



## Counter-Ideological Consciousness and Its Representations: A Study of Basim Khandaqji's Novel "A Mask the Color of the Sky"

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### **ABSTRACT:**

This research paper endeavors to examine the (ideological) identity conflict in Basim Khandaqji's novel, "A Mask the Color of the Sky," specifically by highlighting the diverse manifestations of counter-ideological action within the novel's narrative system; it further seeks to unveil the varied aesthetic techniques employed by the author to expose the latent civilizational and historical postulations promoted by the Zionist Other through its numerous discourses, both past and present.

To answer these questions, we chose to adopt a descriptive analytical approach, where the study concludes that ideology remains a significant director of literary creativity, in both poetry and prose, and a constitutive element of its content, which renders the relationship between them dialectical, fundamentally based on a process of mutual influence and affect.

**Keywords:** Counter-Ideological Consciousness, Narrative System, Representations, Latencies/Subtexts, Aesthetic.

### **1. Introduction:**

The intricate and often contentious relationship between literature and ideology has perennially occupied a central position in critical discourse, positing the literary text not as a mere aesthetic artifact but as a dynamic arena where cultural, political, and identity-based conflicts are articulated, where within this framework, the contemporary Arabic novel emerges as a particularly fertile ground for such explorations, frequently undertaking the profound task of interrogating hegemonic narratives and forging counter-discourses.

It is precisely within this critical milieu that the primary objective of this study is established: to examine the topic of ideological (identity) conflict in Basim Khandaqji's novel, "A Mask the Color of the Sky", as the research seeks to achieve this by highlighting the diverse manifestations of counter-ideological action within the novel's narrative system, moving beyond a superficial reading to uncover the deep structural engagements with identity politics; furthermore, it aims to reveal the variety of aesthetic techniques—ranging from narrative voice and symbolism to characterization and intertextuality—which the author employs to

expose the latent historical and civilizational postulations that the Zionist Other propagates through its numerous discourses, both past and present.

By interrogating this dialectical interplay between ideological content and its artistic representation, this research argues that the novel transcends its narrative function to become an active participant in cultural resistance; it consequently demonstrates literature's enduring capacity to shape, and be shaped by, the socio-political consciousness of its time, thereby illuminating the powerful role of aesthetics in challenging dominant ideological frameworks.

### **1.1 Problematic:**

Building upon the foregoing, the contours of our study's problematic crystallize around interrogating the fundamental concept upon which ideology is based, alongside its true role; furthermore, it questions the nature of the author's counter-ideological consciousness and its efficacy as an act of resistant culture, in addition to the degree of influence the utilized aesthetic techniques exert upon the recipient.

### **2. On the Aesthetics of "Writing Back":**

"Writing back" constitutes a form of Arabic narrative fiction that has adopted varied shapes, diverging according to the intentions of the novelists and proposing interpretative possibilities which themselves differ based on the readers across the Arab world; however, it is observable that the Arabic novel is witnessing its most significant transformations through a re-examination of the colonial period and the colonial imaginary, thereby rereading it—an endeavor that can be classified within the movement of "writing back," a concept whose meaning varies according to the nature and themes of the novels, the orientations of the authors, and the framework within which critics attempt to categorize certain narratives<sup>1</sup>.

This assertion leads us to the domain of contemporary Arabic creative fiction, which carries a counter-position against prevailing historical, political, cultural, and social convictions; it is a form of resistant, counter-consciousness that opposes this misleading mainstream, which distorts facts, shackles moderate and free stances, and unveils what is genuine and sound, as this type of narrative fiction has been inherently linked to writings that engaged with themes of colonialism and postcolonialism, along with their related issues. Furthermore, the value of these positions—which reject the mainstream and deconstruct unjust centralities by refuting historical falsehoods and enlightening readers' minds with truths—arguably increases when their effort is directed towards refuting the fraudulent Zionist narrative; and here, we might inquire: who are the most prominent Arab literary figures who have represented/embraced this counter-consciousness?

