

“READING IT MY WAY”: RESPONDING TO LITERATURE IN A CONFLICTED MULTICULTURAL SETTING —THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

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We are children of our age, it's a political age.

(Wisława Szymborska)

Abstract

The article presents two case studies focusing on lexical and linguistic characteristics of a written discourse between two members of a national and religious minority and their lecturers who are members of the majority. The students are Arab women teachers, who took part in literature courses at Hebrew Israeli colleges of education. The students responded in writing to novels they had to read in Hebrew, their second language, as part of their graduate studies. The study analyzes phrases, metaphors, choice of words in the reading responses. It also questions the lecturers' responses to their students' papers language. The findings reveal the powerful effect of social, cultural, linguistic, and political context on the interpretation of the works read, the insights that readers extract from such works in intercultural situations, and their influence on the discourse setting: what is expressed in the setting and what is silenced. We use the terms 'minor writing' and 'minor reading', extending Deleuze and Guattari's term 'minor literature' (1980; 1986) to explain our findings concerning the role of the language in the context of the study. This study can inform and be relevant to teachers who teach literature in classrooms populated with minorities' students, in a tense political and cultural atmosphere.

Keywords: case study, higher education, Minor literature, multicultural classroom, reading literature

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1. CONTEXT AND GOALS OF THE STUDY

This article describes and discusses two case studies that represent a widely encountered phenomenon in the context of teaching and learning. Given of the processes of globalization, migration, and refugeeship that are enveloping our world, we presume that the processes and phenomena described below are reenacted in schools and academic elsewhere and deserve research and study.

The cases describe interactions involving bilingual or multilingual students who belong to a linguistic, social, religious, and ethnic minority. They studied literature in the majority language in groups attended by students affiliated with the majority culture. The students are Arab women teachers, members of an ethnic and religious minority in Israel; their teachers are Jewish women lecturers who taught literature courses in M.Ed. programs at Israeli-Jewish colleges of education.

Our purpose is to see what happens in the academic context of learning literature when minority students read the literature and write about it in the majority language, at an educational institution where most teaching faculty belongs to the majority culture and the linguistic policy is to teach in the majority language.

The research analyzed the Arab women students' written responses to literary works and examined the Jewish women lecturers' reactions toward these responses.

We realize that we are investigating our own work and the interactions in our teaching environment from a hegemonic point of view, in which dual power is manifested: the lecturer over the students and the Hebrew language over the minority's language, Arabic.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME

Our study is set within several theoretical frames. In respect of teaching and learning, it is based on the reader's response theory and socio-educational theories that concern the reading of literature in multicultural settings. We also relate to the language in which the writing and reading was done, using the term 'minor reading and writing', borrowed and developed from the work of the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1986).

2.1 *Reading and response to a text*

Reader's response theory presupposes different interpretations of one text in view of the various points of departure for the reading and among the readers, none of which is superior in value to the others.

The interpretive pluralism of the reader's response theory is close in spirit to Deleuze and Guattari's botanical metaphor on the essence of thought. Deleuze and

Guattari speak about branching, splitting, and non-hierarchic thinking and refer to it as “rhizomatic,” akin to the branching way in which grass grows, in contrast to the hierarchic thinking that they call “arborescent”—one root, one trunk, and many branches (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; 1986). Rhizomatic thinking is well suited to the teaching of literature in the spirit of reader’s response theories; it assigns proximity to different interpretations and allows none of them to claim superior value, provided it relates faithfully to the text read.

2.2 *Minor literature*

Minor literature is written in the hegemonic majority’s language by a member of a minority group or by someone who feels like a minority within the language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). The minority’s use of the majority’s language, even if it is personal, cannot but have collective, i.e., political, meaning: its individuality loses its privacy and connects with the political. Due to the singularity of the author’s expressive power and language, the writing acquires collective value in the work; what the author says singly becomes the act of a community and a collective severally. Minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, de-territorializes the language and intrinsically takes on a revolutionary quality in the literary sense. Minor literature successfully triggers a different consciousness and a special sensitivity that subverts that which is perceived as accepted and routine. Thus, in a process of defamiliarization, the reality is suddenly perceived differently and as such may animate an open discourse that admits a profusion of voices and subverts hegemony.

If so, both the socio-educational theories on reading the literature of the “Other” and the concept of minor literature call attention to the political aspect of reading, discussing, and interpreting literature.

2.3 *Reading the enemy’s literature*

The enemy’s literature is a specific and complex example of the literature of the “Other” because it belongs to one who is denied, against whom society’s formal systems wage a campaign of delegitimization. An attempt to confront it in an educational context may be rejected or accepted suspiciously due to beliefs and outlooks of the readers (educators and students); its outcome may be disappointing for various reasons, some related to the organizational academic framework that is imposed on the teaching and others associated with the chosen pedagogy and the allocation of time resources (Poyas, 2012; Hurlbert, 2003).

In the Israeli setting, the reading of Arabic and Hebrew literature encounters psychological and linguistic barriers related to the perceptions of each society, the Arab and the Jewish, of the other’s language and literature. First, the societies bring enmity, suspicion, and rivalry to their relations due to their territorial strug-

gle. Second, a problem of linguistic asymmetry exists: even though Israel has a policy of two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic, the policy is unequally applied (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999; Amara & Mar'i, 2002). Thus, an intercultural literary encounter is feasible only if Arabic literature, foremost Palestinian literature, is translated into Hebrew—something seldom done and influenced by political volatilities.

2.4 Teaching the Other's literature

Teaching the Other's literature is a socially important act in a multicultural society where different cultures vie for voice, power, and influence (Graff, 2010). In multicultural groups, one always finds students for whom the work taught is the literature of the Other. The ability to look the other in the eye, identify with his or her twisting and turning, and empathize with and feel responsibility toward him or her shares something with Levinas' ethical approach toward the other (2003)—which requires the individual to answer the ethical imperatives of openness, unbiased attentiveness, and respect. This demand for an ethical approach is crucial in the context of learning and teaching in multicultural groups. Giving this response, however, is no simple task. In the ethical teaching of literature, importance is attributed not only to the elements, themes, and ideas of the text taught but also to the circumstances under which the work was written and under which it is read. Such attribution originates in the understanding that language is anchored in historical, cultural, and political contexts (Graff, 2010) that influence what is written as well as what is read.

The experiences of lecturers and researchers in teaching that aims to create an environment of rethink the Other, teaching that aims at sustaining 'ethical reading' (Thein & Sloan, 2012), show that in most cases it is not realistic to expect a change in attitudes of the learners. However, it is suggested to guide student to "try on" different perspectives (Thein, Beach & Parks, 2007: 55), to be engaged in a perspective-taking through the literary experience.

