develop a different relationship with this God of distant times, not the dependent relationship between slave and master. He rejects our ordinary, static, predetermined way of life. The relationships in this scenario are all known. The path is known, as are the details, which follow religious belief (even after a person’s death). Hence the voice in the poem ponders - if that life has already been destroyed, why go back to it? The poet is against the religious, intellectual, existential hierarchy of values; he is not willing to accept this pre-determinist, static, bounded way of life, this normative existence of home and belonging. The poet desires continual movement; he desires to be in a constant state of flood that obliterates the symbols of ordinary life. In other words, the poet has a proposition, based on the flood motif, for an existential change.

“The Flood” constitutes an objective correlative (Matihissen 2009: 83-96), that the poet uses to express his opinions indirectly. He does not explicitly state “I want a change”. The word ‘flood’ does not lead us to the flood that we know. Arabic poetry, in fact, breaks away from the common associations of words. The poet wants to rethink the nature of the relationships in our lives and to lead us also to rethink matters. He does this by means of a different relationship between words. In this poem, we see an essential change in the regular meanings of words. The ‘flood’ in the title does not lead to the usual, traditional meaning and its associations, but rather to a disruption of normative thinking, to broader thinking about the nature of human existence.

The diasporic effect is deeply present in this poem and constitutes a basis for understanding its components. The journey does not focus on place, but rather embraces the dimension of time. The return to the norm that ordinary people desire is not what the voice in the poem aspires to. The speaker prefers to journey far and wide in order to discover his real existence. A return home, settling into a familiar place does not promote the journey of existential discovery that the speaker is striving for. Diasporic thinking helps the speaker to undergo diverse, universal experiences, ones that break through the local boundaries of normative thinking. This is no ordinary journey; it is one that sets out from the epistemological system we know to other worlds of knowledge, the epistemological system that develops a different kind of access to self and to the other, to different cultural codes that shape the world. The everlasting flood that the speaker in this poem desires is a lifestyle of constant, infinite, renewal.

How the poet expresses this abstract text is also a new existential perspective; different textual comprehension is also a way to express difference and change.

The dramatic, dialogic nature of the poem enables ’Adūnīs to divide the figures into two groups – those who surrendered their flesh to the rocks and those who move forward to the depths of the sea – the speaker in the poem, of course, belonging to the latter category. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope experienced by each side is existentially different. Chronotope refers to the essential reciprocity relative to time and space, such that there is no separation at all between the dimensions of time and space. In the poem, the

⁹ The word *’Islām* bears the same meaning – total submission before God.

figures are divided in such a way that the two groups experience their lives in different existential spaces and times. The term “chronotope” is of interest here because of the reciprocity between the two groups and the dialogue between them; a dialogue in which they can intersect, confront each other, and show understanding. Bakhtin emphasizes that chronotopes can be inclusive of each other, coexist, intertwine, interchange, confront each other or maintain a more complex reciprocity (Bemong 2010: 3-17; Ladin 1999: 212-236). In this poem, the relationship is sharply confrontational and polar, and the dialogue is one of challenging what the other represents. Examination of the chronotope represented by the second group sheds light on the legitimization of offering an alternative existential narrative that proposes an order that digresses from the familiar, normative narrative path. This chronotope is typically always dynamic and does not purport to accept convention. Sailing on the ship and the return to earlier times and to another God indicate a different space and time that the speaker and his group represent. The refusal is expressed here in the strong resistance towards the spaces and times of the first group. Any attempt to shake up the chronotope of the first group means a complete upheaval of its existence. The chronotopic dialogue in this context indicates a deep schism between the two narratives, but it also indicates the legitimacy of critique, of expressing opinions that are essentially different. In class the pupil can agree with the attitudes of either one of the groups but is at least aware of the other parallel position that opposes one’s own. The literary text allows pupils to take a close look at existential options and decide freely and democratically where they belong and why. The importance of texts such as this one by ’Adūnīs lies in that first and foremost they protest the existing situation, this protest enables discussion. The very fact of the discussion is a serious attempt to break through the epistemological framework. It is not about imposing opinions, but about exposure to a different kind of thinking.

This poem by ’Adūnīs is subversive on all levels, despite the fact that at first reading, or even fourth, it may be hard to grasp the real connection between the words and the meanings. It is poetry that challenges the reader and aspires, among other things, to undermine the one-directional understanding of the Arab people; the mode of expression, the nature of the connection between the words, the different kind of existential thinking, the liberation from the center and the existing normative power relations – all these seriously call into question the Arab religious and social establishment.

Conclusion

According to Foucault, schools seek to adapt pupils to the typical, submissive, and mostly normal norm. Schooling, which educates towards a certain framework, changes the pupil from an individual who rises above the framing norm to someone who does not engage in openly creative thinking to reach new horizons. Foucault assumes that the type of pupil schools are ‘creating’ has transferred to hospitals, prisons and the army (Foucault 1979: 138). This article demonstrates that one important tool that can deepen an internal, individual discussion that respects the other and prevents the type that Foucault identifies in schools is the literary text. It is precisely in a traditional Arab society in a country that faces new existential challenges on a daily basis, that the Arabic literary text can be a strong resource through which to raise the level of critical thinking and exposure to healthy

internal deliberations about the perception of oneself and of the other; an exposure that leaves plenty of room to accept the other and reconcile with the basic principle of the universe that the world *is* change.

In this article I offer a model for teaching a literary text that combines a number of elements. The first is the non-conformist text that can lead to a dialogue about the meaning of our existence and identity, whether it is relativism that rejects prior frameworks, or essentialism that is fixated within the existing framework. The second is the theoretical concept of Kamāl 'Abū Dīb's Sanctuary Theory, and the Diaspora Theory of Ilan Gur-Ze'ev. Both these theories clarify that existential space cannot imprison people's thinking in pre-determined casings. In the practical section I have demonstrated how to deal with an abstract text of the poet 'Adūnīs – "The Flood". I believe that analysis of a literary text can generate a real, uncompromising debate about the inner truth of each and every pupil, offering them diverse existential possibilities, while at the same time enriching them with the beauty of Classical Arabic by bringing it closer to the world of the younger generation.

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