Among the symbols of the contemporary Palestinian counter-literary consciousness, in both poetry and prose, is Ghassan Kanafani, through his two works: *'Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine 1948-1966'* and *'Resistance Literature under Occupation 48-67'*; wherein he considers the literature produced both in the diaspora and within Palestinian society as resistance literature, by virtue of its revolutionary, social, national, and human dimensions<sup>2</sup>. This is the description attributed to it by Galal al-Shukri, who regarded it as a literature of opposition—a view shared by the researcher Shakir al-Nabulsi when he described

the literature of Palestinians inside Israel as a literature of opposition, encompassing other cultural forms such as visual arts, music, painting, and academic studies<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, from the foregoing, it becomes evident that contemporary Palestinian literature is simultaneously a literature of resistance and opposition, since resistance is one facet of opposition, and opposition relies on resistant action, where other Palestinian literary figures are also inclined towards the current of cultural opposition against the Zionist Other, exemplified in figures such as Fadwa Tuqan, Ibrahim Tuqan, Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, Mourid al-Barghouthi, Tamim al-Barghouti, and Basim Khandaqji.

### **3. The Representations of Ideological Action within the Novelistic Narrative System**

Terminologies and concepts often intertwine, making it difficult to disentangle them; among the most notably interconnected terms, both conceptually and in application, are "ideology" and "identity," as each invokes notions of belonging, hegemony, and points of reference within their doctrinal, political, social, cultural, artistic, and economic dimensions. In our endeavor to identify the 'fine line' distinguishing them, this research seeks to recall the concept of identity as one of those problematic and contentious notions that opens onto different knowledges and cultures, and indeed onto other identities, while being linked simultaneously to both the self and the group, as its comprehension inherently necessitates the concept of "totality"<sup>4</sup>, for identity cannot be separated from a specific collective project that expresses itself through collective means and aspires to achieve collective goals; without this 'collective' or 'total' character, the identity project loses the references that ensure its movement, growth, and development.

This research can draw upon the concepts of the scholars Paul Ricoeur and Martin Heidegger: the former defines identity as "the sustained effort undertaken by the self to understand itself through discovering the meaning of its experience, by questioning the foundations upon which it rests, because it is unable to rely on an absolute certainty"<sup>5</sup>. Heidegger, conversely, encapsulates it in his statement: "Identity belongs to every being as such, insofar as it is unified in itself"; thus both definitions<sup>6</sup>, therefore, link the meaning of identity to the self and being, allowing us to posit that it emanates from the self, yet within its collective context—where the individual exists within a communal being.

In the pursuit of affirming the self-identity and collective identity of the nation, every society embarking on that identitarian quest starts from a fundamental, existential question: "Who am I?" or "Who are we?", "What do we represent?", and "Where did we come from?" This is a question that is simultaneously existential, essential, and tragic, particularly when it pertains to the profound and enduring Palestinian question, stretching across history and geography—a question about origin, and about the fate of a usurped land and a suppressed identity. Numerous Palestinian writers and intellectuals—poets, autobiographers, playwrights, storytellers, and novelists—have engaged with this identitarian challenge, as evidenced in works such as Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*, and in the contributions of Faisal Darraj, Edward Said, Izz al-Din al-Manasira, Tamim al-Barghouti, Basim Khandaqji, among others, as they have all been preoccupied with questions and crises of identity, transforming their creative output into a literary strategy for affirming their existence, an

intellectual mechanism for defending their suppressed identity, and a cultural act of resistance against the Zionist narrative that misrepresents authentic Palestinian history.

Consequently, these creative endeavors represent a Palestinian ideological consciousness that refutes and opposes the Other's perspective, as seen in the novel under study. Then, it is perhaps useful for this research to allude to the concept of resistance and its relationship to literature, culture, and ideology.

### **3.1 The Concept of Resistance**

Resistance is "a comprehensive, broad concept encompassing a set of dimensions, givens, and directions that place it within a conceptual framework based on a philosophical and social theory; this theory presupposes an action and a stance that interacts with an event, or struggles against it, constituting a conscious response to a situation requiring a natural action to confront an existing reality and change it into another"ition with a This is a defin<sup>7</sup>. revolutionary basis, founded on a conflict between two trends carrying two opposing ideas, subject to an inverse, discordant relationship whose essence is rejection, defiance, and objection to attempts of imposing hegemony and exercising acts of obliteration, negation, and erasure.

