

# Sayed kashua's chronicles: a new religion is born in Israel

## Abstract

The State of Israel organizes its population by its religious affiliation. Nevertheless, their identification with their respective religions is not so evident. The writer Sayed Kashua is an Israeli Arab Muslim who identifies himself as a secular person. For him, his religion has been imposed on him. Based on the Cultural Studies and post-Zionism theories, this paper analyzes several of Sayed Kashua's chronicles published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* to point out how this author deals with these Israeli religious categories and creates a new identity group.

**Keywords:** Sayed kashua, israeli society, religion, identity, haaretz newspaper, chronicles

Volume 3 Issue 1 - 2018

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**Received:** June 24, 2017 | **Published:** January 16, 2018

## Introduction

At the end of the 19th century a group of Western Europe Jewish intellectuals originating mostly from secular cultural elite<sup>1</sup> started a systematic effort to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Not until 50 years later, after the tragedy of the Holocaust, was Zionism successful in establishing the Jewish State in that region. The State of Israel was meant to be the guardian of the Jewish people, where Judaism in all of its aspects and terms was to be ensured. After the War of Independence,<sup>1</sup> the 160 thousand Palestinians who remained in Israel became Israeli citizens. In its Declaration of Independence, Israel granted all of its citizens their individual, political, economic, legal and religious rights assured by the state, including freedom of speech and political organization and the right to vote. Nevertheless, as a Jewish State, Israel reinforces and maintains its Jewish identity. Arab citizens claim that Israel emphasizes the separateness from non-Jews in the country and as a Jewish State, it fails in its democratic values to balance the advantages extended to Jews, such as the unequal allocation of socioeconomic resources and the laws of citizenship based on ethnicity; they claim a lack of cultural autonomy and of rights as a homeland minority.<sup>2</sup> The State of Israel has become a Jewish State in which religion walks hand in hand with the government<sup>2-6</sup> and integrating a Jewish and a Democratic State is one of its most formidable challenges in the 21st century.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics divides its population in three major groups<sup>7</sup> and religion grouping is its main indicator: Jews, Arabs (Muslims, Christians and Druze) and other, meaning non-Arab Christians, members of other religions, as Baha'i, Buddhists, Hindus, Samaritans and persons not classified by religion in the Population Registry. Israeli Arabs constitute the non-Jewish population who stayed on in Israel after the War of Independence and their descendants

who obtained Israeli citizenship.<sup>2</sup> According to this classification, all Jewish citizens are included under one umbrella, whereas "Arab" indicates the other part of the population, which includes Muslims and Christians, besides the Druze. In this ethnically fragmented country, the very concepts of "Judaism" and "otherness" became key parameters for the Israeli government to rule and allocate resources for its population. Religious affiliation has become a major factor within this categorization.

The population of Israel numbers approximately 8.680 million<sup>3</sup> in 2016. Jews account for 75.4 percent of the population, Arabs make up 20.7% of the population and the rest of the population is identified otherwise (3.9%). In 2016, Israeli Arabs were distributed between 16.9% of Muslims, 2.1% of Christians and 1.7% of Druze. In 2015, on the basis of self-definition among persons aged 20 and over, a survey organized by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics found that, among Jews, 44% consider themselves "not religious" or "secular"; 24% are traditional and "not so religious"; 12% are religious traditional; 11% religious; and 9% consider themselves "ultra-Orthodox".