Glazier (2003) cautioned against "colorblind" teachers who exhibit a mindset organized around an effort not to see and not to acknowledge the existence of racial, ethnical and cultural differences. Participants in dialogic and responsive encounters discover how strongly their culture influences their interpretations of and attitudes toward the teaching of language and literature (Willis, 2000).

2.5 The Israeli context

Israeli society is characterized by immense heterogeneity. It is composed of two main population groups: 74.8% Jewish and 20.8% Arab (Muslims and Christians) (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Arabs living in Israel are concurrently

Israeli and Palestinian; they consider themselves inseparable from the rest of the Palestinian people (Al-Haj, 1997; Peres and Ben Rafael, 2006; Smooha, 1992).

The Israeli education system is arrayed by sectors (Jewish-general, Jewish-religious, and Arab). The country has only five bilingual and poly-religious schools (Dekel, 2011). Young Jews and Arabs have almost no opportunities to hear each other out, get to know each other’s culture, and discuss disputed social issues face-to-face.

Mixed study groups do, however, exist in higher education because the country’s universities and colleges practice neither ethnic nor religious segregation (Swirski, 1990). In the higher-education institutes, Jews and Arabs who were brought up in segregated schools meet each other for the first time and have to adjust to the generally Western academic culture that is accepted in higher education in Israel, the Hebrew language that is used in most colleges and universities, and socio-academic relations with Jewish peers (Bäumel, Ze’evi, & Totri, 2009; Shamai & Paul, 2003; Al-Haj 1996; Davidovitch, Soen, & Kolan, 2007).

The discourse, the writing, and the interpretation in mixed Jewish-Arab study groups are also influenced by constant stress flowing from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Israel.

The courses described below, in which the two case studies unfolded, took place against the background described thus far—the complexity of reading the Other’s literature, the political significance of minor literature, the difficulty of reading “enemy literature,” and the incessant tension between Israel’s Arab and Jewish populations. Our goal is to understand what happens when an Arab woman student reads Hebrew literature in the environment of a Hebrew-speaking college.

We asked ourselves two questions:

- 1) How do students who speak Arabic (as a mother tongue and as a minority language) interpret works that they read in the majority language, Hebrew (their second language), and respond in writing to what they read?
- 2) How do Hebrew-speaking lecturers read and interpret these responses?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research method and context*

Below we present two case studies (Hua & David, 2010; Stake, 1995). The case-study approach can facilitate intensive study of the two particular cases and help us understand the specific and complex situation that an Arab woman faces when learning literature in Hebrew at in a Hebrew-speaking college in Israel.

Although this method is limited in the extent of generalization that it permits, the complementary research tools that are used in this case—painstaking analysis of the data and comparison of the cases—allow readers to extrapolate from these

individual cases to similar contexts in which minority students learn literature in the majority language, in an environment that the majority controls.

The authors teach in graduate programs at two colleges. One college, located in Israel's northern periphery. Arabs account for 40 percent of the graduate students. The other college, located in a city in central Israel of whom 20 percent are Arabs. The two literature courses, one at each of the colleges, addressed similar student populations. In both courses, the reading list includes novels. Both the reading and the teaching take place in Hebrew. We use similar approaches in teaching literature, combining reading according to the reader's response theory and close reading with the tools of New Criticism. Each course, however, has specific characteristics of its own in terms of reading list, course management, teaching methods, and use of technology (see appendix A & B). Below we describe them in each case separately.

Data on the scholastic performance of approximately forty students in courses taught by both authors at both colleges were systematically collected over a two-year period (2010/11 and 2011/12). Several complementary tools were used: (1) documentation of the discourse in class, in writing or by recording; (2) students' assignments and collection of personal writings and e-mail communication; (3) research logs kept by the lecturers; (4) interviews with the women students who were the focus of this study.

3.2 *Data analysis*

The materials gathered were analyzed from a qualitative narrative perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998).

This approach allowed us to expose and construct our story and that of our students. We focused on written reading responses that uncovered the students' attitude toward the fictive world of the novels and the way this world connected with the realities of their lives in Israel.

The written materials were analyzed in the following ways:

- 1) First reading—each author read the written materials of each student in her study group and responded in writing. Concurrently, she handed on the student's materials (with no remarks of her own) to the other author for a first reading of the remarks of the student from the other learning group.
- 2) Second reading—the authors communicated with each other about phenomena that they detected in the first reading. Each author re-read the materials, this time along with the other author's remarks, and responded to them.
- 3) Third reading—the authors met face-to-face for a discussion in which they identified common themes in the two students' remarks (identity, language, power relations, otherness, sense of minority, etc.).

- 4) Fourth reading—after agreeing on the shared themes, each author re-read the materials of the student from her own group in order to map all statements associated with the themes that were identified in the third reading.
- 5) Fifth reading—in view of the findings of the fourth reading, a within-case analysis (Hua & David, 2010) was conducted to reach a consensus about patterns specific to each student, the way the students' writing was organized, and their use of the language.
- 6) Sixth reading—a cross-case analysis (Hua & David, 2010) was conducted to detect similar patterns among the responses and reach a consensus about the theory to be used in presenting the findings—the minor literature theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986).

Throughout the process, we documented our reactions to the students' remarks, related to issues that arose in the writing discourse (lexical choice, organization, and recurrent expressions and their meaning in writing), and focused on our own responses to the students' remarks.

3.3 Ethics

The students participated in the study by consent. They were aware that the data were being gathered for the purposes of the study and understood its goals. Both women students whose cases are described here gave their consent to have this done and are identified by pseudonyms. To assure the neutralization of power relations between the students and the lecturers, the article was written after the end of the course and after grades were given, irrespective of the extent and manner of participation in the study (Josselson, 2007; Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

3.4 Participants and context

For the purposes of the study, the Arab students chosen in each group were those who had the strongest Hebrew writing abilities and could articulate their opinions and feelings in fluent, expressive Hebrew.

3.4.1 Nur, from central Israel

Nur (46), a Muslim Arab student and a teacher of Arabic who lives in an Arab small town in central Israel, chose to enroll in 2010/11 in a joint literature course at the college's book club. The course facilitator was one of the authors of this article. In 2010/11, the relevant year, the club discussed seven books (see appendix A). Ten

women students¹ who teach language (Hebrew, Arabic, or English) and/or literature took part; they were aged 29–56.

Nur teaches Arabic at a primary school in the town where she resides. She earned her B.Ed. degree in Hebrew and Arabic language at an Arab teachers college. She is proficient in Hebrew language. Reading was in fact the only intellectual avocation that her home and family setting allowed her. Inadvertently, however, it exposed her to the world:

I'm from a generation that read; there was no television. [...] I read some books too early, I picked up whatever I could lay my hands on. I got some of my sex education from what I read [...]. My mother [...] could hardly sign her name. I taught her how to sign. Father didn't let us go out; I had to keep myself busy. I read.