This concept aligns with its lexical (dictionary) signification, as it is a word derived from the verb *qāma* (to stand/to resist), which dictionaries associate with meanings such as: refusal, combat, resolve, contestation, confrontation, and obstruction—meanings that adhere to concepts of steadfastness, challenge, and repulsion; thus, resistance is a practical state of confrontation where images of reality and the rejection of reality clash, a dynamic reflected in<sup>8</sup> literature, the arts, and all spheres of political, social, and cultural life.

Within this context, literature cannot earn the descriptor 'resistance literature' unless it succeeds in penetrating the walls of consciousness and the reservoirs of the mind, striving to convey an effective discourse that guides its recipient and impels them towards resistant action<sup>9</sup>, therefore, it must work to liberate people from their dependencies and defend the aesthetic values of life, such as freedom, right, and justice.

### **3.2 Culture as a Factor of Resistance**

Culture, in its varied artistic forms (poetry, cinema, short story, novel, biography, etc.), represents a mechanism of resistance against any threat endangering the identitarian existence of a people. Returning to the Palestinian narrative, we find it constitutes a significant literary space for confronting the misleading discourse of the Zionist Other; it is "an authentic part of the battle for Palestinian existence against the narrative of the occupier, its discourse, and its misleading, mythical narrative..".This is the role shouldered by the contemporary<sup>10</sup> Palestinian novel, as in *A Mask the Color of the Sky*—the subject of our study; and here, we might inquire about the tools of resistance within it and the representations of the act of resistance inside its narrative world.

### **3.3 Representations of Ideological Action in *A Mask the Color of the Sky***

Returning to the novel *A Mask the Color of the Sky*, we find it carries a significant cultural and ideological load, defending the authentic Palestinian identity against the comprehensive attempts at erasure, obliteration, and exclusion pursued by the false Zionist narrative; whereby

the occupation began "giving places and geography its own names to erase the original history, and with its new geography, erase our geography and our old names..". This has affected the names of villages, cities, streets, gates, entrances, exits, and spaces of worship and culture<sup>11</sup>.

A manifestation of this in the novel's text is: "...As for in this large, concrete city, Ramallah and Al-Bireh or Al-Bireh and Ramallah, he is a refugee without considering whether his facial features and appearance reveal this or not; his alienation from this city, its squares, and its artificial, disordered, and occupied streets is sufficient..".He is the stranger in that city, which <sup>12</sup> is strange in its designs, streets, sidewalks, concrete piles, and unfamiliar naming, making his relationship with it one of repulsion, rejection, cursing, and vomiting; as he walks on the pavement under the shadows of "residential and commercial buildings, haphazardly organized and constructed, he is choked by piles of stone, iron, and cement; he glances to his left, where the massive 'City Inn' hotel looms..".This is one image of the distortion that the Zionist <sup>13</sup> occupier and its followers seek to entrench, a distortion the writer resists with all available cultural tools. This is perhaps encapsulated in his response to his friend 'Mourad' in one of his letters, where he confesses with pain: "In Jerusalem, Mourad , I am forced to swallow lies and myths, the lowest of their kind being played with. I swallow them, then I expel them with my immunity, my resilience, and my resolve to confront the historical rape we have been subjected to since our Nakba, at the very least" ..He embodies the role of the resistant Palestinian <sup>14</sup> intellectual, perpetually engaged in struggle with the Zionist Other against attempts at cultural and ideological imposition; for resistance is steadfastness and struggle, as in the cultural tradition of the critic Edward Said,at the very least; as in these images of resolute, resistant <sup>15</sup> cultural insistence, we see a counter-cultural and ideological consciousness.

