

# ‘‘Voicing the Voiceless’’: The Significance of the Fictional Journalist in Jamal Mahjoub’s *Travelling With Djinns* (2004)

Raja Fadla

Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Mohammed Shaheen

Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

**Abstract**—The present article emphasizes the role of the fictional journalist as a representative of his nation in Jamal Mahjoub’s *Travelling with Djinns* (2004). It equally ventures into establishing a connection between the characterization of the journalist and the postcolonial and cultural analyses, shedding light on the role of the ‘‘fourth estate’’ in giving voice to the silenced nations. The paper specifically examines how the British-Sudanese protagonist Yasin and his father committed themselves to journalism and took the responsibility to speak on behalf of their nation. Additionally, it stresses the importance of history and identity resistance to write back in the fiction of exile. Because of the journalistic restrictions and mass media dominance, Yasin turned to literature as an alternative to write back and state his counter narrative based on historical knowledge. The study bases its analysis on different postcolonial theories such as Said’s theorization on post colonialism in order to validate the significant role of the fictional journalist in voicing the voiceless.

**Index Terms**—Jamal Mahjoub, *Travelling with Djinns*, Writing Back, Fictional Journalists, History, Identity Resistance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Journalism is considered as one of the mass media components that play a major role in delivering messages, achieving implicit goals and controlling the public opinion. Since it is widely used throughout the world, the effect of ‘‘the fourth estate’’ should be taken into consideration. Consequently, the character of the journalist is depicted in literature throughout the years from many angles. For instance, the characterization of the journalist in Anglophone Arab writers’ productions is presented in novels such as Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005) Ahdef Soueif’s *Map of love* (2000) and Nada Jarar’s *Unsafe Haven* (2016). Those texts and many other literary works give the journalist a great attention, shedding light on his/her significant role. Therefore, the study draws attention to the representation of the journalist character in Anglophone Arab fiction and mainly presents a textual and analytical reading of Jamal Mahjoub’s *Travelling with Djinns*, in which the character of the journalist is portrayed. On the one hand, the novel sheds light on the protagonist who takes responsibility to speak on behalf of the nation and voice the voiceless. On the other hand, it shows the difficulties and hardships the journalists confront in their profession.

Jamal Mahjoub is a Sudanese English author who has published eight English novels among them *The Carrier*, (1998) and *In the Hour of Signs* (1996). It is important to mention that Mahjoub is a journalist-novelist who owns the Guardian and Heinemann African Short Story Prize. In the novel of *Traveling with Djinns*, Mahjoub maps the postcolonial features of the Sudanese nation through the main character Yasin and his father. Mahjoub’s novel tells the story of a family that runs away from its homeland Sudan because of the critical articles’ publication against the Sudanese government and the journalistic restrictions imposed on them. Nevertheless, Yasin follows the path of his father as a journalist and an intellectual who seeks knowledge in the books of history and literature. The novel shows that Yasin is aware about the responsibility to transfer that knowledge to his son Leo, a seven years old boy. They take an educational trip throughout Europe, moving south to Germany with a car Peugeot 504, a third world nostalgic car that reflects the past memories. Throughout the novel, Mahjoub highlights the significant role of literature as an alternative to the Arab journalists who suffer from media dominance and journalistic restrictions. Consequently, this article grapples with the role of the press and stresses the importance of literature that becomes the means through which journalists state their positions and unveil the reality of the marginalized. For this reason, the study shows that Mahjoub uses the fictional journalist not only to publish certain ideas without limitations but also to reveal the Sudanese social decay and expose the challenges that face Arab journalists.

## II. THE REALITY OF JOURNALISM IN THE FICTION OF EXILE

Like postcolonial novelists, writers in exile focus on the historical account to write back. Authors seek to fill in the gaps, correct history and present the marginalized point of view. In other words, Immigrant journalist-novelists seek to make an objective analysis and treatment of the Arab society since they are aware about the effects of media dominance. For that reason, authors create a character who can give voice to the voiceless, a person who is capable of delivering the message and uttering the unspeakable. One cannot deny the importance of the journalists' position as they have the right to portray multiple issues, control and dominate the discussion. In addition to that, their voice may change the reality by telling their own story and making a counter narrative. Consequently, one notices that many Arab writers in exile turn to use the journalist character as a lens through which the Arab world's troubles can be portrayed. In this respect, Zahia Smail Salhi and Ian Richard Netton state that, "an Anglophone Arab writer is seen as a representative of the Arab world" (2006, p. 164), adding that "the third world writer is less an artist than a native informant" (2006, p. 165). It is clear then that awareness and responsibility towards the nation pushes many Arab authors to write about the society's reality and deal with many unsolved issues throughout the fictional journalists.