Many of those Arab Israelis, even though split among Muslims, Christians and Druze citizens, also have little identification with their religion although this percentage is still higher than the Jewish Israeli population. In 2015, 21% consider themselves "not religious" and 52% consider themselves religious; 23% consider themselves "so religious" and only 4% consider themselves "very religious". The categories which determine the religious affiliation of individuals in Israel also organize its population in accordance with the language they speak. Theoretically, Jews speak Hebrew and Arabs speak Arabic, associating languages to religion, even though in Israel, Arabs speak Hebrew, as this is the main language in work and study places and Jews who originally come from Arabic-speaking countries speak mostly Arabic.<sup>8-10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>After the Partition Plan for Palestine was announced by the United Nation in 1947 and the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948, seven Arab countries opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. In what came to be known as War of Independence by the Israeli-Jewish narrative and as *Al Nakba* (The Catastrophe) by the Arab sector, Israel conquered part of the territory that would constitute the Palestinian State (as proposed by the UN). The Palestinian exodus, forced and voluntary, started with the publication of the Partition Plan and continued even after the armistice which was signed in 1949, after the end of the war.

<sup>2</sup>The Israeli Arabs can also be referred to by themselves or by others as Palestinians and Israeli Palestinians, among other denominations. In this article, I use the terminology Israeli Arabs to highlight his/her citizenship. It is important to clarify, however, that "Palestinians" mostly refers to the population living in the areas conquered by Israel in the Six-Day War (The 1967 War) and who have not received Israeli citizenship.

<sup>3</sup>Preliminary results. The population estimate does not include the foreign resident population, which was about 183,000 at the end of 2015. See [http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/?MIval=cw\\_usr\\_view\\_SHTML&ID=705](http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/?MIval=cw_usr_view_SHTML&ID=705).

Taking all this into account, the category "religion" became outdated in Israel. The State organizes its individuals by attaching religious components and even linguistics to ethnicity, which very often is a dissonant way of organization regarding religious reality. Sayed Kashua was born in an Israeli Muslim family in 1975 in the Arab village of Tira, located in the Triangle region of Israel. At age 15, Kashua left his home town after being accepted in a well known Jewish boarding school in Jerusalem for gifted students - the Israel Arts and Science Academy. Kashua was then educated in Hebrew and all his work is written in this language. He wrote three critically-acclaimed novels, which were translated into several languages: *Aravim Rokdim*,<sup>11</sup> *Vaiehi Boker*<sup>12</sup> and *Guf Sheni Yahid*.<sup>13</sup> In 2004, Kashua won the Prime Minister's Prize for Literature. Sayed Kashua is the screenwriter of the sitcom *Avodah Aravit (Arab labor)*, which reached its fourth season. *Avodah Aravit* is one of the top five Israeli comedies of all time and it is the only show on Israeli television featuring major Arab characters and the only one spoken mainly in Arabic. Since 2005, he has a weekly column in *Haaretz*, the most important Hebrew newspaper in Israel, which also has an English version. In 2016, Keter Publishing House published many of his chronicles from his column under the title *Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life*. Sayed Kashua's work is well known for its use of humor, sarcasm and self-irony.<sup>14</sup>

Kashua has been writing chronicles on the topic of religion and religiosity and has been dealing with the subjects as components of his ethnic and national group ever since he has started his weekly column. As on all other topics, he does it in a very peculiar, inventive and unexpected way. Instead of reinforcing the stereotypes of Arabs and Jews as religious representative components of the society in which he lives, Kashua introjects religious and ethnic characteristics of the citizens of the State of Israel, thus transforming them into something new. He breaks down the defining categories established in the foundation of the country and produces an entirely new portrayal of the groups living in Israel. He reorganizes the State according to new religious, ethnical and linguistic categories. He transforms a Jew into something different from what the State of Israel considers a Jew and does the same with the Arab as well.

In this article, I use the "I-chronicler" terminology<sup>4</sup> to differentiate the author Sayed Kashua from the chronicler's protagonist, even if he is named "Sayed Kashua". In doing that, I consider the chronicle a literary text, imbibed in fiction, what allows a comprehension that goes beyond reality and may reach unusual and surreal interpretations. Still, the use of this terminology does not deny the political connotation of the situations exposed by the author.<sup>16</sup> Instead, it may highlight its complex statements. In one of his chronicles,<sup>17</sup> the I-chronicler, an Israeli-Arab, states: "(the) greatest joy in the life (of my little boy) is to be 'Shabbat Daddy' on Fridays and to sing 'Who Loves Shabbat' every day". The I-chronicler explains that this Israeli Arab boy attends a Jewish kindergarten school in Jerusalem and as such, he is faced with religious and Jewish customs and influences every day.<sup>5</sup> In Israel,