Furthermore, among the stances of staunch refusal against the Other's attempts at domination—and its inversion of reality from the image of the original, true agent to that of a passive object who receives aid and grants within its artificial, imposed camp—is the decisive refusal of 'Nur's' father, 'Al-Mahdi', as *he declared his "absolute and stringent refusal of the material grants and aid offered by the Camp Services Committee to some successful students.."*. In the father's rejection of that assistance and charity lies an awareness of the perilous <sup>16</sup> consequences of benevolence, which could strip him of the dignity inherent in steadfastly defending the Palestinian origin and lure him into the precipice of submission, acceptance of a surrendering posture, and acquiescence to the Other's historically, politically, and identitarily falsified vision.

*Among the manifestations of counter-cultural consciousness in this novel are those related to confronting the attempts of Zionist colonialism to erase the historical and civilizational landmarks of Palestine, foremost among them Jerusalem. Here, the imprisoned friend 'Mourad' exhorts his friend, the protagonist 'Nur,' on the necessity of standing against these acts of falsification. Thus, he implores: "Let me... urge you once again to reconsider abandoning your research on Mary Magdalene and to invest the historical, archaeological, and intellectual knowledge you have acquired into investigating contemporary issues, such as: the issue of the houses of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood residents, which the Zionist colonial system intends to empty by expelling their inhabitants, or the ongoing excavations beneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque. These are two pivotal issues, and we must confront this colonial beast by establishing a cognitive frame of reference specific to us.."* Thus, despite the circumstances and constraints of <sup>17</sup>

imprisonment, he insists on resisting the Zionist hostile practices; therefore, living under conditions of control and their coercions does not mean submitting to them or resigning to their inevitable fate.

Furthermore, among the depictions of resistance against the oppression and subjugation imposed by the Zionist occupier upon Palestinians is the recurrent physical and psychological confrontation of the protagonist, 'Nur,' with Zionist soldiers in the heights of Jerusalem; a struggle he articulates by declaring, *"You want me to engage? I have engaged, my friend, in Jerusalem—on a high biblical summit, until I tumbled down from it and landed here, in this very room, afflicted with bruises and wounds that have scarred my identity and my very existence"*<sup>18</sup>.. His physical injuries thus become a metaphor for a deeper, existential battle, underscoring his relentless defense of a perpetually threatened identity and right to exist.

The protagonist 'Nur' perseveres in his resistant quest against identitarian distortion, steadfastly resisting the allure of the Other's identity—an allure embedded in promises of modernity, security, and safety; he consciously distances himself from the pervasive sensations of being hunted, fear, vulnerability, and moral ambiguity, a internal conflict powerfully encapsulated in a pivotal 'monologic dialogue':

I will take him by surprise... I will be the one to pounce, interrogating him with offensive indignation before he can assail me:

*'Who are you? You are not Ohr... I am Ohr Shapira.'*

*'—No, I am Ohr Shapira, and you are the one who has usurped me and violated my identity..*

*Who are you... Speak!'*

*'—I am Ohr, as I told you.'*

*'—Then what is your father's name?'*

*'—Nitsan.'*

*'—Your mother's name?'*

*'—Lital.'*

*'—Your grandfather's name?'*

*'— ...'*

*'—Your grandmother's name?'*

*'— ...'*

*'—You see, you fool... You are not me... So who are you?'*

*'—I am you... I am your mirror.'*<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the seductive appeal of this glittering, assumed identity ultimately fails to dislodge him from his authentic Palestinian roots; he remains staunchly anchored to his essence, fully conscious that preserving it necessitates an unending resistance against the Other's appropriative gaze.

This steadfastness is arguably rooted in his profound comprehension of colonialism's mechanisms, the Zionist movement's historical origins, its expansionist policies, its inherent brutality, and its overt as well as hidden agendas; a comprehensive awareness that empowers his confrontation, filling him with confidence, defiance, and resilience. The narrative confirms that *"Nur al-Shahidi did not retreat from the identity of Ohr Shapira but faced it head-on... Indeed,*

*he ultimately donned it himself, yet this time he did so with a full understanding of its origins; for it was this very understanding that granted him immunity and prevented his metamorphosis into a being composed of 'black skin and a white mask,' in the words of his friend Mourad 's reference, 'Frantz Fanon.'"*<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, the preservation of identity and the defense of values such as steadfastness, freedom, and all forms of struggle imperatively demand a deep, comprehensive knowledge of the Other, coupled with a penetrating awareness of both his manifest and latent designs; thereby transforming intellectual vigilance into an indispensable pillar of cultural and ideological resistance.