Although her mother was illiterate, Nur and her siblings were given an education. Nur married a teacher who does research on Arabic literature; her children went on to academic schooling.

Nur's decision to join the book club stemmed from her wish to make more room for literature in her studies, learn by attending sessions with many lecturers, and improve her proficiency in Hebrew literature: "I usually read in Arabic and I saw the club as an opportunity to get to know Israeli literature by means of experts."

Nur is a tall, impressive-looking woman who wears traditional attire including a hijab. Since the participants in the reading club are rather homogeneous in socio-economic and ethnic terms (Long, 2002), Nur stood out as an exception in this environment but did not find this a deterrent.

3.4.2 *Ranin, from the north*

The second case we present is Ranin, a Muslim-Arab woman student who took a year-long literature course as part of her master's studies at a college in Israel's northern periphery. The works chosen for reading in her course centered on cultural conflict and, in almost all cases, addressed topics related to various Muslim cultures (see Appendix B). The group met on a weekly basis for regular reading and discussion of phenomena and dilemmas that the reading brought to light. The students' writing assignments included keeping a "travelogue" documenting their reading experiences as they progressed through the novels and participating in various class events and happenings (see Appendix B).

In 2010/11, the course was attended by fifteen women teachers and one male teacher aged 38–64. Some taught in primary schools, others at higher levels. Three were Arab women students: two Muslim and one Druze. They tended to sit together in the group activities and participated actively throughout the course.

¹ Only women chose this course. Since 90 percent of students in the program are women, this choice does not imply a gender preference.

Ranin, 53, is a woman from a large village in Galilee. She does not define herself as religious and, in fact, is concerned about the religious radicalization that has been sweeping her village. She earned her B.A. from a university in Israel in English literature. She has been teaching high-school English for years. Her children are grown and have completed higher studies in prestigious disciplines. Her husband is a school principal. Her reading is extensive and mainly in English and Arabic. She wrote the following about the course in her diary:

This is the only course that's different in terms of contents in that although both texts discussed in the course are translations, they were written by Arab authors who show the rest of the class, the Jews, the authentic Arab society and culture with all its contrasts.

Ranin's remarks show that she senses her cultural difference within the group of Jewish teachers, the stereotypes about Arabs that exist among her Jewish colleagues, and even the dominance of Jewish contents that are taught in the various courses.

4. FINDINGS

The findings are presented in two voices, each author recounting, in her voice, the story of the student from her group and discussing her interaction with her.

4.1 Nur—an Arab woman who reads “enemy literature” from an “Other” perspective

4.1.1 Attraction and resistance

Nur's writing for the first meetings was very cautious. It addressed aesthetic and linguistic dimensions of the text, skirted social and political issues, and avoided a critical attitude. Gradually, however, her personal voice gained self-confidence. Writing about the first book that we dealt with, she expressed excitement about the author's specific choice of a female character as the representative of the pioneering act, dwarfing the male and political characters who occupy center stage. The silence that Nur employed in avoiding topics of Arab–Jewish controversy was, in my judgment, a thundering silence. At the end of the course, she described the first exercise assignment as the hardest because she did not know how much liberty she could take in expressing a personal view in writing.

Her transition from side-stepping the conflict to critical candor was gradual. It took place ahead of the fourth encounter and at a seemingly unexpected juncture, an ostensibly distant one: a discussion of characters who care for an elephant in Saramago's *The Elephant's Journey* (2008), a novel set in sixteenth century Europe, far from the Israel conflict. In retrospect, it precisely this distance that helped her

speak her mind. With its help, Nur related intensively to the issues of power relations in the plot and specified them, of all things, as the factors that allowed her to “connect” and “identify.”

Saramago [...] creates space for the voice of people who lived at that time, as rebels from the lower class, under really difficult conditions [...]. It sheds light on the vacuity of Europe’s rulers and their regimes, hierarchy and class relations, injustices committed by the Catholic Church and faith [...], a magnifying glass for those human details that the history books had marginalized and minimized for centuries. A book that allows one to connect to and identify with the issues that it presents [...] emotional human experiences that caused me to empathize and connect (Nur, Encounter 4).

By the time she wrote about the next books, Nur expressed her feelings candidly.

In the introduction to the exercise paper that she presented ahead of Encounter 5, concerning Litvin’s book *The Desert Generation* (2009), Nur cautiously describes the conflict that she experiences when she encounters a piece of Hebrew literature that presents a pronouncedly Jewish migration narrative, one that clashes with her own:

I admit that I connected with the book somewhat and found it very moving, even though this kind of literature, which deals with a very problematic period in Arab–Jewish relations in this country, should stir emotions of a different kind in me (Nur, Encounter 5).

“Somewhat” is a reductive term one that aims to devalue the book. However, it is countered by Nur’s emotional reaction and her embarrassment for having had it. She describes the reading process as a conscious attempt to minimize a reading experience that foments an inner conflict of loyalties: resistance to a book that captivates her with its power and something inside her that “begs” her to read it:

I thought, what could this offer? After all, there’s no shortage of literature about Jewish immigration to this country, the settlement era, and the founding of the state [of Israel] [...]. The more I progressed from chapter to chapter, the deeper and more comprehensive my view of the work became; something begged me to keep going (Nur, Encounter 5).

Olshtain’s autobiographical book (2010), the record of a child survivor of the Holocaust, was discussed at the last encounter. In one breath, Nur mentioned the tremendous tension she felt between resistance and attraction to this work, which she termed “an example of ‘hostile’ literature that can attract a reader like me, who comes from the Arab sector.” Farther on, she took an explicit stance, drawing a parallel between the narrative of suffering in the Holocaust and the *Nakba*, the disaster, a term in the Palestinian vernacular for the establishment of the State of Israel (Shenhav, 2012).

From another perspective, I consider Holocaust literature a parallel to Nakba literature. Associatively, many details documented in Olshtain’s book remind me of similar situations that I had heard about from my parents and read about in the Palestinian literature about those days: Emile Habibi, Ghassan Kanafani, and even the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish (Nur, Encounter 7).

I, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, read Nur’s remarks with a sense of discomfort mingling with attentiveness. Her family story also contains suffering, I told myself; we need not compete over whose pain or suffering is the greater.

In her writing ahead of Encounters 5, 6, and 7, Nur spoke candidly about the Israel–Arab conflict (throughout her writing she used neither the word “Palestinian” nor “Zionist”, and Israel is “this country”, not mine nor our) and questions of identity, language, and culture, always in a restrained and respectful manner. Her personal voice came indirectly through her response to the novels.