<sup>4</sup>Simon (2011) proposed the terminology "I-chronicler" to unleash the chronicler's author from the situations which he exposes in the texts. In this paper, this terminology is used within the same meaning attributed by the author, even when he is named "Sayed Kashua". In the article **So dubious, so coherent: form and content in Sayed Kashua's journalistic chronicles**, this author<sup>15</sup> sustains that within the "New literary paradigms", journalistic chronicles can be studied and analyzed as literary texts.

<sup>5</sup>In the Jewish religious narrative, Shabbat commemorates the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation of the world by God. In this last day of creation, God had rested and religious Jews do rest as well.

schools are separated by languages used for teaching. Jews study in Jewish schools, which are divided among "religious" (which are in fact under the Jewish orthodox stream) and secular; Arabs study in Arabic. There are exceptions as such as Arabs who study in Jewish schools and Arabs and Jews who study in bilingual Arabic-Hebrew schools, an option available in Israel since 1997.<sup>6</sup> This I-chronicler lives with his family in a Jewish neighbourhood, an exception to the usual separation between Jewish and Arab residential areas.<sup>7</sup> This blend of beliefs and break of parameters are not easily taken by this I-chronicler: "Sometimes I feel guilty about the so-called mixed education system or, actually, the exclusively Israeli one in which I've enrolled them (his children), 'for the sake of a better education,' as I tend to convince myself. Sometimes I'm scared by the very fact that I have forced them to live in a Jewish neighbourhood".<sup>18</sup> The fear expressed by the I-chronicler is related to a "confusion that they're (the children) liable to suffer". It is about this exception scenario of which Sayed Kashua speaks. He is an Israeli writer himself, extremely successful in a country which is undergoing an editorial crisis (similar to almost all countries on the planet). He writes all his works in Hebrew blending ethnicity, language and religion; by the time he wrote this chronicler he was living in a Jewish neighbourhood;<sup>8</sup> he is economically well off. He is part of a minority among Arab Israelis and Israelis in general, but he is no exception in relation to how he relates to religion: he is a "secular Muslim", which contradicts the Israeli way of organizing its citizens.

In another chronicle,<sup>17</sup> the I-chronicler mentions a Jewish taxi driver, a "Mercedes Driver with a tattoo on his shoulder." He identifies himself with the taxi driver and they become each other's confidant. Getting a tattoo is forbidden for a great number of Jewish religious authorities and the I-chronicler also rethinks the boundaries imposed by his religion, Islam, which prohibits the ingestion of alcoholic beverages. Nevertheless, he drinks considerable amounts of alcohol and it is remarkable that he mentions this in many chronicles, as an uncontrollable urge. Many of Kashua's chronicles refer to this addiction: "Would you happen to have any alcoholic beverages?";<sup>19</sup> "I shouldn't have drunk so much, I scolded myself";<sup>20</sup> "A mini-bottle of whiskey out of my carry-on";<sup>21</sup> "I drank beer and recalled that September 11";<sup>22</sup> "Every 10 minutes I went over to the beer spigot to refresh the stock";<sup>23</sup> "It doesn't bother me to go on drinking - there's no point trying to fight that again now".<sup>23</sup> The I-chronicler of Sayed Kashua is a truly secular person. His religion does not dictate his behaviour. Besides that, he is completely critical of his religion. In a chronicle, he says, ironically:<sup>24</sup> The Koran says that prayer prevents

<sup>6</sup>The Center for Bilingual Education in Israel (CBE) was established in 1997 by two Israelis, one of Jewish and the other of Arab origin. According to the CBE proposal document, its aim is to create Hand in Hand Bilingual Binational Schools across the country, revolutionizing "Israel half-century old tradition of separate classrooms and segregated lives among Arabs and Israelis." (<https://www.handinhandk12.org>)