A manifestation of a conscious Palestinian ideology, deeply aware of its authentic civilizational history and vehemently confronting the occupier's attempts at historical falsification and manipulation of information through its own historical narrative and literary-cultural discourses, is vividly embodied in this sudden, impassioned, and catastrophic address directed at foreign tourists saturated with deceitful Zionist propaganda: *"No, ladies and gentlemen... No... Allow me to beg the purity of your ears, the innocence of your hearts, and the sincerity of your conscience, which believes in a coming salvation... to tell you that everything I uttered moments ago is merely baseless nonsense and superstitions; for here, ladies and gentlemen, where you now stand, lie the ruins and remnants of the Palestinian village of Sar'a'—a village whose approximately four hundred inhabitants were displaced during the Nakba in July 1948; yes, they were displaced, and now they reside as refugees in camps of exile. Zionist gangs destroyed this village to establish in its place 'Kibbutz Sar'a'... and this house of the village Mukhtar bears witness to that, as you now stand directly above its foundations.."*<sup>21</sup>

Through this jarring discourse, Basim Khandaqji debunks Zionist narratives, standing with rigorous awareness against the attempt to alter identity, sacred spaces, geography, and history; thereby affirming the true narrative of the Palestinian village 'Sar'a' and denying any legitimacy to 'Kibbutz Sar'a,' just as he denies the existence of 'Samson's Tomb,' for no echo of a Zionist hero resonates here—only the story of an indigenous people unjustly and forcibly displaced from their sacred land.

Furthermore, the author/novelist deliberately employs a sarcastic tone in his resistance against the fallacies of the Zionist Other, an effective mechanism in literature—according to the revolutionary writer Ghassan Kanafani, at the very least—who considered it *"a means writers resort to for responding to the enemy's presence... and a primary level of resistance poetry that moves in tandem with life itself"*. Thus, sarcasm exerts a potent effect on the adversary, diminishing his stature and delivering an elegant, evasive, yet piercing refutation of his absurdities; a technique Khandaqji incorporates through the character of 'Sheikh Mursi,' who, *"with a suppressed chuckle and a pat on Nur's shoulder, earnestly advised him to hide in the deepest alley of his camp to avoid detection by the monitors of the Zionist Ministry of Tourism.."*<sup>22</sup> This suppressed laughter conveys profound admiration for such candid, bold, and shocking discourse, while simultaneously cloaking a deep-seated mockery of the Zionist narrative, which invites derision due to its stark divorce from historical truth and the logic of both history and geography.

The novel's protagonist, 'Nur,' attempts to resist the seductive allure of the Zionist Other's identity—a identity marked by deceptive glamour within its Zionist spaces—a resistance evident in his cautious and hesitant stance towards it; for he fully comprehends the peril of entanglement with it and the limited reach of its charm, which does not extend beyond the Zionist usurpers, *"The name is my trump card, which I play in the most difficult times, and my alternative plan in complex and decisive moments; it accompanied me like my shadow until I felt, because of you, that I had sold my true shadow for a forged identity, thus I became shadowless.."* This position placed him before a profoundly challenging identity test, entangling him in a liminal 'in-between' zone that distanced him from his original identity while drawing him closer to his fabricated one.

Nevertheless, he swiftly seeks to mitigate this risk through this authentic identitarian steadfastness, reflected in his conscious discourse, as he states: *"Features are a preconceived classification in Tel Aviv, but they are not so elsewhere... for my features are authentic, like the features of many sons of my occupied people... and what I did was merely manipulating the value of features according to Zionist colonial criteria.."* Thus, those features, built upon racist backgrounds and a savage colonial ideology, along with values of haughty hegemony, hold no true worth.