She repeatedly used the expression “from another perspective” to explain that reading allowed her to give others (including, sometimes, the enemy) a hearing, to listen to arguments and narratives, and to introduce flexibility in her thinking. Writing about Kaniuk’s book (2010) ahead of Encounter 6, she stated:

I found the book interesting both in terms of its style and language and in terms of its plot and content. [It’s] about a time that’s considered very critical in the lives of the Jews and Arabs in this country [...]. Taking a biographical approach [...], I wondered about the author’s perspective as he writes about the War of Independence, the Nakba for me, as a member of the Palmach². [The author] expressed lots of criticism about the Jews, like the lynch [...] in Jaffa [...] and he, this man of the Palmach, tried to defend the Arab victim!

Taking a historical approach [...] he invited me to view this historical period from the contrasting perspective, of all things [...] and more wars that took place in Jerusalem. For me, some of them were like the filling of gaps. When he uses the expression “Arabs” and, sometimes, “the enemy!”

Relating to Kaniuk’s *1948*, Nur raised a question that I disregarded at the time: “How can a person with a career like that be identified as having liberal views?” Analyzing her remarks for this study, I was uncertain about what she meant and felt that I did not understand it. Politically, Kaniuk aligns himself with the Israeli left and the peace camp. It seems to me, however, that my misunderstanding is not fortuitous; it reflects the depth of the mental disparity between the belligerents. Nur claims that a person’s biography determines his/her identity, meaning that Kaniuk, having been a Palmach combat soldier in the 1948 war, cannot be peace-loving. However, in the way I as a Jewish woman in Israel understand this, her approach undermines my right and duty to struggle for Israel’s existence as a Jewish state along with my right to hold political views on the advancement of peace and coexistence. Embarrassed, I realized that even though I place myself in the Israeli peace camp, my military service raises doubts among those on the other side about my views.

Nur copes with the inner conflict that the “enemy literature” (as she calls it) triggered. She feels that she has “connected” with works such as those of Litvin or

² *The Palmach was the elite fighting force of the Jewish community’s underground army during the British Mandate for Palestine.*

Shalev (2009); she empathizes with the grandmother in Olshtain's story. Generally, she says, the literature may encourage empathy between different cultures—an empathy that constitutes not the waiving of justice but a bridge between societies, which she hopes to find in literature:

What I find interesting in this [Holocaust] literature is that it has the potential of creating empathy and identification with the other; in this one finds latent power for bridging, coexistence, and true peace. To some extent, it can give us the hope to follow the light at the end of the tunnel and not to give up! (Nur, Encounter 7)

4.1.2 *"People are a blend of several identities"*

An examination of repeated words in Nur's writing shows that the word recurring most intensively—twenty-four iterations in a 4,500-word research corpus—is "identity." The word "Arab" and its variants (Arabic, Arabism, etc.) recurs twenty-two times; "language/languages" does so nineteen times. This preponderance is not random; even though it surfaces in the writing pursuant to the reading of literary works, it attests to Nur's personal response as the reader of these texts.

Even though she discusses the identity question through the prism of literary plots and characters, Nur lends it a universal dimension in her writing. Remarking on Kashua's book (2010), she writes:

The main issue in the story is one of identity and striving to be part of the Israeli collective [...]. The question is whether Sayed Kashua wanted to emphasize that an Arab can surrender his card, i.e., his identity, if given the choice, or whether the exchanging of ID cards suggests that Arabs and Jews are actually the same apart from their ID cards. (Nur, Encounter 2).

Nur relates to the conventional nexus of identity, nationality, and language (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2007). After reading Kashua, who writes in Hebrew, and despite her interest in the human aspect ("Is this self-criticism?!" she wonders), she digresses from the specific work to a general contemplation of the phenomenon as a social and cultural one, underscoring its complexity and problematic. The profusion of question marks and exclamation points that she inserts attests to the level of passion that invests her writing:

An Arab author who writes all his works in Hebrew. What prompts him to do this? [...] Wouldn't writing in Arabic and then translating it into Hebrew do the job for him? What's more important for him: that the Jews should read him or that the Arabs should do so? Where does he stand on the question of a writer's mission in society? [...] The question is whether the minority has to speak the majority's language in the belief that there's no other way! [...] Is literature outside the political discourse, in which the Arabs in Israel challenge the state's linguistic policy and demand equal status for the Arabic language!! I'd find it interesting to understand: what status does Sayed Kashua attribute to Arabic and to Hebrew? And how does he picture the Arab's identity in the multicultural context of the Israeli reality!?! (Nur, Encounter 7)

Nur's remarks reflect two things at once: her own voice and a critical look, rooted in national ideology, at the reality of her life as an Arab woman in Israel, a member of a minority in a society dominated by the majority, the majority whose language allows progress and success in life at the expense of the minority's crumbling language and culture. After reading Kashua, an Arab author who writes in Hebrew and portrays the identity problem of Arabs in Israeli society, Nur implicitly wishes a traditional identity for herself and the society that surrounds her, in which the Arabic language is the main vehicle of identity for members of the Arab national group (Nur speaks of an Arab, not a Palestinian). However, she criticizes the behavior of the ostensibly progressive Arab male whom Kashua describes: “The truth is that, deep down, he's still the Eastern Arab male who won't let any change distract him, especially when it comes to wife and family honor” (Nur, Encounter 2).

If so, Nur does not detect the subversiveness of Kashua's use of the Hebrew language. She does not consider his writings a minor literature that can shed a different light, a political and critical one, on expressions, sentences, and situations by means of the “other” use of the hegemonic language.

In contrast to the traditional perception of identity that Nur expresses when writing about Kashua (2010), her writing after reading Rina Litvin's book (2009) is sensitive to the representation of a complex and postmodern identity (Woodward, 2005; Maalouf, 1998) that has both a past and present, multiple identities, and fluency in many languages:

She thought it was so simple and easy and that she could rid herself of her past—erase it, as she put it—and turn a new leaf in Israel and get a new identity that's worthy of the new place and life [...]. In fact, however, the more the plot progresses, the more evident it is that it can't be avoided, it's neither easy nor doable, she's surrounded by several languages: Chinese, Russian, English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, everyone speaking in his habitual vernacular. These are the languages that ... “Together they are my language of words, a mixed-up language, you might say...” (Litvin, 131). [...]. You can make out her double identity. One belongs to the past [...] and the other belongs to the new reality [...]. To strike the balance within a real and stable identity, she finds her refuge in words [...]. If so, it's hard to speak about one pure identity; people are a blend of several identities all thrown together, one of which may be more dominant.

Nur's alternating feelings of attraction and repulsion evidently serve as a way to express her vacillation on questions of identity and place in Israeli society.