Indeed, novelists hold the same principles as journalists who are considered as representatives of their nations since they are responsible for delivering the messages and speaking on behalf of the oppressed minorities. In that sense, Layla Al Malah claims that the Anglophone Arab writers play a major role in creating a historical account about their homelands and they are considered as real mediators between eastern and western cultures, "they did not betray their cultural memory, deny their own past or prove disloyal to their country of origin, rather, they viewed both past and present critically" (2009, p. 5). Due to serious political issues, authors present their productions in a way that permits them to voice the silenced and utter the unspeakable throughout fiction, "Anglophone Arab writers, it seemed, had the will to reclaim their narrative voice and recover their own discourse" (2009, p. 8). Actually, novelists have less limitations and restrictions which allow them to express ideas and treat sensitive issues unlike the journalists who are controlled by institutions.

For that reason, many exiled Arab writers are interested in claiming the point that journalists face many hardships and challenges throughout their journey. As a result, the writers' depiction of the journalists is not only made to voice the voiceless and speak about the marginalized issues but also to refer to the hardships and difficulties the journalists suffer from. In other words, the Anglophone Arab writers are using fictional journalists for a double purpose; to voice the Arab journalists at the first place and to treat the marginalized troubles. Undeniably, journalists face many struggles in the attempt to cover the Arab world's reality as well as treating the various problems that encounter the immigrants. Since, manipulators and political leaders are the controllers of the public opinion, journalists in most of the times suffer from media restrictions. The news concerning the Arab world's conflicts which is portrayed by foreign press generally lacks reliability and credibility. Therefore, the western media is accused of hiding the real story of conflicts and wars that occur in the Arab world, for instance, the Algerian war is represented from a western angle for hidden political reasons. For that sake, Frantz Fanon mentions that,

Round by indifference or hostility: all this is quite normal. The nationalist leaders know that international opinion is formed solely by the Western Press. Now, when a journalist from west asks us questions, it is seldom in order to help us. In the Algerian war, for example, even the most liberal of the French reporters never ceased to use ambiguous terms in describing our struggle. When we reproached them for this, they replied in all good faith that they were being objective. For the native, objectivity is always directed against him. (1963, p. 26).

Without reservation, journalists are not free; they are tied by different kinds of restrictions and suffer from journalistic limitations. Those examples are meant to explain that there is no absolute truth and that we should always question the represented news and information, analyze and construct our own story. For this reason, journalists are struggling in order to decipher the reality; the fictional journalist characterization is merely a kind of compensation to novelists-journalists of the restrictions imposed on them. In accordance with this idea, Mahjoub as a journalist-novelist; creates a fictional journalist in the novel of *Travelling with Djinn*s as a tool to explore the reality of the fourth power and the situation of the Arab world avoiding any kind of restrictions.

The depiction of the news that is taken for granted raises multiple questions among critics. Edward Said, for example, in *Covering Islam* (1981) sheds light on the role of journalism to cover the reality and even fabricate it for political purposes. As an illustration, the media has a great role in covering Islam, claiming that it is a fair and balanced representation, but in fact it is just an assumption, not the reality. On this basis, Said mentions that, "Both the media's Islam and the cultural attitude to it can tell us a great deal not only about "Islam" but about institutions in the culture, the politics of information and knowledge, and national policy" (1981, p. 40). From the above quote, one can say that Edward Said gives the role of media a post-colonial reading claiming that it is in service of colonialism and inherits the colonial and Orientalist traditions. In addition, he, as a postmodernist, attacks the media's positivism, focusing on the absolute truth and true knowledge that draws a line between reality and interpretation. Thus, he deconstructs media as thin, works for politics, and provides superficial knowledge rather than looking for what actually happened. He further mentions that media generally based on assumptions represented as facts. Additionally it highlights western victims and ignores the victims of western violence. For Said, everything that comes from human society and historical knowledge is an interpretation and there is no reliable true narration because all knowledge is merely an interpretation.

