

### **Imagining the 'Other': A Palestinian Perspective on Israeli Identity**

In his memoirs, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982) and *The Sealed Room* (1992), the Palestinian lawyer and writer Raja Shehadeh uses literature as a political weapon to exhibit the injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people and to offer his own version of life in the Occupied Territories.

His representation of Israeli identity is mostly limited to Israeli officials and Israelis as colonizers and usurpers of Palestinian land. The distance and difference generated through a stereotypical and faceless representation of 'Israeliness' is counterbalanced by Shehadeh's portrayal of his friendship with Enoch, an Israeli Jew, in *The Third Way*. Their relationship is very close but it is marked by their mutual awareness of each other's ethnicities and the distance resulting in belonging to two peoples competing for the same territory. In *The Third Way*, the absence of any 'human' Israeli except for his friend is more revealing than the presence of Israeli officials. The insistence on a clear-cut separation between Palestinian self and Israeli other offers a more negative view of the relationship between them, which does not suggest that 'imagining the other' is the solution for the problem.

In *The Sealed Room* (1992), which is marked by Shehadeh's father's death and the impending Gulf War, the author still insists on a clear-cut distinction between self and other and does not hide his hate and contempt for the colonizer. It becomes clear that he needs a simple 'other', an enemy, to define himself against, as he is very suspicious and even angry when he meets an Israeli soldier who speaks Arabic and behaves in a friendly way. Shehadeh is showing a tentative desire to 'imagine the other' when he thinks like an Israeli strategist, trying to find the best location for the next settlement. But even though he imagines the 'other', he is still aware of his own identity in relation to this 'other' and the implications of crossing the Israeli/Palestinian boundary.

My paper examines how successful Shehadeh's representation of Palestinian-Israeli relationships is and if his refusal to allow a rapprochement between Palestinians and Israelis can be interpreted as an attempt to write back to the elimination of the Palestinians from Israeli national discourse.