4.1.3 *Cultural foreignness or cultural mirroring?*

For Nur, the word “culture,” which she uses eleven times in her texts, provides a convenient way of speaking about her place as a student in the group, her differentness, and differences between Jews and Arabs generally. Kashua's work gives her an opportunity to explain the cultural difference between Jews and Arabs; the sense of cultural disadvantage that Kashua's Arab heroes feel mirrors her situation as well. Without attempting to conceal this point of departure, Nur emphasizes the

differentness but not the disadvantage: “I’ve learned that interpretation depends largely on the reader’s background, so that an author uses cultural codes that one reader might understand and another reader might not” (Nur, Encounter 7). “Cultural foreignness,” she notes, is not an insurmountable barrier, on the contrary: she read Saramago’s *The Elephant’s Journey* and found, despite its being foreign to her, that it “connects with my cultural baggage” and speaks to her. The foreignness is the vehicle that is mirroring her parallelism between sixteenth-century Europe and the present. Despite the cultural difference between her world and that of Rina Litvin, the migrant girl who reaches Israel from China, she feels very close to her due to what she calls the “writing culture” (Nur, Encounter 5). For Nur, writing as a creative act and reading are a crossing into intercultural differences. As Nur sees it, writing about reading, an activity that she took up in the reading club, gave her an in-depth view of herself through new lenses.

As I gazed at Nur’s exercise assignments, I wondered repeatedly about how this quiet woman student, who rarely speaks out in class, expresses herself clearly, courageously, and in a way that confers respect on me, too, a representative of the ostensible “enemy,” the “Jews.” In my reflective journal, I wrote:

I wonder how effective writing is at allowing openness relative to open discussion in class. My co-author in this article related that in class there was a reluctance to speak about sensitive issues among Arabs, and here, albeit by one student, there is an open discourse about the Nakba.

4.2 *Ranin, a Palestinian woman among Jewish women*

Writing and reading are “the oxygen that kept me alive,” Ranin wrote in her diary, and one can feel it in her emotive writing along the course.

4.2.1 *I am a Palestinian*

Ranin claims to have found herself in the Palestinian reality depicted in *West of the Jordan*. The details of the plot, she says, immediately brought scenes from the past to her mind. I suppose that this experience strengthened in her, as a reader, the feeling that the book invited her to an authentic encounter with memories and that its account of events closely approximates the reality familiar to her.

From the beginning of the course, Ranin’s writings articulated her personal voice loudly. It is highly likely that the choice of a book that tells the Palestinian story via Palestinian voice gave her the idea *ab initio* that she could write overtly about national tensions in Israeli society.

The foods, flavors, and aromas mentioned in the opening remarks of the novel triggered memories of flavors from home and conversations with her daughter. These flavors of yore are hard to find today because everything really did change when the grandparents’ generation, the one that predated the State of Israel, went

to its eternal rest. At the very beginning of her journal, Ranin juxtaposes what used to be, a world of flavors conceived in the heart, to today’s events. The nostalgia in her writing glorifies those pre-1948 days, before there was an Israel.

She expresses her identification with the Palestinian people directly, overtly, and immediately:

Like the author of the book, I cannot tell my story as a Palestinian woman without speaking of yearning. After all, the entire Palestinian people lives in yearning. The Palestinian man who grew old in exile yearns for the home from which he was expelled at the time of the Nakba [...] and for the childhood that won’t come back [...]. He yearns for the soil that he loved and grew up with but he has no hope even of being buried in it.

Ranin writes explicitly that she is a Palestinian woman. For her, the essence of Palestinian peoplehood is captured in yearnings for the villages of the bygone Palestine, the one that preceded the 1948 and 1967 wars. She uses the Hebrew word *galut*, exile, the word used by generations of Jews to denote the split reality of their lives: yearning for Zion, the cradle of their past, while still in exile. Ranin’s lexical choice of “exile,” a word fraught with meaning in the Jewish world, resonated in me, a Jewish reader, as a subversive act—even if Ranin herself was oblivious to it.

Ranin herself grew up in Israel and is a birth citizen of the country—born and raised in the village where she still lives. By defining herself as a Palestinian and not as an Israeli, however, she invests her tongue and lips with the flavor, symbols, and images of the Palestinian story. Her remarks presented me with a difficult challenge. According to Ranin, I, my parents, and grandparents are among those who doomed her to a life of yearning. Every time I looked into her eyes and listened to her, I could not rid myself of the question of how to respond to her assertions without amplifying her innate sense of injustice and without being untrue to myself.

In her reading, Ranin vacillated about the messages that she wanted to impart to her oldest daughter, who attends school in a faraway, foreign Western culture—messages that ask her to preserve her legacy and never to forget the identity of her origins and culture. This made it easy for her to identify with Hala, the young Palestinian heroine of *West of the Jordan*, who rebels against her father and goes off to study in the United States. Although she has fled from her father’s home, Hala has not forgotten her origins.

Hala inspires me to hope that the young Palestinian generation has not forgotten and still yearns for the home and homeland that it has been forced to place at a distance.

Ranin’s relations with her daughters acquire meaning in the middle of her journey through the book and she takes the opportunity to tell herself via the story of other Palestinian women. The setting—a literature class, a place that deals with things that are fictive but plausible—gives her room to say things that she could not say in another class.

Although Ranin was born and raised in Israel and still lives there, meaning that she has not personally experienced exile and wandering, she deals incessantly with the dilemmas of returning to a rooted identity, to the soil, and to the village. It is not only Hala in *West of the Jordan* who attracts Ranin; she is also drawn to the narrator in Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North* (2004), who returns to his home after seven years in Britain. In her final paper, she wrote: "Although Western society had some influence on him, and despite its liberalism and all its attractions, the European occupier's society was unable to inundate the narrator or extinguish the flame of yearnings for his homeland; therefore, he decides to return to his small village." Ranin contrasts the liberalism and attractiveness of the occupying West with the small and remote village that represents the homeland. This contrast immediately reminded me of two lines from "My Heart Is in the East" by the eleventh-century Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi, who lived in exile in Spain:

It would be easy for me to leave all the bounty of Spain— As it is precious for me to behold the dust of the desolate sanctuary.

Reading Ranin's remarks, I was struck by the strange feeling that these lines from a canon poem of my culture express the distress of Ranin, who regards my country as her own country that has been plundered. Yearnings for Zion suddenly take on a different meaning from the one they possessed before Ranin's writings were read. Suddenly a canon poem taught in Jewish schools in Israel no longer belongs to the Jewish people only; instead, it articulates the yearnings of an additional people.

4.2.2 *Go tell the Jews that you're not what they think you are*

Today, the teacher asked us to sit in groups and [instructed] each group to discuss one of the characters of the story. There was one student in my group who, I felt, always maintained a barrier between us, couldn't put up with me, and didn't like Arabs. But when we sat together, I noticed that this woman, even though we'd taken several courses together, looked me in the face for the first time and I looked her in the face, and it did something to me. I felt good because we spoke as equals in this situation. I also learned that there's power in looking. Looking at each other seemed to do something that made a change in her. She realized then that the enemy has a face.