More than that, Said attacks the West for the media representations of the Middle East troubles and the reality of Islam. It is the media and the experts who determine people's perception of the world "the media are responsive to what we are and want" (1981, p. 49). Furthermore, Said asserts that,

Like all other residents of the Third World, Muslims tend to be dependent upon a tiny group of news agencies whose job is to transmit the news back to the Third World, even in the large number of cases where the news is about the world. From being the source of news, the Third World generally and Islamic countries in particular have become consumers of news [...] the Islamic world may be said to be learning about itself by means of images, histories, and information manufactured in the west" (1981, p. 52)

In the midst of all those struggles and challenges comes the intellectual, like the journalist, as a savior of his nation; a person who can challenge authorities and speak louder about the terrible issues. It is true that journalists, novelists and the writers in general are considered as the elite and the defenders of human rights. In *the Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), Said discusses the characteristics of a good intellectual, highlighting that his public role is an outsider, amateur, and disturber of the status quo. Particularly, the intellectual, from Said's perspective should separate himself from collective community. He must analyze and deconstruct other's definitions in order to state his position. In addition, Said refers to the privilege that comes to an outsider intellectual who never felt at home. In fact, the exilic intellectual has a crucial role in discussing the politics of society. For Said, the best way of criticism is to deconstruct; a true intellectual should speak truth to power. On this realm, he claims that, "one task of the intellectual is the effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are limiting human thought and communication" (1994, p. x). One can argue that the journalist as an intellectual is a deconstructionist and a transcendentalist because he is attempting to fight the constructions of fictions like East and West, and clarify marginalized people reality. As a result, the journalist is an intellectual at the first place, a person who can speak truth to power.

Accordingly, in an article entitled *Educating for Peace in a Time of Permanent War*, the critics states that "Said understood that, in order to continue to live a truthful and dignified life both as an academic and as a world citizen, he had to take the risk of violating the imperial academic code to speak against wars and brutality against marginalized people such as the Palestinians" (Carr & Porfilio, 2012, p. 94) In this respect, many critics emphasize the role of resistance and its importance. It is the intellectual's duty to transfer the message of the oppressed and to speak up about their rights. More precisely, in *Beginnings: Intention and Methods*, Said focuses on the concept of resistance, resisting tradition, conclusions and strong opinions as he mentions "in retrospect we can regard a beginning as the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works" (1975, p. 3). In fact, beginning is not a production of thought but it is an exercise of thinking in which Said called for the urge to leave tradition and the need to begin. In that sense, it is a reflection to Jamal Mahjoub's novel *Travelling with Djinnns* and the way he portrays the character of the journalist as an intellectual who departs from others narratives and states a counter narrative based on historical knowledge in order to voice the silenced nations. As a result, the present study explores social, historical and political contexts that influence the characters, at the same time, it refers to the various cultural issues like immigration, identity and alienation. Thus, the characters in the novel of *Traveling with Djinnns* used their homeland experiences in treating the cultural, sociological, and political issues.

### III. "WRITING BACK": HISTORY AND IDENTITY RESISTANCE IN JAMAL MAHJOUB'S *TRAVELLING WITH DJINNNS*

Since its publication in 2004, Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinnns* has widely attracted scholarly attention for instance, Yasemin Mohamed in an article entitled "Reconfiguring European History and Cultural Memory in Jamal Majoub's *Travelling with Djinnns*", reads the novel from a cultural perspective as "an attempt to reconfigure European history and cultural memory through a transnational, exilic perspective by exploring the British-Sudanese protagonist Yasin Zahir and his son Leo's road trip through contemporary Europe" (2015, p.1.). In fact, the question of identity in the novel has been broadly explored by many critics. For example, Michelle Strok reveal the transcultural perspectives and the identity issue through the Road novel in which, "*Travelling with djinnns* situates automobility in relation to other experiences of mobility such as migration, exile and travel involving cross-border movements as integral to European history and collective identity" (2022, p.240) as a matter of fact the researcher goes further to state that, "Mahjoub's novel portrays the road as a space for overcoming static concepts and for reflecting on new notions of identity as a result of movement through and cross space" (2022, p.241). In another article entitled *Family Members and Marital (In) Stability of Cross-Cultural Marriage in Jamal Mahjoub's Travelling with Djinnns*, Yousef Awad and Majd Alkayid demonstrate the relation between the Family members and shed a light on the marital instability of cross-cultural Marriage in the novel. Furthermore, they argue that exile plays an essential role in the novel and the experiences of the characters.