<sup>7</sup>In Israel, Israeli Arabs are segregated in term of residence ever since the "pre-State", the period in which Jewish immigration to Palestine occurred before the establishment of the State of Israel. Though today this segregation must be voluntary, there are reports of cases of Arabs who try to get transferred to a Jewish Community or neighborhoods with a majority of Jews and they find resistance from the Jewish local population. The Arab population resides basically in three regional concentrations, among those Galilee is the biggest, and also in several cities, neighborhoods and mixed regions, but the majority live in small communities with only Arab inhabitants and far from the urban area.

<sup>8</sup>In 2014 Sayed Kashua, his wife and their three children moved to the US.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

alcohol and sins. The recipe for me (...). Starting Sunday I am starting to pray, that's it. During Ramadan I will also visit the mosque. I will ask my religious mentor whether, as a pious person, I can still go to the gym and the pool. I will buy a bathing suit that meets the demands of the sharia<sup>10</sup> and I will go at the times set aside for men. If not, then never mind. Prayer is also a good workout.

Kashua usually mentions Islamic religious habits and holidays. In a chronicle,<sup>25</sup> the I-chronicler describes the preparations for a celebration of Id al-Adha,<sup>11</sup> which consists of buying new clothes. "New clothes are part of the holiday. That's how it's always been. They're known as 'the holiday clothes' and are eagerly awaited twice a year, on Id al-Fitr<sup>12</sup> and Id al-Adha. The holiday clothes enjoy a special status and on a holiday morning, as I recall, we were so happy and sparkling clean, with shoes a size or two too big, because children's feet grow every second."

But the celebration's tradition that the I-chronicler recalls from his childhood does not find resonance in his adult life, which is much more secular, even though we'll see further on that also during his childhood, the religion was not the central point of his family's life. The I-chronicler narrates that his son doesn't want to buy new clothes in Id al-Adha and he himself doesn't want to be in a shopping mall "packed with Arabs" (on the eve of the holiday): "Am I to blame for having distanced the children from the atmosphere leading up to the Muslim holidays?"<sup>25</sup>

In another chronicle,<sup>26</sup> the I-chronicler and his wife, close to the birth of their third child, start a discussion on the decision to circumcise or not their new son. The wife wants him to be circumcised whereas the husband doesn't. In what concerns his knowledge about the Islamic law, the father states: "I honestly don't know what Islamic law has to say about circumcision (...). I grew up in a not-very-religious home and I'm not always aware of what's allowed and what's not, of what we're commanded to do or not to do." But his wife insists: "It's written in the Koran, It's a Divine order," and ironically the I-chronicler confesses that, even though his wife states it in an authoritarian way, he would not trust her in what concerns the Islamic law. "Even if you're right," I told her on the phone, "I don't care what it says in the Koran. I'm not circumcising my son and that's it." In the end, he convinces himself to circumcise the son for health reasons.

The Israeli calendar is oriented by national Jewish holidays (oriented by the Jewish narrative referring to the establishment of the country) and by religious Jewish festivity calendar.<sup>27</sup> That way, the Arab Israeli routine ends up being influenced by this calendar. During the Passover Festival,<sup>13</sup> for example, students have a two-week-break, whether they are Jewish or not. The same happens on Sukkot.<sup>14</sup> In a chronicle,<sup>28</sup> the I-chronicler states that the two weeks of the Passover Festival is called "spring vacation", a time in which there are no classes. The I-chronicler asks: "What else should they call it? Forced

Passover vacation for Arabs?" He calls Sukkot "the winter vacation". And so, complaining about the difficulties of finding programs to get the children busy during the Jewish festivities, the I-chronicler states: "We're just stuck in a Jewish holiday without the slightest idea of what we're supposed to do. We don't even have the right to complain about *Seder* night,<sup>15</sup> or about the annoying aunties.<sup>16</sup> And when it comes to people like us, who live in a Jewish city, we're stuck with a spring vacation, without bread."