In this paragraph, Ranin revealed the attitude that she had concealed in the learning group. She wished to prove that she did not fit the stereotype that Jews had formed toward the Arabs, that she was a woman who had a uniqueness of her own. She believed that her counterpart in the group considered her part of the collective "enemy" stereotype and did not flinch from using the potent word "enemy." She got her way in the group discussion as she and her counterparts looked at each other as equal participants, i.e., the enemy has a face. None of this emerged in class; it came out only in Ranin's journal, submitted to me as the Jewish lecturer in the course.

The Palestinian point of view in the novel provided an outlet for tense verbal exchanges between several Jewish women and Ranin and her compatriots. Naturally, the literary discussion was sometimes crowded out by the current political one. One of the climactic moments that found painful expression in Ranin’s diary concerned an argument over whether the word “occupation,” mentioned by one of the women speakers in the novel, is the right word to use in describing the reality in Judea and Samaria, where some members of the family described in the novel lived.

I want to tell you today what I couldn’t tell in class. I didn’t want to add to the tumult that broke out in class today. The truth is that I wasn’t surprised by the reaction of some of the students in class and by their anger about the author’s calling the Israeli occupation by its name. Every time I run into such people, I wonder all over again how someone can call himself enlightened when he can’t figure out the simplest thing: that there’s still no word in any language known to humankind that describes the forcible expulsion of a person from his land and home other than occupation. The occupation is ugly and cannot be prettified.

Ranin admits to having residues of terrible anger and pain: "There’s tremendous pain inside me. And the more I live in contact with Jews, I discover more how unaware they are of our suffering."

In her interview with me, Ranin said: I don’t know if they [the Jews] are prepared to hear me out. They were raised on other stories.

Later on, she related to her study of the novel: “It’s the first time somebody presented the Palestinian as a normal human being. First they should understand that we’re normal; then they should think farther.”

4.2.3 *All of us are stories*

In both the interview and her diary, Ranin expressed fury about the widespread use of the term “narrative,” which she construes as the evasion of historical truth and fact:

They always use the word “narrative” and it makes me angry when they say there are two narratives, because in my opinion a narrative is a story that’s been invented and that’s different from a fact. The Nakba is not a story that the Palestinians made up. It’s a fact and you can’t see it with two eyes. The Nakba is a historical event that involved an occupier and an occupied. The occupier can lie and obfuscate but he can’t deny, just as no one can deny the Holocaust.

She cannot say such a thing to the others in her group; it is clear to her that comparing the Nakba to the Holocaust cannot be done in the full forum of the course. However, she does it in her diary and apparently feels confident enough to show this candid document to the lecturer. When I revisited Ranin’s remarks for the writing of this article, it occurred to me that her stance left me no room: if she deems her narrative to be true history—a fact that allows for none other—then my narrative is a hodgepodge of fictions and justifications. The difference in how we per-

ceive events of the past, one that the literature articulates but does not heal, left me with a sense of impotence.

Although angry about the tendency to view the Palestinian story as a “narrative,” Ranin is attracted to stories. She is receptive to stories about her Jewish colleagues’ families and thinks they create a chance to speak face-to-face.

If we think it through, we’ll find that the stories we hide inside and roll around over the years are the things that keep us alive and give our lives meaning. And the moment we as people can listen well to the others’ stories and share our stories with them, then we’ll be able to feel the magic that exists in the human fiber.

The diary that Ranin kept pursuant to her reading allowed her to say what she would never say in class but would reveal and explain in detail in the interview. She will always see herself as an Other in Israeli society. She will always remember the injustice that her family endured. She will always yearn, via the stories that she unfolds, for the reality that preceded the State of Israel. In the mixed learning groups, it was clear to her that any political statement she might make would be interpreted through the prism that Jews use to examine Arabs in Israel. However, she wanted them to listen to her, to her stories, and to view her as a “normal” woman and not only an “Arab” and an Other. She wanted them to look her in the eye.

5. DISCUSSION

Our purpose in this study was to examine interactions between minority readers and majority-culture readers when the reading and the discussion are conducted in the majority language. The discourse investigated took place in a setting that was bilingual from the students’ point of view. It was dominated by the language of a hegemonic majority, that of the lecturers. The speakers, in contrast, are native in the minority language; for them, the majority tongue is a second language. This being the situation, the case study creates an opportunity for close and in-depth study of covert happenings by means of language (Hua & David, 2010). It allows a researcher to subject an ostensibly mundane event to thorough examination that illuminates another point of view, through which s/he sees and hears something previously overlooked (Stake, 1995).

By corresponding with students across an entire academic year and collecting data via multiple complementary tools, we lecturers gained an authentic encounter with the students’ language and voices as well as their perspective on literature and reality.

The research gave us an opportunity to listen to what was being said, what was not being said, and what was said but we had not heeded thus far in the multicultural groups that we teach. Having presented descriptive findings about what happened during and in response to the reading processes, we now wish to answer the research questions.

5.1 *Enhancing the minority's voice*

We found similar and dissimilar elements in both students' writings. Both students taught us quite a bit about what happens when a woman student who belongs to a lingual, ethnic and religious minority attends a class in which the other students and the lecturer belong to the majority, amid protracted enmity between the sides. Both students are aware of being “Other” relative to the rest of the class and to the lecturers. The literature provided both students with a “safe zone” where they could speak up and speak out. According to the reader's response theory, which explicitly served as a platform for the conduct of both courses, the students' writings were grounded in an unwritten “contract” between them and the lecturer: their right to express their personal response to the Novel, and the lecturer's obligation to treat these responses attentively, respectfully, and topically. Ranin, who felt gagged by her colleagues in the social situation of the learning, used the genre of a personal diary as her medium of communication with the lecturer; she also used it to present the lecturer with severe demands of, and allegations against, the Jewish majority, which she did not dare to express in class.

Nur, in contrast, was very cautious. In her writing, she conducted a “Bakhtinian” dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984) with the lecturer: she planned out her remarks and the description of her thoughts after, and on the basis of, thinking about the lecturer, her reader. Her goal was to make herself heard and understood. Nur anticipated the lecturer's questions, reservations, and responses, and preempted them with an appropriate statement. Under the initial circumstances of the writing, she deliberately chose to avoid topics that she considered threatening to the very existence of the dialogue.

The dialogue, its orientation to an Other, and the need to be understood gave the students themselves a clearer idea of their vacillations and attitudes.

We found three commonalities in the two students' writings: tackling questions of identity as members of a minority that is in the midst of a confrontation with the majority; drawing of parallels between the Holocaust and the Nakba, and interpreting Hebrew terms and words not as the Jewish majority does. Below we elaborate on each of these.