As the above review shows, recent modern scholarship has not spotted light on the role of journalists in the setting of exile. For that reason the present article is dedicated to highlight the significance of the fictional journalist. In the following part, the study focuses on how the protagonist Yasin, challenges as a journalist and the way he moves to literature as an alternative to avoid restrictions. Indeed, *Travelling with Djinnns* follows the journey of Yasin, a thirty-seven-years- old journalist who transfers the historical knowledge to the coming generation as a way to preserve his identity and establish a counter narrative. The novel is considered as a road narrative that portrays an educational

journey of a father and his son throughout Europe. Yasin is always in transit and since he moved from the homeland Sudan to settle in England his psychological stability rests in mobility.

The novel of *Travelling with Djinn*s is considered as a counter narrative to the western narrations just like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Both authors used historical knowledge in their novels as a way to state their position and write back. Jamal Mahjoub in *Travelling with Djinn*s sheds light on the importance of history and the effect of displacement and alienation. For that reason, Yasin invades libraries as a kind of resistance and a way to dig deeper into the past. Furthermore, the novel depicts Yasin's conflicts as an immigrant journalist who lives between two different cultures and languages. In this novel, Mahjoub stresses the role of education and mainly the historical knowledge in empowering the individuals and preserving the principles. As an illustration, Yasin wants his son Leo to learn and widen his reading horizon in order to make personal judgments and independent interpretations. Specifically, the author produces a realistic depiction of the Arab World issues, mainly his reference to the sociopolitical reality of the Sudanese nation that pushes many intellectuals like journalists to immigrate as it is portrayed through the character of Yasin.

At the beginning of the novel, the Mahjoub highlights the importance of history and the effect of storytelling to gain knowledge about the past. The protagonist sheds light on the significance of the elder's narratives in knowledge transformation. Once, Yasin questions about the reliability of the narration and the dimensions that may take, he often falls into "a vast web; a complex net woven of an infinite number of stories" (p. 3). It means that the novel stresses on the power of storytelling and the significance of history and identity resistance. In reality, the elder's narratives about historical events empower the relation between the individuals and their homelands which creates a sense of belonging.

Throughout the course of events, Mahjoub refers to the cultural struggle and the characters' identity split. Yasin and his family try to keep the cultural and religious order of their homeland as a kind of identity resistance that is reinforced by the historical knowledge. In fact, Yasin felt that he has no fixed home, and that his identity was affected by the host land, "I sometimes think I envy those people who know where they belong; writers who have a language and a history that is granted them with no catches, no hooks" (p. 4). From Yasin's statement, one deduces that there is a clear reference to the nation's history and the importance of language in creating the sense of belonging as Stuart Hall claims,

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (2020, p. 222)

From the above quote one may argue that identity is a process that is formed within the individual's representations. This evokes the association between journalism and the protagonist's search for stability and identity quest as it will be further explained in the coming paragraphs. Yasin, as a Sudanese journalist, always thinks that he doesn't have such privilege of a developed nation since his homeland is a kind of a neglected nomadic tribe. This position increases the sense of alienation; he almost lost the ties with his home which makes him strange and lost. Being an urban child, who grew up in a suburban environment, put him in the situation of defining his belonging to foreigners. For that reason, Yasin attempts to assimilate through learning the language and adapting to that new culture, nevertheless, he felt alienated wherever he goes. Undeniably, Yasin is torn between two nations and he almost lost the sense of belonging. As Bill Ashcroft states, 'place' might not refer to a location at all, since the formative link between identity and an actual location might have been irredeemably severed. But all constructions and disruptions of place hinge on the question: 'Where do I belong?' (2001, p. 125). Furthermore, Ashcroft states that:

Displacement is not necessarily a feeling. To some extent any 'sense' of placelessness felt by people who are born in a place is just as much constructed as identity itself...uncertainties about the location of value, ambivalence or argument about certain kinds of cultural or political affiliation, social contestation over the 'proper' use of language, confusion about the use of the word 'home' (2001, p. 155)

In accordance with this idea, the protagonist's marriage with an English wife refers to the struggles he is facing in order to adapt to the new culture. The reason that attracted him to Ellen is her incomplete Englishness; the same as him, a dark woman who makes Yasin feel at home. However, when it comes to the name choice of their son, he insists on choosing an Arabic name while his wife prefers an English one. Actually, Yasin focuses on the importance of names as an act of identity resistance, "names have their own resolve and this one has already attached itself to his growing awareness of himself." (p. 6). Leo's name "Hamdi" as Yasin calls him shows the significance of names in the process of identity resistance.

Actually, Yasin was aware about the importance of history and the responsibility to transfer that knowledge to his son: "To assemble the facts into his own sense of who he is and where he comes from" (p. 22), it was an attempt to explain to his child the reality of their belonging and to stress on the identity awareness, as he refers, "he needs to know the history [...] I am trying to prepare him for the future and for that he needs to know the past" (p. 23). Hence, it is a real educational journey filled with historical knowledge and identity resistance. It is worth signaling that Hall claims that, "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories" (2020, p. 225). Furthermore, Hall explains that the identity is based on the group of experiences that encounters the individual in the past and the present at the same time." In this

perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (2020, p. 226). As a result, the past plays a major role in strengthening the character’s identity. It is through the historical knowledge that identity is maintained and counter narratives are composed.

Through the characterization of the fictional journalist, Mahjoub mentions the obstacles that encounter Yasin throughout his journey as a foreign journalist. Additionally, he highlights the journalist’s passion for reading historical books and literary works to seek knowledge: “as I read the world makes perfect sense” (p. 42). The journey of the father and the son continues in the lands of Germany, an educational trip that holds knowledge and wisdom. For instance, Yasin narrates the story of the hoopoe that is known in the classic Sufi literature. Moreover, he quotes from books to discuss the origin of the world and questions about the blacks and mainly the slaves’ issues. He also did not miss any chance to tackle racism problems and narrate stories about the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Caucasians as well as the reality of the Negros. Furthermore, he informs his son about the past of certain civilizations like the Romans, Barbarians and Ottomans.

Mahjoub’s novel highlights the significance of universal literature that enlightens the readers’ minds and enriches their knowledge about the world. It is true that Yasin’s awareness about the significance of knowledge increased his love for literature and the need to spread that heritage to the coming generations as his father did, “when my father died he took with him his corner of history the anecdotes, the stories of his childhood and parents [...] they say, when someone dies a library vanishes forever” (p. 180). Consequently, the journey throughout Europe is made for educational reasons. It is a way to know about history, culture and the past. Yasin allows Leo to read books from his library and empowers him with the appropriate knowledge before he died. There is also a reference to the Arab architecture and previous civilizations heritage as a witness to their great achievements and glories. In reality, we can learn history from books, storytelling and architecture. Accordingly, Mahjoub, in *Travelling with djinns*, puts an emphasis on the need to study history through well organized and educational programs since the future of any nation is related to its past as the writer mentions that “ history is not the easiest of subjects at the best of times. History is forgotten” (p. 58). As a matter of fact, historical studies must be a priority in order to raise awareness and produce counter narratives.