While the novel concerns itself with the world of the camp, its fundamental focus rests upon the subject of 'identity' in its varied dimensions: the dialectic of 'Self and Other,' and the subversion of the colonizer-usurper's narrative. Here we find the protagonist 'Nur' questioning, in a moment of deep awareness of his reality, about the Palestinian 'Nur' inside the camp and its alleys, his relationship with that imposed, artificial place, and his identitarian status: *"Who am I? Who is my father? What are the alleys? Where is my identity? Where is my shadow? Where is my mirror? What am I doing here? There are no particular events here pertaining to him, no incidents, no occurrences, no occasions, no components for a new memory, no holidays, no new clothes, no channels for life... for friendship... for love... for poems... for dance"*<sup>24</sup> Behind these repeated inquiries lies an expression of profound astonishment that touched the author's inner depths and awakened his conscience, in a moment of contemplation and review of his existential and belonging-based position, declaring a stance that rejects the reality to which his existential condition has been reduced; for 'Nur' of the camp is not the real, authentic 'Nur,' *"for everything that existed outside the perceiving self or independent of it was other than it, and we call the thing existing outside the ego the 'non-ego' or the Other.."* This <sup>25</sup> conscious, thinking self feels alienated and separated by what lies outside the entity—the Other—and this is what 'Nur' suffers in his camp: he is the stranger to the real, authentic 'Nur,' the 'Nur' of Jerusalem and Palestine in general. *"He had left the camp a long time ago, since his father's release from prison, since the arrest of his friend Mourad . As for Ramallah, he never mastered it, never felt it. For cities are of two types: a type with a womb, and a type without a womb; a type of natural birth, and a type of artificial insemination; a type with stones and fragrance, and a type with iron and rust. There is Jerusalem, and there is Ramallah, and he embraces Jerusalem, liberated from the burdens of Ramallah"*. Thus, the protagonist 'Nur' <sup>26</sup> desires liberation from this artificial Other in which they have placed him and with which they force him to acclimatize; for as long as belonging is primarily a feeling, he belongs to Jerusalem

in sentiment, thought, and existence, while he views 'Ramallah' as a heavy burden he must shed by all available means of resistance<sup>27</sup>. "*...As for Nur, he desires no such void. Nur will give birth to his father and mother from within himself. He will give birth to his identity, reclaim his self, burn his mask... and be reborn from its ashes. He will reclaim himself from his contemplation and obsessions*"<sup>28</sup>.

Ideology persists in its presence, adorned in the garb of counter-consciousness tethered to Palestinian civilizational history and authentic existence; here, 'Nur' insistently affirms that he is the center, the true native of the land, reassuring his friend 'Mourad': "*No, Mourad ... rest assured, for I am still me, Nur; however, I am the inner Nur, whereas Ohr is the external Ohr... I am the essence and he is the apparition. The essence manifests while the apparition is veiled*"<sup>29</sup> Thus, he perpetually represents the fixed, immutable original essence—the world of Nur al-Mahdi—while Ohr Shapira remains peripheral and intrusive, even if the artificial spaces of modern streets, towering buildings, and lush gardens grant him an aura of dominance and centrality. Consequently, the authentic Jerusalemite, defending his sanctuaries from desecration by this interloper, is accused of being a rioter, a vandal, and an aggressor against sacred sites and properties; he is even demanded to change the name of the ancient Palestinian neighborhood 'Sheikh Jarrah' to 'Shimon Hatzadik'—a profoundly ironic paradox.

This counter-consciousness, championed by the author through his protagonist's assumption of the Jewish/Zionist persona 'Ohr Shapira' whenever and however he wishes, is further reflected in how he harnesses this guise to serve his historical and cultural objectives with freedom and awareness: "*Ohr whispered in Nur's ear, who replied with an equally hushed whisper: 'I wear you as I wish, not as you wish.' 'I will expose you... I will tell the bookstore owner that you are a fraud, impersonating an identity that isn't yours... a Jewish identity.'*"<sup>30</sup> The protagonist stands perplexed in this intermediate zone between Nur and Ohr; yet, he remains acutely conscious of the core issue, fundamentally tied to identity: is it Jewish or Zionist?—for there is a vast difference between the two. Between one term and another, his acceptance of the Other's presence becomes conditional: "*'Are you truly a Zionist or merely Jewish?' 'What's the difference?' 'There's an immense difference... I don't believe Abu Ibrahim and I have a problem with you being Jewish, but with you being a Zionist.' 'The problem lies in the designations, the terminology, the details...'*"<sup>31</sup>