Both students' writings showed us how preoccupied they became, pursuant to their reading, with disturbing and complex issues of identity. However, while Nur's identity question was between her and the book, her and herself, or part of the discourse with the lecturer, Ranin's identity questions were also reflected in tension between herself and her classmates. Their attitudes represent the perceptions of identity in Israel's Arab population and the country's internal political controversy (Rudoren, 2012; Smooha, 1989): Ranin declared herself a Palestinian; Nur, while avoiding this word, did not define herself as an Israeli Arab. Did she dodge the need to express a definition, or did she suppress one that she had in mind, in view of our discourse? Refraining from self-definition in her writing for the course may allude

indirectly to a political stance: I am unwilling to play the game of definitions. Refraining itself is the utterance of a political voice.

Both students' remarks drew a parallel between the Holocaust and the Nakba. This kind of statement presses a sensitive button in the Jewish consciousness: it not only likens the Nakba to the Holocaust as "foundational past" for both parties (Confino, 2012) but also touches upon Holocaust denial, a phenomenon expressed in various quarters of the Western and Arab worlds (Achcar, 2011). Ranin says, however, the following: I accept that you went through a Holocaust but why don't you see ours? By putting it this way, she upbraids the Jewish majority and accuses it of dissembling and denying what she perceives as the Holocaust of the Arab minority. Nur, too, carries a grim emotional burden on this account. She terms Holocaust literature "enemy literature," an expression that stunned the lecturer when she read it—after all, literature is no one's enemy. However, the possibility of speaking of "enemy literature" offers the possibility of projecting emotions onto a neutral, unbiased player with whom there is no direct contact. Thus, it ostensibly allows one to take a stance without sparking a confrontation.

Ranin may have arrived at this turn of phrase after projecting her emotions onto the literature. Both students have repressed anger that they do not express in daily academic life but voice in their personal writings, politely or crudely.

The analysis of the written responses of our Arab students showed us the cultural meanings that Arabs in Israeli society attribute to Hebrew (the majority language) expressions differently from the meanings Jews attribute to the same expressions.

Words that appear in the works were interpreted differently in the writings of the Arab students. This was blatant in reference to the Holocaust, the War of Independence, other terms associated with the Jews' arrival in Israel (homeland, exile), the establishment of the State of Israel, and the Arab-Jewish wars and tensions (e.g., the words "occupation" and "liberation"). We also saw, however, that the concept of an ID card is fraught with political meaning by the very fact of its being identified with the holder's religion and ethnicity.

Alongside the commonalities, we noticed what sets each of the students apart. Despite the difficulty that she faced as a member of the Arab minority, Nur displayed "perspective-taking," in the spirit of ethical reading (Thein, Beach & Parks, 2007; Thein & Sloan, 2012) in her writing. She was emotionally and intellectually willing to examine, from an empathetic perspective, a Jewish immigrant family's integration hardships and the suffering of a Jewish girl in the Holocaust. This attitude was less evident in the writings of Ranin, who chose to express her narrative and reinforce it as a counterweight to the Jewish one. Another source of difference, of course, is the difference between the works that were chosen to be taught. Nur read works that express the Jewish-Israeli voice; the voices in the works read by Ranin are Palestinian or Sudanese. Nur was given an opportunity to experience ethical reading; Ranin, less so.

5.2 *Majority vis-à-vis minority*

Our research prompted us to reexamine basic premises in our work as lecturers at a college of education. We had been accustomed to thinking that if a minority student chooses to attend a Jewish-majority college, she has accepted the outcome: she will be learning in Hebrew (her second language), will be taught (almost always) by a Majority teachers, and will be studying materials that the teacher chooses from his/her academic, cultural, value, social, and perhaps political point of view. Nur's and Ranin's writings forced us to view the reality that we inhabit through their eyes. By reading their writings, we were distanced from our point of view and forced to be "color sensitive" (Glazier, 2003), to try-on the Other perspective (Thein, Beach & Parks, 2007). Their voices distanced us from what we considered routine and problem-free but is problematic to them as Arab (minority) readers and students. We realized that by including a Novel on the reading list we reawakened basic questions about the gap between thoughts of the majority reader and those of the minority reader: For Arabs, the "War of Independence" was a "Nakba": the biography of a girl who experienced the Holocaust immediately raises a parallel association with stories about the trauma of deportation/escape that their families had experienced in 1948. The 1967 war, in turn, meant occupation. Kashua's Hebrew writings, which we as Jewish women perceive as an interesting case of "minor literature" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), is perceived by an Arab reader as something between opportunism and treason that releases a powerful torrent of identity questions.

For us, the case of Ranin emphasized something that we had overlooked in our pedagogical considerations. We learned what, in the opinion of an Arab student, could and could not be said to a lecturer and to an entire group of learners. Ranin's case shows that when a student has a personal channel of communication with a lecturer who listens and respects her responses to what she has read, however harsh they may be, the lecture is given an invitation to an encounter with ideas, thoughts, and opinions that would not be broached to an entire group, which might respond with raucous if not furious reactions. Even Nur, once realizing from the lecturer's response that her remarks were accepted with attentiveness and interest, dared to say things that might have touched off a war of words if uttered in a mixed setting. In polycultural groups and a fortiori in stressful social contexts, we believe, it is important for the lecturer to maintain a personal, private channel of discourse between and each student separately so that she may hear the full range of voices in the learning group.

As part of their studies, the students were required to write in Hebrew. From this standpoint, their writing was minor writing in a de-territorialized language: The Jews' language that moved into the Arab locality and then returned to the Jewish domain through the Arabs' mouths. That the writing assignments were personal amplified the minor and political nature of the students' voices and language. As

the lecturers of the courses, we had to read these texts, sometimes in embarrassment, and hold ourselves accountable for the meaning of what they said in our language. This reading was no simple task; it forced us to analyze our feelings and reactions and remain aware of the spectrum and origin of our emotions in view of the complexity of the situation. When Nur and Ranin read Hebrew literature (or literature in Hebrew), they engaged in “minor reading”—a term that we coin, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari (1986), to denote learning and reading literature in a multicultural setting.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our experience and the research that flowed from it taught us a great deal about situations of teaching literature in culturally mixed classes in our particular context. In this concluding section, we wish to return to the terms “minor” reading and writing, borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1986), and expand our insights to places that lie outside the Israeli context.

Minor literature “generates a different consciousness and a different sensitivity that upend the ‘natural order’ and allow people who are different, voices that are singular, to meet” (Zahavi, 2010:98). If so, largely pursuant to the reading and writing of Nur or of Ranin, we read and listened differently. The work is no longer distanced from the sum of the voices that respond to it, the different ways its fictive world is entered, and the range of texts associated with it.

Given that our article is built on two case studies, we must beware of generalizing from the insights that we derived from them. Just the same, our experience illuminates a phenomenon that presumably exists in any classroom environment that accommodates students who speak different languages, adhere to different religions, and affiliate with different cultures. In these classes, members of the majority culture learn together with those from minority cultures and with migrants or refugees, who come with a different heritage, mother tongue, and sociocultural consciousness from those of the majority. In various places around the world, tension is rising between members of majority cultures and minorities who live among them, and one must assume that these tensions are not “checked in” at the entrances to the education system. When members of minority cultures read works of literature that are taught in the majority’s vernacular, they do not experience the works as does the teacher, if he or she belongs to the majority-culture, and as do members of the majority culture, their classmates.