The I-chronicler talks about the problems of being forced to have his children out of school during the Jewish holidays, a fact that becomes unbearable "when you're not part of the holiday and you don't enjoy any rituals." Besides that, Arabs are restrained from shopping for certain products in Jewish markets since Jewish groceries and supermarkets don't sell the products which are forbidden by the religious dietary rules of the Holidays (as some grains). So, the I-chronicler creates eating restrictions laws for his family. They refrain from eating eggs during the eight days of the Passover to give "a religious meaning to this period". The I-chronicler also sees himself involved in the Lag Ba'Omer holiday. He says:<sup>29</sup> "I'm not quite sure how it happened, but last week I found myself sitting at the Lag Ba'Omer bonfire, (...) this big fire celebration, that I had this vague notion was somehow related to the Bar Kochba revolt." The knowledge of the I-chronicle about Jewish religious practices includes the awareness of common use of candle lighting: "I'm afraid of fire. Fire and water, my grandmother used to say, are the worst ways to die. I tried to reassure myself, thinking that it's a Jewish holiday after all and they know what to do with fire. Jews handle fire all year long Shabbat candles, Hanukkah candles,<sup>17</sup> Lag Ba'Omer and other fire-lighting ceremonies."

And so he explains: "Come to think of it, it is actually the Arabs, as a minority, who should adopt some kind of secret rules to distinguish them from other people a few days a year".<sup>28</sup> And by doing so, the chronicler adds a religious sense which is connected to the minority's survival, a motivation that he doesn't recognize any longer in maintenance of the Jewish religious practices in Israel, a country with a Jewish majority. Sayed Kashua's I-chronicler, however, is not fond of Islamic celebrations either. And so he narrates: "Ah, the same old traffic jams, I smiled to myself on Sunday morning as I drove my kids to their first day of school. Because of the Id al-Fitr holiday, the Muslim kids hadn't started school in September." The non-Jewish holidays are not included in the Jewish calendar, which means that the I-chronicler's children who study in Jewish schools have classes regularly during those non-Jewish holidays. "I put on the Edith Piaf CD that the kids like to create a festive atmosphere and thought about how happy I was to be sitting here again, like everyone".<sup>30</sup> This I-chronicler is happy about the fact that his children are going to school during the Islamic holidays and the French music they listen to in the car adds to his cosmopolitan and secular view of himself.

However, the secular aspect generates identity problems in a religious state where religious identity is defined by predetermined standards. The I-chronicler's children are not raised with a clear understanding of what is Jewish and what is Islamic. They pass over traditions and symbolisms, between languages and national

<sup>10</sup>Sharia is the Islamic law.

<sup>11</sup>Id al-Adha is the Islamic traditional Sacrifice Feast. The feast recalls the sacrifice that the patriarch Ibrahim was willing to perform with his son Ishmael as proof of his faith in God. Nowadays, an animal is sacrificed and eaten afterwards.

<sup>12</sup>Id al-Fitr is an Islamic celebration which marks the end of the sacred month of Ramadan.

<sup>13</sup>Passover is a festivity which celebrates, among other events, the freeing of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery.

<sup>14</sup>Sukkot is the Feast of the Tabernacles. It recalls a period in which the Jewish people wandered through the desert and commemorates the annual harvest in Israel.

<sup>15</sup>Traditionally, Jewish people celebrate the first two nights of the Passover festivity by dining with their families, in a feast called *Seder*.

<sup>16</sup>"Aunties" may refer to familiar members who one meets mainly on religious holidays, such as Passover.