Emerging from the very core of the novel's ideological consciousness is the stern, unequivocal response delivered by the character 'Sama,' a woman of Palestinian origin, addressed to a Canadian student 'Mark,' who is captivated by the Zionist narrative; she confronts him, stating: "*'Mark... my living here does not mean I am Israeli or Jewish... No... There is a vast difference between me being an Arab Palestinian and being an Israeli.'*"<sup>32</sup> Her identitarian stance is resolved and unambiguous, devoid of any mask—unlike Nur, who relies on the mask of the Zionist Other, 'Ohr'.

In a moment where 'Nur' appears to liberate himself further from the constraints of his mask 'Ohr'—perhaps reinforcing 'Sama's' direct and courageous stance—he confronts the ideological and identitarian falsehoods of the Zionist Other, which receive Western backing through certain archaeologists and researchers, "*Yes... I would have tarnished your reputation even more had I now revealed to the group members—so captivated by your Zionist socialist*

*civilizational achievements—that the kibbutz stands on the land of a devastated village called Abu Shusha... and that this cave, forcibly inserted into your sacred national texts, is nothing but a playground for the children of the displaced village... No, it was even used as a livestock pen. - Lies... Slander... Deception".<sup>33</sup>*

He fortifies his counter-position by incorporating the voice of the Belgian character 'Nicole' into his resistant perspective; she embarrassed 'Natan' with questions that demonstrated knowledge of the facts and exposed the falsehoods and lies he had provided them, *"And have you forgotten that I am an archaeological expert, capable of discerning whether these stones are Biblical or the rubble of a depopulated Arab village from your war of independence... especially since Sama had already confirmed this to me?"<sup>34</sup>*

Among the manifestations of counter-cultural consciousness is the author's utilization of a Zionist narrative discourse that nonetheless adheres to recounting the events of the Nakba and its accompanying acts of torture, killing, demolition, displacement, the erasure of Palestinian identity, and the concealment of their massacres against land and people by planting tall, green forests that obscure the material, spiritual, and symbolic traces of Palestinian identity (homes, places of worship, farms, fields, pens...), as depicted in the Israeli writer's novel: *"If I had given it a tongue to reveal the forest's secrets, it would not have burned it to make the abandoned village appear; I did not want it to speak but to act through burning the forest".<sup>35</sup>* This constitutes an objective discourse that acknowledges historical truth, diverging from the falsified Zionist narrative.

The author desires the Zionist intellectual to embody the image of a writer committed to defending just causes, one who adheres to truth in his narrative treatment of historical events and appeals to objectivity, even when his account contradicts the official Zionist narrative. Here, 'Nur' rebukes the Zionist novelist through a repeated, interrogative challenge regarding his failure to address the details of the Nakba, such as the ethnic cleansing and expulsion inflicted upon Palestinians, *"Why didn't you novelize the village's expulsion? And why didn't you treat the ethnic cleansing through fiction?"* Thus, he demands from him, and other <sup>36</sup> genuine Zionist intellectuals, literary material laden with facts and imaginative voice; for only then, endowed with literary courage, would their novels attain sublimity and widespread readership.

### **Conclusion:**

These scenes and positions represent that can be termed 'Counter-Ideological Consciousness' within this narrative text, which the author intended to emanate from the free and authentic Palestinian voice, and even from the voices of conscious Western and Zionist Others who recognize the necessity of defending just causes, resisting lies and myths by exposing them through revelation, narration, and creativity, where this study has endeavored to trace the manifestations of counter-ideological consciousness in the contemporary Palestinian novel, through a close reading of Basim Khandaqji's "A Mask the Color of the Sky", where the analysis has yielded that most notably that ideology remains a decisive director of literary creativity, both shaping it and being shaped by it in a continuous dialectical relationship, whose most profound impact is observable within the space of identity conflict

between the Palestinian Self and the Zionist Other, where literature emerges as an active cultural mediator in the battle for existence and identity.