Our study shows that teachers should be sensitive to the language that minorities in their classrooms generate and to the specific voice of the Other that they enunciate when they use, read in, and respond to the majority language. This may be something other than mere working-through and interpretation through the particular prism of the “Other.” Our study focused on minority students who are saliently literate in the majority language. Even when minority students appear to

have mastered the majority’s vernacular, however, our findings show that they do not use it as do members of the majority culture. This may not be evident in verbal and daily communication, but when literature is given scholastic attention in study and writing, a lecturer who belongs to the majority culture must be attentive and sensitive to the “minor language” that emerges in these students’ writing—a language that takes on political meaning due to the very fact that a minority is using it.

Do teachers or lecturers know how to cope with these modalities of expression and respond to them judiciously? In the academic context, where teachers or lecturers hold the power both *ex officio* and by belonging to the majority, can they accommodate subtle political statements, reflect on them, and respond to them, or would they disregard or gag them? Are they really receptive to the rhizomatic approach to literary interpretation, or is their openness limited by the very fact of their being culturally and socially influenced by the majority-culture?.

Our study invites further research on the topic because its choice of the case-study methodology imposes limits and because it investigates a specific aspect of our work. Additional research should shine a spotlight on the processes of the use of language in polycultural classes where works in the majority vernacular are read. Such study should examine the modalities of speech and writing pursuant to the reading and, no less, the teacher’s considerations, attitudes, and responses to the students’ remarks. Such research, conducted in different cultural and political settings, may prove eye-opening to those who teach literature and yield a better understanding of the thinking processes that flow from the teaching of literature in polycultural societies.

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APPENDIX A: WORKS TAUGHT AT THE COLLEGE IN CENTRAL ISRAEL

Title (original or, if translated, as rendered in Hebrew)	Basic information about the book
Meir Shalev (2009), <i>That's How It Was</i> (Tel Aviv: Am Oved).	A Jewish author born in Israel; an autobiographical book about the author's grandmother and the dawn of Zionism.
Sayed Kashua (2010), <i>Second-Person Singular</i> (Jerusalem: Keter).	An Israel-born Arab author who writes in Hebrew; the plot centers on identity theft.
Sami Berdugo (2010), <i>That Is to Say</i> (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, New Library).	An Israel-born Jewish author, son of immigrants from Morocco; the story of a librarian born to an illiterate mother who wishes to learn how to read and write.
José Saramago (2010), <i>The Elephant's Journey</i> , translated from Portuguese by Miriam Tivon (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, New Library).	A Portuguese author; a historical novel from the 16 th century
Rina Litvin (2009), <i>The Desert Generation</i> (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, New Library).	An Israeli author and translator born in Hong Kong whose parents had migrated to that location from Russia; she immigrated to Israel at the age of 10. Autobiographical.
Yoram Kaniuk (2010), <i>1948</i> (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth Books).	A Jewish author born in Israel to a father born in Galicia who migrated to Berlin before immigrating to Israel; an autobiographical book about the era in of Israel's War of Independence.
Elite Olshain (2010). <i>Terracotta Ovens of My Childhood: The Story of a Little Girl from a Small Town</i> (Jerusalem: Carmel)	A researcher and educator in linguistics, born in Czernowitz; an autobiographical book about her childhood during the Holocaust.

Assignments relating to each book, following the reading list above:

Book no.	Assignment
1.	What did you like about Meir Shalev's book? Was there something you did not like about it? What was it? Why? Have you read any of his other books? Did you find similarities among the books? What was different about this one?
2.	Before reading the book or (for those who have already read it) now, reflect on how you read it and how an interpretation is constructed. Express these points in writing. After reading the book—expand, revise, and explain what was added to your understanding about the way you construct an interpretation. As for the book, what interpretive issues did you encounter? What did you do?
3.	An important school in literary research calls itself the reader's response school. It takes an interest in the reader's reading process, the way he or she prepares to read, constructs his or her understanding as he or she reads, and, finally, constructs an interpretation. The response

spans a very broad range of emotions: empathy and, excitement, curiosity, boredom, fear, recoiling, revulsion.

4. In what sense did you find this book “hard to read?” In what sense did you find it “easy to read?” What did you borrow from your previous reading and the learning encounter to cope with Saramago’s novel?
5. This assignment resembles previous assignments in some ways and differs from it in others: Pay attention to your reading processes and document them. What happened? Did something change? What was it? What questions do you consider interesting for the interpretive discussion of this book? Present three or four questions of this kind.
6. It’s a different kind of assignment this time, because I’m not asking you to describe your reading process. Instead, I start from the end of the previous assignment, where I asked you to present questions for interpretive discussion.
Present up to six questions that you consider important for interpretive discussion of Litvin’s book. Choose one or two questions and write an interpretation about them in no more than two pages.
7. Interpretation concerns itself with content that is not visible or self-evident—content that the author masks deliberately or inadvertently and makes readers puzzled. What did you learn about yourself as a reader in the course of the encounters this year? Give examples of how you learned this, explain it; choose one or two the books that we have read that seem, to you, interesting for interpretive discussion even after the lecture that you attended. What seems to challenge you in interpretive discussion? What is your opinion about the inclusion of Elite Olshstein’s book as a work to be read and discussed?

APPENDIX B: BOOKS TAUGHT IN THE COURSE AT A COLLEGE IN NORTHERN ISRAEL

Title	Plot
Halaby, L. (2008). <i>Mima'arav la-Yarden</i> (West of the Jordan). (Translation from English: D. Rosenblitt) (Tel Aviv: Resling).	The story of a Palestinian family from a Palestinian-American perspective.
Salih T. (2004). <i>Onat ha-nedida el ha-tsafon</i> (Season of migration to the north). (Translation from Arabic: T. Shamosh) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved).	Set in Sudan and Britain: the story of post-colonial Sudan.

Each work was read during one semester. As it was being read, theories of interpretation were discussed.

An assignment given at the beginning of the course, as the novel <i>West of the Jordan</i> was being read	As you read the book, thoughts, memories, and experiences will surely occur to you. The intention is not so much to discuss the literary act as to discuss your set of responses consequent to the reading.
Summarize what you learned by reading <i>West of the Jordan</i> .	Choose a character in the book and describe h/her, how s/he is shaped, and what s/he represents to you. Connect the events in the character's life to a social phenomenon discussed in the course and discuss how the character copes with and represents the phenomenon.
Final assignment in study of <i>Season of Migration to the North</i>	Write a Wiki article. The subject may be the work itself or you may examine relations between the work and social and historical phenomena. Discuss the theme of the article with the lecturer by the end of April.