#### IV. THE JOURNALIST PORTRAYAL: PROPAGANDA AND JOURNALISTIC RESTRICTIONS

When Yasin takes his son in a long journey without Ellen’s permission, different scenarios invaded his mind, “I can just see the headlines: Muslim fanatic kidnaps own son ” (p. 81). Yasin imagines an exaggerating reaction from Ellen after their disappearance while he considers it a kind of freedom and a journey into wholeness and identity-quest. Furthermore, Yasin confronts various troubles in his trip; the stereotypes chase him wherever he goes. It is clear then that the media images concerning the Arabs and Muslims influenced the attitude of western people like the airport officers, “in the German borders they checked his name in the list of internationally wanted suspects against any known act of terrorism perpetrated [...] no doubt the product of all those war films and biggles novels that came my way as a child” (p. 10). This story shows the mass media effects and how appearance and names reflect on the terrorists issue according to prejudices generally created by news and films. In *Covering Islam*, Said argues that “media coverage was superficial” (1981, p. 22). Even though it is scholarly, generally, media is about the power of image. This thinness and depthless make it more problematic since it speaks with authority and out of the validity. Now, media and TV which are supposed to enlighten people are spreading stereotypes throughout news. To reinforce this idea, Said devoted a chapter entitled “Islam as news” that deals with the negative impact of TV as a deceptive tool. He claims that the television depends on a Pavlovian approach, which is based mainly on brainwashing. Furthermore, He says that media, which was once about facts just like realism in literature, it becomes unreliable means which spread stereotypes and that the “truth and reality do not in fact exist” (1981, p. 42). Although Americans claim that their channels are reliable because of their privacy, Said charges them of subjectivity and unreliability. He goes further to question the creation of the differences and the binary oppositions between the East and the West.

In the novel, Yasin refers to his father’s job as a journalist and a smart political activist. Yasin’s father arrived to London in the 1950s to carry on his studies at the Yardarm school of journalism. Throughout this depiction, the novel shows the reality of propaganda in the Arab World and the journalistic restrictions that prevent journalists from portraying the Sudanese troubles: “the Sudanese nationalist movement needed voice [...] and the only way of getting a voice was to learn how to speak” (p. 61). Therefore, Yasin’s father committed himself to learn “the business of newspapers” (p. 61). He believes in the importance of counter narratives, a man who wants to voice the voiceless and speak on behalf of the oppressed. This devotion led Yasin’s father to prison in order to silence him and prevent the publication of critical articles that goes against the Sudanese government. However, he always believes that the truth will find its way and it is impossible to suppress it or hide it for a long time. For him, Truth is “like a boomerang always comes back.”(p. 88). He also considers the rumors spread in the world as a moral decay since there is no proof to prevent the political corruption.

In the light of what have been said, one concludes by confirming that the journalistic restrictions and media dominance is one of the reasons that make it harder for Yasin to choose his father as a model to follow. While Yasin was dreaming of being a sportsman, his father’s wish is to make him one of the best journalists who contribute in the nation’s development. He advises Yasin to put his focus on the marginalized people, those who need to be voiced: “you

must start at the bottom, the ordinary people, the workers, the voiceless ones” (p. 93). As it is shown earlier, the father is threatened by manipulators and accused of working for the western side. In addition to that he is considered as a spy who spreads rumors and makes propaganda against his nation. Consequently, Yasin’s father commitment to journalism was faced with the government’s threat; they exiled him and prevented his return to Khartoum.

Interestingly, the news is a source of information that portrays the horrible tragedies and shows the way people suffer silently. When the Sudanese security closed the newspaper, Yasin’s father stresses on the horrible situation and the urge to establish narrations about the arrested people and the troubles they encountered. In a conversation with Yasin, the father informs him that, “we do not have political freedom” (p. 205). Furthermore, he claims that since people do not read, they will never be aware about the reality of the events. In other words, Yasin’s father stresses on the importance of historical knowledge, for him knowledge not only raises awareness but also plays a crucial role in helping the nation to state its position. To say it differently, knowledge allows people to tell their own stories in accordance to their account instead of being misrepresented by foreigners or oppressors, Yasin says, “for half a century the country had struggled to make coherent sense of its post-colonial heritage” (p. 134). In fact, many issues are portrayed by journalists for instance, Sudan’s troubles, terrorism and the issue of jihad in addition to the cold war era results: “in the meantime, the government grew concerned with silencing all dissent, including the press” (p. 134). As a result, the press is silenced hand in hand with the marginalized nations. As a journalist, Yasin sheds light on the significance of history in maintaining identity and considers it as a tool to make counter narrative against all the stereotypes and prejudices constructed by foreigners.