The novel reveals a conscious commitment to defending the Palestinian narrative, armed with historical truths and geographical testimonies, while adeptly employing sophisticated narrative techniques to deconstruct the Zionist narrative; it thereby demonstrates the novel's capacity to transform resistant action from a political confrontation into a cultural and creative project that continuously reproduces consciousness of both the Self and the Other.

Finally, the study concluded with the following findings:

- Ideology remains a significant director of literary creativity, in both poetry and prose, and a constitutive element of its content; this renders the relationship between them dialectical, fundamentally based on a process of mutual influence and affect.
- The effect of ideology is most prominent—in our view—within the interactive space between the Self and the Other, and the associated identity conflict of varied dimensions and multiple levels.
- Consciousness of ideology's influence, firstly as a guiding factor for literature and secondly as a cultural load impacting the recipient, necessitates cultural resistance against it through diverse mechanisms.
- Palestinian creative expression in general, and the novel in particular—both classical and modern—epitomizes a tool of cultural resistance, as exemplified in the novel *A Mask the Color of the Sky*, the subject of this research and analysis.
- Among the mechanisms of counter-ideological action in this novel is confronting Zionist myths and challenging them with overwhelming historical facts and material artifacts that bear witness to the authentic existence of Palestinian Arabs there.
- The novel reflects a conscious commitment to defending Palestinian identity against attempts at identitarian distortion by the Zionist Other—however alien—even under the most difficult circumstances (the space of the prison).
- This narrative text reveals significant artistic and aesthetic capacities in the author, who succeeded—in our estimation—in effectively deploying characters within the novel's narrative as intended, alongside a polyphony of voices and meta-narrative; he is, therefore, a knowledgeable, modern novelist.
- The efficacy of ideology within the novel confirms the difficulty of neutralizing the creative process from its historical, civilizational, cultural, and social contexts, given its inherent intellectual nature.

#### Footnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Amina Ballali, *Suq al-Riwayah al-'Arabiyyah* [The Arabic Novel Market], 1st edition, Khayal for Publishing and Translation House, Bordj Bou Arréridj, Algeria, 2023, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *Al-Adab al-Muqawim fi Filastin al-Muhtallah '48-67'* [Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine '48-67'], 3rd edition, Beirut, 1987, pp. 51-100.

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- <sup>4</sup> Faisal Darraj, *Dhikrat al-Maghlubeen* [The Memory of the Defeated], p. 403.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Al-Dhat 'Aynaha ka Akhar* [Oneself as Another], p. 67.
- <sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Al-Falsafah - Al-Huwiyyah wal-Dhat* [Philosophy - Identity and Self], trans. Muhammad Mazyane, p. 39.
- <sup>7</sup> Ahmed Ibrahim Aziz, *Balaghat al-Muqawamah fi Khitab al-Sirah al-Thatiyah al-Filastiniyah* [The Rhetoric of Resistance in the Discourse of Palestinian Autobiography], 1st edition, Kunuz al-Ma'rifah for Publishing and Distribution House, Jordan, 2022, p. 39.
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- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>10</sup> Aziz, *Balaghat al-Muqawamah...*, Op. cit., p. 52.
- <sup>11</sup> Al-Mutawakil Taha, *Ayyam Kharij al-Zaman* [Days Outside of Time], p. 287.
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- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 27.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Said, *Al-'Alam wal-Nass wal-Naqid* [The World, the Text, and the Critic], trans. Abdel Karim Mahfouz, p. 146.
- <sup>16</sup> Khandqji, Op. cit., p. 39.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 48.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 62.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 63.
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- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 70.
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- <sup>26</sup> *Dafatir Falsafiyyah, Nusus Mukhtarah, Al-Ghayr* [Philosophical Notebooks, Selected Texts, The Other], prep. and trans. Muhammad Al-Hilali and Aziz Lazraq, Toubkal for Publishing House, Casablanca, Morocco, p. 9.
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- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 87.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 107.
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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

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