<sup>17</sup>Hanukkah Festival celebrates the victory of Maccabee over the ancient Romans.

fidelties. "Daddy," says the child to his father at the entrance of a market in Jerusalem, "I want a Superman shirt."<sup>31</sup> But the I-chronicler describes that on that t-shirt there was a Superman logo with a Jewish hat on, a *haredi*,<sup>18</sup> with its *tsitsiot*<sup>19</sup> and the inscription "Super Jew." The I-chronicler is embarrassed in front of the Arabs who were at that place. "(...) there was no way on earth I would buy him a Super Jew T-shirt".<sup>20</sup> But the boy screamed so much that the I-chronicler decided: "Fine, fine, I will buy you Superman," he answered in Hebrew, pretending to be the father of a "little Jew". But the conflict doesn't end there. The daughter asks: "Daddy, (...) I want you to buy me a *kaffiyeh*".<sup>21</sup> But the I-chronicler rebels at this request: "'What are you talking about, a *kaffiyeh*? Have you gone crazy?' 'Why are you ashamed to buy me a *kaffiyeh*?' asked the daughter in a loud voice, which caused the Arabs passing by to stop and watch how this identity problem would be solved". The son then asks for another present, to what the father answers: "Anything but a *menorah*".<sup>22</sup>

The religious and ethnic symbols are not clear to these children and neither is the identification of the symbols for the father. The I-chronicler doesn't identify him with the Jewish ultra-orthodox shirt, nor with the *kaffiyeh*, or even with the *menorah*. Explaining the complexity of the use of ethnic and religious images and objects is not an easy task for someone who sees himself beyond symbols and stereotypes.

In a chronicle<sup>32</sup> where a Jewish Israeli politician states that the legitimacy of a Jewish State in Palestine is confirmed in the Bible, the I-chronicler claims: "The same Bible that all the Muslims in the world, all the Christians in the world and certainly all the Jews in the world believe in, says, 'Unto you will I give this land.'" And so, the I-chronicler presents a relativism of the Jewish property of the promises made by God in the Bible. But he confesses that he doesn't believe in that Bible: "I know a few Muslims and a few Christians who not only do not believe in the Bible, they don't believe in any divine book. And there are some who are ready even to doubt the existence of God. I fervently hope that Minister Bennett<sup>23</sup> was wrong and that not all the Jews in the world believe in the Bible either".

That uncertainty towards religion and religious symbols confront the I-chronicler in many chronicles written by Sayed Kashua. The I-chronicle confesses: "(...) it looks like a last struggle by my generation to be liberated from the shackles of religion, or maybe to return to them in full force. You're right, it's crazy because we are about to understand if we are on the verge of being freed from the shackles of people who believe in God as a concrete entity, believe in reward and punishment, in hell and paradise as they appear in the Scriptures." That way, the I-chronicler criticizes the blind Jewish belief in a God who judges and dictates what is right and what is wrong, but he also does not spare the Islamic belief in a God who

presents the same features and powers. For this I-chronicler, Man should be the master of his own destiny. He defends a fight for "(...) freedom of expression, freedom of thought, the freedom to love, to doubt, to rebel, to shout out and to be citizens capable of determining their future".<sup>33</sup>

This belief in a Man who steps beyond the limits of formal religion leads to the identification of the other by attributes other than traditional religious. The I-chronicler's son, in a chronicle,<sup>34</sup> while living abroad, introduces himself to a teacher as a Jerusalem citizen, to what the teacher replies: "By the way, I'm Jewish, too." The boy, then, suspects that he was granted a maximum grade because of his (supposed) Jewish background, which causes him to conceal his actual religious origin. "Alright," said the father, "not knowing whether it would be worthwhile telling Mr. Isaac (the teacher) the truth and how it might affect my son's A+."

Other characters of Arab background in the chronicles of Sayed Kashua also escape, or wish to, religious conventionalism. In a chronicle,<sup>35</sup> a Syrian, a Lebanese and the I-chronicler named "Sayed Kashua" take part in a Italian Literature Festival and the Syrian introduces himself as: "(I am Syrian) but please don't ask which ethnic group I belong to, or which religion and please don't ask who I'm for or who I'm against." A chronicle in which the writer articulates a peace plan,<sup>36</sup> he indicates secularism as a project: "Belief is permitted. Heresy is permitted. The state will not have a religion."