From the novel, one may say that Yasin’s family relation with news and media was filled with doubts and discomfort. They accuse different channels like the ITN, BBC and CNN and consider the Jews as the dominants who run the news “they play on prejudice and ignorance to increase their audience.”(p. 289). As evidence, films are encouraging ignorance and strengthening stereotypes among people. While the family tackles the reliability of news and its credibility, Yasin wonders, “if they were right, then all we have left are relative truths, prejudice excused by counter prejudice, sectarianism” (p. 291). At the beginning of his career, Yasin works as a journalist on the local stories, and because of the media requirements, he became obliged to portray a war that occurs miles away.

In the Iraqi war, the families of the soldiers were interviewed about their pride of their sons contributing in the conflict. Yasin makes an attempt to inform the world about the oppressed stories and discuss the war in Iraq as well as the reality of its nation. One of the soldiers’ mother states that, “tell them English people. Not all Iraqi people are bad people” (p. 99). It is true then, that the real war started on the television programs in the screens of CNN and other channels: “the world is an illusion [...] for the first time in my life I began to wonder about the integrity of the British press” (p. 94). On one occasion, Yasin begged the editor Harvey to transfer him to the foreign desk while the latter refused and confesses that: “we make the news” (p. 95). After a long debate, Harvey imposed an English name for Yasin as pseudonym to publish certain articles. Due to all those limitations, the mission of Yasin did not last for a long time and his career as a reporter comes to an end.

Then, he was offered a job at the BBC and turned to the radio to work on the BBC world service. His new job is a kind of arts review program that he considers as a link to the past and a great connection to home. For Yasin, “history is about power. One history displaces another. You see what I mean? That is why we have to fight for our corner ” (p. 252). In reality, he considers the program as an opportunity to tell his story and to voice the silenced nations in reference to the ancestor’s narrations: “we are not here to promote these people. We have a struggle on our hands, to promote the other. The unknown, the exploited, the disadvantaged, the silenced” (p. 254). It means that his new job is a tool to voice the voiceless and an alternative to avoid the journalistic restrictions. Yasin finally finds something enjoyable that he can make with pride regardless of its great contribution. Literature strengthens the character of Yasin in a way it raises his awareness and responsibility about the information he transfers. Significantly, he makes efforts in order to provide a professional reading of books and essays for the large audience. He declares: “we reviewed books, interviewed authors who had just jetted in from the sprawling urban chaos of a city in west Africa, from Lahore, Calcutta, Manitoba, Ivory Coast” (p. 258). All those traits show Yasin’s commitment and responsibility to voice the voiceless. In other words, through literature and book reviews, Yasin considers himself as “a man with a mission” (p. 258).

In line with this idea, Yasin questions the importance of art and stresses on its major role in voicing the silenced. In some cases artistic productions may be an alternative to journalism that failed to portray the reality because of media restrictions. In another instance, Yasin questions, “was it the notion that politics should never be placed above art?” (p. 261). To elaborate on this, he compared one of the authors’ guests to his father who devoted his life for the sake of clarifying reality without results. And it always leads him to question about the possibility to “fight dogma with aesthetics” (p. 261). Accordingly, Edward Said in an essay entitled “From Silence to Sound and Back Again: Music, Literature, and History”, mentions that,

There are then the alternatives either of silence, exile, cunning, withdrawal into self and solitude, or more to my liking, though deeply flawed and perhaps too marginalized, that the intellectual whose vocation is to speak the truth to power, to reject the official discourse of orthodoxy and authority, and to exist through irony and skepticism, mixed in with the languages of the media, government, and dissent, trying to articulate the silent testimony of lived suffering and stifled experience. (1997, p.21)

In fact, Said stresses on the important role of intellectuals in covering the reality of the marginalized communities. Once, in an interview with an African writer, Yasin criticized some authors' works that lack creativity. Therefore, a critical situation must be taken into consideration on the one hand the artistic productions that lack contribution, on the other hand, the journalistic restrictions that limited the journalists like the case of Yasin's father who was executed far away from his home. Relying on what Yasin concludes about the importance of literature as an alternative to journalism in the Arab World, he starts writing a book about his homeland's situation by reflecting on his childhood memories. As a consequence, he was rewarded for the contribution that holds pride and responsibility of continuing his father's mission with a different tool: "I realized now that I had written my book for him, hoping to carry his struggle for social justice to another level, trying to fulfill his ambitions for me as a nation builder" (p. 292). Finally, Yasin manages to make the English countryside a kind of home, highlighting his strong relation with books and literature as a kind of resistance and a tool to state counter narratives.

