

Arabic and the Cultural and National discourses in Jaffa

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Abstract

*The paper examines the literature of the field regarding the political and cultural identity of the Palestinian minority in Israel in general; and the extent to which use of Arabic by Palestinians in the city of Jaffa reflects their national and cultural identity. The article shows that studies published since the 1950s revolve around two main methodical spheres: the sociopolitical space and the sociolinguistic behavior. As to follow the pinpoint the differences between these studies, this paper divide them into four main rubrics: sociolinguistic, collective identity, Jews- Arabs coexistence, and education. The vast majority of these studies fall under two rubrics: collective identity and education. The reason behind this trend is the **ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its effects on the political and social discourses**. This paper also finds that most of these studies call on the Israeli governments to bridge the socio-economic and educational gaps between Arabs and Jews in order to create a society that promotes equal rights for its all members.*

Key words: Identity, minority, coexistence, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sociolinguistic, sociopolitical

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Before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jaffa was one of the most important economic and intellectual centers of Palestine. (Sa'ar, 2006: 109f) In 1948 about 70 thousand inhabitants lived in Jaffa, but during the war of 1948 there was a massive exodus of Palestinians (Muslims and Christians) from the city, among which many were intellectuals. (Falah, 1995: 112f) In 1954 Jaffa became administratively part of the city of Tel-Aviv, the economic and cultural center of Israel. Today there are around 35 thousand inhabitants (Jews and Arabs) living in Jaffa among which 20 thousand are Palestinians, who are citizens of Israel. Devoid of its urban intellectual supremacy, the Palestinian minority in Jaffa has to deal, like the rest of the Palestinian minority in Israel, with many socioeconomic and educational challenges. (Sa'ar, 2006: 109) This study aims to explore identity of the Palestinian minority in the city of Jaffa from the sociolinguistic point of view. Specifically, this inquiry will investigate how the use of Arabic by Palestinians in Jaffa reflects their cultural identity and the extent to which this sociolinguistic identity is influenced by the dominant Israeli culture. It is worth mentioning that the case of Jaffa represents in many ways a microcosm of linguistic challenges faced by the Palestinian minority in Israel. Palestinians in Israel, who make up a fifth of the population (Lissak: 2000), speak the Palestinian dialect of Arabic and use Hebrew as the state dominant language. (Bernard Spolsky and Elana Shohamy: 1999, 116-131) Before launching this investigation it is instructive to survey the literature of the field.

Survey of the Literature

To the best of my knowledge, no studies have been dedicated to examination of the sociolinguistic role of Arabic in the cultural and national discourses in Jaffa. This study cannot be fully conducted without understanding the sociopolitical background against which the sociolinguistic behavior and identity of the Arab minority in Jaffa are affected. Since the Palestinian population in Jaffa constitutes an integral part of the Palestinian minority in Israel, it is instructive to examine studies that discuss the political and cultural challenges faced by this minority. These studies can be divided into four main rubrics: sociolinguistic, collective identity, Jews- Arabs coexistence, and education. To start with the sociolinguistic area, our inquiry draws, in terms of methods and objectives, on a number of important linguistic studies that need to be fully examined. First to be examined is Salma Arraf's (2004) study *Sociolinguistic impact of ethnic-state policies: the effects on the language development of the Arab population in Israel*. In this detailed and intriguing study, the author explores the effects of the Israeli ethno-centric policies on the national identity of the Palestinians in Israel through development of their language.

This study also enhances our understanding the extent to which Arabs' interaction with the dominant culture in Israel affects their sociolinguistic behavior. This study finds that Israel, as a Jewish state, has been promoting the national interests of the Jews and maintaining their superiority, whereas it marginalizes the Arabs' rights in many aspects of life. In light of these Israeli policies, Hebrew became the hegemonic language (though Arabic is considered the second official language) in the Israeli society. This situation forces the Palestinians to become bilingual, whereas it maintains a monolingual Jewish majority with sociolinguistic advantages. Of great relevance to our study are the sociolinguistic studies of Amara Muhammad and Bernard Spolsky, who examine the sociolinguistic behavior in two villages in the Triangle (north Israel), which are located at the border created by the 1967 war. (Amara and Spolsky, 1996, 1995; Amara, 1999). Specifically, these studies explore lexical diffusion and integration of Hebrew and English in spoken Arabic in these villages. The conclusions of these studies bear similarities to those of Salma Arraf.

Finally, the Bernard Spolsky and Elana Shohamy's (1999) *The languages of Israel: policy, ideology and practice*. This study traces the sociolinguistic process in which Hebrew became, due to ideological reasons, the hegemonic language in Israel/Palestine. The authors dedicate a chapter to examine the sociolinguistic environment among the Palestinian minority in Israel where they discuss the sociolinguistic role of Arabic in the Israeli educational and national discourses. Like in the case of the previous studies, they reached similar conclusions regarding the hegemony of Hebrew and the marginalization of Arabic.¹

Under the rubric of collective identity and nationality, one finds that the majority of studies on the Palestinians in Israel are dedicated to this area. Reading these inquiries, one finds that the Palestinian identity was, due to the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict, subject to transformation. As this conflict intensifies the more the Palestinian component becomes a crucial element in the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel. Salma Arraf has pointed out three main models emerging in these studies (Arraf, 2004: 244-253). The first model concerned itself with the problematic social and political situation of Palestinians in Israel as a result of having conflicting components in their collective identity: Israeli and Arab Palestinian. (Hofman and Beit Hallahmi, 1977). The second model, which is adopted by Sammy Smooha (Smooha 1980, 1988, 1989), describes the question of this identity as consisting of two constituents: Israeli and Palestinian. The third model, which is espoused by Nadim Rouhana, (Rouhana, 1997, 147- 149) discusses "accentuation" of the Palestinian identity; i.e., the attachment to Palestinian national discourse as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Arraf, 2004: 250-253).