In another chronicle,<sup>37</sup> the I-chronicler mentions his desire to go to a secular country. "The thought of remote New Zealand came to me again as a place of refuge. Oy<sup>24</sup> New Zealand, where 40 percent of the inhabitants are considered to be secular and without religious affiliation. On top of which, the New Zealand air will undoubtedly do wonders for my complexion." Nevertheless the author inflicts a positive role to religion in some contexts, especially when it doesn't take away from men the possibility to decide his destiny, but it serves well for other purposes. In a certain chronicle,<sup>38</sup> he listens to the radio and hears a sermon from an *imam* Friday morning. As he was about to touch the dial, he hears a message which he considers quite welcoming: "A moment before I switched back, I heard the imam talking about optimism in Islam and I decided to keep listening. Well, according to this imam, who certainly displayed expertise in the material and made use of quotations from the Prophet Mohammed and other stories, a Muslim is not allowed to be pessimistic. Optimism is the Muslim's natural state and he must cling to optimism and spurn pessimism, even when the going gets very tough. So he decides: "Next week, inshallah, he'll improve and write something decent."

The I-chronicler sees in religion and in religious laws a way of keeping a minority group united. "I might have understood this behaviour" of adopting religious prohibitions, while referring to the dietary laws related to Passover, or the fasting of the Yom Kippur,<sup>25</sup> "when it comes to Jews living as a minority in foreign countries, where they try to maintain some kind of identity, a shared destiny and a unique character. (...) But when it comes to an entire country, to a law, to people who have already become the majority, it starts to be somewhat worrisome".<sup>20</sup>

This is how the I-chronicler understands Israel, not only as a Jewish State, but also as a religious Jewish State, which for him mean different things. He rebels when he hears uncertainties towards the

<sup>18</sup>*Haredi*, in Hebrew, means "fearful". The term refers to the ultra-orthodox Jew.

<sup>19</sup>Ultra-orthodox Jews wear shirts with four corners, where the fringes (*tsitsiot* in Hebrew) hang as reminders of the established obligations of God.

<sup>20</sup>The ultra-orthodox Jews are known for their belief in the Holy Land, which was promised by God to the Jewish people.

<sup>21</sup>*Kaffiyeh* is the part of a costume traditionally worn by the Muslim Arabs, which has gained a special status representing the fight of the Palestinian people for their land.

<sup>22</sup>The *menorah* (chandelier of seven holders) is one of the most remarkable symbols for the Jewish people.

<sup>23</sup>Naftali Bennett is an Israeli politician who has led the right-wing religious party *Yisrael Beiteinu* (The Jewish Home), which preaches that Israel is the homeland for the Jews only.

<sup>24</sup>*Oy* is a Yiddish complaining word.

<sup>25</sup>Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, the most important day in the Jewish religious tradition. Religious Jews fast during that day.

future for the Jewish people: "(...) so many years of life amid this people have made me almost one of their sons. Jewish history has become an integral part of my history. So how can I fall asleep when the Palestinian president is scheduled to speak the next day and hurl mud at the country I live in and at the nation within which I breathe?"<sup>39</sup> It is from those reflections that the writer Sayed Kashua introduces a new possibility for religiosity. It is not the one determined by the national categories and that serve the purposes of organization according to religion and justification for the ownership of land and privileges. Those are categories which enable the authenticity, the interpretation of religious rules and the manipulation according to the individuals' beliefs, a religion that supports someone in the feeling that he/she belongs to something bigger than him/herself, to constitute a population, a nation, without, nevertheless, predetermining people's behaviour. It is a religion which becomes flexible according to individual beliefs and needs.