## V. CONCLUSION

In short, the fictional journalists are used to highlight the profession's limitations and the challenge to represent the reality instead of being misrepresented by the West. Therefore, journalism is a tool to write back and reinforce the oppressed nations despite limitations. As a matter of fact, the immigrant writers, in the Arab world, shed light on the reality of their nations in addition to the situation of journalists who struggle in order to deliver their voice. For that reason, novelists like Jamal Mahjoub are realistic in their depictions of the Arab world's issues throughout the characterization of the journalist who speaks on behalf of his nation. Indeed, the fictional journalist used by the novelist-journalist Jamal Mahjoub to express the press challenges and the sociopolitical reality of the Arab world.

Through writing about history, Mahjoub wants us to not only make a parallel with the present situation but also to question and dominate the narrative. Mahjoub, as an immigrant Arab novelist, writes in English to stress the importance of history and identity resistance in his novel *Traveling with Djinnns*. Since Mahjoub is a novelist-journalist, he chooses the journalist character in order to express his ideas without restrictions and to show journalism challenges. In fact, the characterization of the journalist is a method to promote ideas and to avoid journalistic restrictions. Jamal Mahjoub in this case is an intellectual and an informant more than being a novelist as he 'speaks truth to power', and he is considered as a representative of the marginalized Arab world through the mirror of the fictional journalist. This is what shows the distinguished qualities and responsibilities of the journalists to report the silenced nation's troubles. All those struggles and challenges are portrayed through the eyes of Yasin and his father as journalists who stress on the significance of historical knowledge to reinforce nations.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Postcolonial Transformation*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Alkayid, M., Awad, Y. (2019) Family Members and Marital (In) Stability of Cross-Cultural Marriage in Jamal Mahjoub's Travelling with Djinnns. *The international Journal of Critical Cultural Studies*, 17(2), 1-13.
- [3] Carr, Paul R, and Brad J. Porfilio, (2012). *Educating for Peace in a Time of "Permanent War"*. New York: Routledge
- [4] Fanon, F. (1963). Concerning Violence. The wretched of the earth. *On violence: A Reader* Ed. By BB Laurence, A. Karim. Durham, Nc.78-100.
- [5] Hall, S. (2020). Cultural identity and diaspora. In *Undoing place?* (pp. 231-242). Routledge.
- [6] Malah, L., Al Malah, L. (Eds.). (2009). *Arab Voices in Diaspora*. Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature (vol. 115). Rodopi.
- [7] Mahjoub, J. (2004). *Travelling With Djinnns*. London: Vintage.
- [8] Mohammad, Y. (2015). Reconfiguring European history and cultural memory in Jamal Mahjoub's Travelling with Djinnns. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 52 (2),316-330
- [9] Nash, G. (2007). *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. Peter Lang.
- [10] Said, E. (1975). *Beginnings: Intention and Methods*. New York: Basic Books.
- [11] Said, E. (1981). *Covering Islam*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- [12] Said, E. W. (1997). From silence to sound and back again: Music, literature and history. *Raritan*, 17(2), 1-21
- [13] Said, E. (1994). *Representations of the Intellectual The 1993 Reith Lectures*. Vintage Books.
- [14] Salhi, Z. S., & Netton, I. R (Eds.). (2006). *The Arab diaspora: Voices of an anguished scream*. Routledge.
- [15] Strok, Michelle.(2022). Identities lost and found? Transcultural perspectives on Jamal Mahjoub's Road Novel Travelling with Djinnns. *Postcolonial Interventions: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. VII, Issue 1, 240-265.

**Raja Fadla** is a PhD candidate at the University of Jordan, Faculty of English Language and Literature, Amman, Jordan. She is interested in Arab Diasporic Fiction, Postcolonial Literature, Journalism and Media Studies.

**Mohammed Shaheen** is a professor of English literature at the University of Jordan in Amman, Jordan. He is the author of many books, including E.M. Foster and the Politics of Imperialism.