Another constructive way to explain these changes in national identity of Palestinians in Israel simply follows chronological order. (Tessler, 2000: 95-118; Mufti, 2000; 67-94). A number of studies see the outcomes of the 1967 war, the emergence of the PLO, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, and the discriminatory treatment by the Israeli governments as the main reasons for the rise of national awareness. (Peres, 1968, 1970; Meari, 1978; Tessler, 1977) The above mentioned studies of Smooha during the eighties, refer to two components that shape the identity of the Palestinians in Israel: Israeli and Palestinian. While the first aspect represents the civic identity, the second reflects the national identity. The next important stage in the process of shaping of the Palestinian identity was the first Intifada (uprising between the years 1987-1993) of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza against the Israeli occupation. (Mufti, 2000: 88f) This event increases the national awareness among Palestinians in Israel. The peak of this orientation was in 2000 when the second Intifada had begun. Against this background one can better understand Karma Nabulsi's article (2003), "Being Palestinian." This study offers a new definition of the Palestinian identity not on the basis of shared culture and language, but rather on general will. To illustrate her argument, the author applies Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the "general will" to the ceaseless attempts to achieve state and the right of return since the *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1948.

Since the 1990s many studies that revolve primarily around the attitudes of Palestinian youth in Israel toward their national and civic identity. For example, Ramzi Suleiman *et al* (1997) examine how the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel is perceived by Jewish and Palestinian university students in Israel. The authors conclude their research by stating that the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel is attached to their language and cultural identity, whereas the civic-Israeli dimension is perceived in most cases negatively. Elsewhere, Ramzi Suleiman (2002) reached the same conclusions in another study where he applied new parameters (such as elections in Israel) to test the national and civic identity of the Palestinians in Israel.

¹ Currently, there are attempts in the Israeli parliament to introduce legislation to eliminate the status of Arabic as an official second language in Israel.

The study of Philip Hammack (2006) examines the formation of adolescent identity in the context of political conflict. Orit Ichilov (2005) examines the extent to which nationalist or religious affiliations affect citizenship orientation among young Palestinians and Jews in Israel. Among the main findings of this research is that young Palestinians in Israel are, due to their status as a minority, more politicized than their Jewish counterparts. In his study, "Identity, Moral and Political Development among Palestinian Student Activists in the Israeli Universities," Abraheem Almiccaway (1997) examines how the educational experience of Palestinian student activists in Israeli universities affects their collective identity and membership in the larger community.

As for the Jewish-Arab existence, there is a fair number of studies on the relations between Arab and Jews living in Jaffa. In their study *Arabs and Jews in a Mixed Neighborhood in Jaffa* (1994) Orly Hadas and Amiram Gonen explore how social life is conducted in the mixed Arab Jewish neighborhoods in Jaffa and the manner in which each side views the other. This study finds that since the population in Jaffa (Arab and Jews) shares similar socio-economic characteristics, there is on the whole a peaceable environment in mixed neighborhoods. This study emphasizes also that Arabs are interested more than Jews in living in mixed neighborhoods and social relationships with the other side. This study finds also that some of the Jewish interviewees express intolerant views about the presence of Arabs in their neighborhood. Ghazi Falah et al (1996) explore the relationship between coexistence in five mixed Arab-Jewish cities in Israel and a set of socioeconomic variables. Among these mixed cities, the author mentions Jaffa where his discussion is limited to the socioeconomic conditions of its population.

Another important study on the Jewish-Arab coexistence in Jaffa is that of Amalia Sa'ar (2006). This study applies the model of social activism as a touchstone to test the social relations between Arabs and Jews in Jaffa in light of cross-class, cross ethnicity, and cross-gender dialogues between the two sides. This research emphasizes that, due to the cultural hegemony of the Jewish majority in Israel, there is an unequal social relation between Jews and Arabs in Jaffa that makes the socio-economic situation of the former much more advantageous than that of the latter. This reality creates ethnic tension and class division between the two sides. Nevertheless, they agree to cooperate whenever they have common problems. This study also finds that both sides perceive masculinity as an important source of legitimacy and hegemony.

Under the rubric of education, one finds the number of studies is immense. In his comprehensive study, *Education, Empowerment, and Control, the Case of the Arabs in Israel*, (al-Haj, 1995) traces the history of education among Palestinians since the Ottoman period emphasizing the educational system of Arab-Palestinians in Israel. Al-Haj concludes that the Israeli government is successfully using the educational system to socially and politically control the Palestinian minority by withholding resources, qualified teachers, and suitable curricula. In this manner the education system preserves the traditional structure of the Arab society and permits only minor sociopolitical changes. Discussions of the curricula used in schools of Palestinians in Israel have emphasized the ongoing attempts of the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture to discharge the Arab educational system from any national references and to extract sympathy for Israel as the national home for Jews.

In light of these objectives, Arabs study more Hebrew language and literature than their own language and literature. In terms of history, the curricula used in Arab schools put an emphasis on Jewish history and world history, whereas Arab history was marginalized. (Abu- Saad, 2004; Al-Haj, 1998, 1989; Bargut, 1991; Boulus, 1991; Tzartzur, 1981; Mari, 1978; Nakhleh, 1977) All of these studies emphasize that, in light of the national Jewish interests, these policies aim at maintaining the superiority of the Jewish majority by subordinating the cultural and socioeconomic status of the Palestinians in Israel. Most of these studies call for the Israeli governments to bridge the socio-economic and educational gaps between Arabs and Jews in order to create a society with equal rights for its all members.

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