In the case of the I-chronicler's son, for example, who finally would be circumcised, the wife, who is also from a Muslim background, determines: "Rabbi Yishai (will perform the circumcision). He's been recommended by absolutely everyone. He's cut half of Jerusalem without a problem." "But a Rabbi?" asks the I-chronicler. To which she replies: "Hey, if we have to live in Jewish state, then why not take advantage of what it offers?"<sup>26</sup> In a dialogue,<sup>40</sup> the I-chronicler and his wife decide, for many reasons that they should pretend to be Jewish for a week. But they decide not to be "ordinary Jews". "But we'll be leftists, won't we?" asks the wife. "Of course," replies the I-chronicler. "Secular too, a small *Kiddush*<sup>26</sup> for the experience and that's it, we don't observe *kashrut*<sup>27</sup> and things like that." They will have a "Shabbat meal, we'll put up a *mezuzah*<sup>28</sup> and buy a candelabrum and a *Kiddush* cup".<sup>29</sup>

When invited for a Shabbat meal at the house of some Jewish acquaintances from Jerusalem, the I-chronicler reports that this Jewish hosts have changed the traditional wine blessing ("Sanctify us *between* all the nations") in a way that includes all of us ("Sanctify us among all the nations"), "with an emphasis on the words 'among' making sure that we had gotten the message."<sup>24</sup> The concept of sanctification within Judaism is determinant for the identity of the Jewish people, who believe to have been sanctified from all other peoples, becoming, that way, unique. Changing this concept means, theologically, to change the unique relation that Jews, as people, believe to have with God and with non-Jewish as well. Among Israeli Jewish citizens, there are expressive efforts to turn Israel into an inclusive and multicultural country by the creation of non- *governmental* organizations and other kind of institutions and civil actions.

In a chronicle,<sup>30</sup> the I-chronicler, whose son finds himself depressed since Christmas, Hanukkah and the Feast of the Sacrifice, promises him that on the Feast of the Sacrifice next year, he would decorate the lamb (which was sacrificed instead of Ishmael, according to the Islamic religious tradition) as a Christmas tree, with shiny lights and, among other symbols, a *hanukiah*,<sup>31</sup> - as if his son's bad mood was

<sup>26</sup>*Kiddush* is the sanctification of the wine (and grape juice) in the Jewish tradition.

<sup>27</sup>*Kashrut* consists of the traditional religious dietary Jewish laws.

<sup>28</sup>A *mezuzah* is a piece of a parchment hanging from the doorjamb of a house which indicates that whoever lives there is Jewish.

<sup>29</sup>*Kiddush* cup in where wine is poured in order to be sanctified for the Jewish ceremonies.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Hanukiah* is a candelabra with nine candle holders, used in the celebration of Hanukkah festival.

caused by the awareness of the impossibility to celebrate all religions which are represented in the State of Israel. Sayed Kashua's chronicles try to dilute political and religious affiliations and boundaries since he considers them coercive and artificial. He tries to generate from them something new, which regards people according to their political and individual views, as people who live together, who influence and are influenced by others. It is in that sense that Sayed Kashua creates in his chronicles new religious attitudes, new conceptions of beliefs and religious practices: religions and beliefs that speak of and to real people.<sup>42-48</sup>

It is a Jew who modifies the blessing of wine in order to include all of God's creatures in his prayer, an Arab who celebrates Passover, the Jewish Easter, in his own way and by doing this, creates for himself his *matzah* and reflects on the meaning of freedom; it is an Arab who wishes Shabbat Shalom, a Jew who gets a tattoo, a Muslim who drinks beer.<sup>49-54</sup> The world of fiction and the world of reality definitely meet each other in the political fiction of Sayed Kashua's chronicles analyzed in this article. Sayed Kashua creates new political, ethnical, religious and linguistics categories which, due to their surreal possibilities, shocking and shattering established labels, make Israel a country far removed from its statistics, whose people do not fit stereotypes. As the I-chronicler of Sayed Kashua says: "As far as I am concerned, the issues of Hebrew, Arabic, Judaism and Islam are superficial, cosmetic matters".<sup>37,55,56</sup>

## Acknowledgements

None.

## Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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