

The Distortion of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Contemporary American Fiction: A Study of *The Haj*

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Abstract: *Approaching The Haj (1984) as a colonial novel which views the Palestinian people as a barbaric race threatening the existence of Israel, the paper aims to undermine critical assumptions which categorize the book as historical representation of the Middle East conflict. Published at a time in which sympathetic American voices were raising a debate over the legitimacy of Israel's imperialistic policies in the Arab world, particularly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, The Haj deployed a counter-discourse aiming to degrade the image of the Palestinians and the Islamic religion. The paper argues that The Haj, which depicts Palestine, prior to colonization, as a primitive country inhabited by nomadic barbarians coming from neighboring desert communities, is not a historical portrayal of the Middle East conflict but a replication of racial representations integral to American cultural mythology about a pre-colonial America populated by an inferior people. The paper also points out that the author's vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict is integrated into hegemonic/racist discourses incorporating narratives of barbarism and Orientalism perpetuated by the American culture industry since the 1980's when controversy in the West about radical Islamic movements and political Islam reached culmination.*

Tracing the origins of Arab history in Palestine, Ishtiyag Ahmad (2004:138) argues:

The Arabs are pre-Islamic people who lived in Palestine and various parts of West Asia before the advent of Islam. In 1517, the Ottoman Turks conquered Palestine and occupied it until 1917. The year 1917 marked a turning point in the history of Palestine not only because of the end of Turkish rule but also because of issuance of Balfour Declaration in November 1917. Under Ottoman rule, Palestine was an integral part of the 'Ottoman Empire' and Palestinians were not treated as subjects but as citizens of sovereign and independent country.

Ignoring the existence of the Jews in Palestine, Ahmad's monolithic argument emphasizes that Jewish immigration to Palestine started only after the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897 echoing radical narratives promoted by some historians who totally deny the Jewish existence in the holy land. Quoting Herzl's (1960:58) "at Basle I

founded the Jewish state". Ahmad reached the conclusion that the Jews did not exist in Palestine before the Basle convention in 1897. Ahmad's viewpoint contradicts with Kamel Al-Swafiri's (1985) study of the Arab-Israeli conflict. According to Al-Swafiri's argument which distinguishes between Judaism and Zionism, the Jews have existed in Palestine since ancient times: "They established a kingdom, governed by Saul, David and Solomon"(Al-Swafiri 1985:48). Unlike Al-Swafiri, Ahmad (2004) builds his argument on Herzl's motto, "land without people for a people without land," (qtd. in Ahmad:139), concluding that the Jewish immigration to Palestine was the result of "the discrimination and persecution they [the Jews] suffered in Europe" (Ibid.). Rooted in fundamentalist Islamic thought, Ahmad's totalizing argument on the Middle East conflict blurs the lines between what is Zionist and what is Jewish ignoring history and reality. Ahmad (2004:139) points out that when Palestine was chosen as "the future location" for the Zionists in Basle in 1897, they invented the concept of a historic right to the country:

The Zionist claim of historic rights did not have a legal, political or even moral basis as it [Palestine] was the homeland of the Palestinians, who inhabited the country from the dawn of history until the creation of Israel when majority of them [Palestinians] were forcibly expelled by Jewish terrorist organizations.

Regardless of the historical facts mentioned by Ahmad concerning the Palestinian tragedy and the horrible crimes committed by the Zionists against the Palestinian people, it is obvious that he completely denies the existence of the Jews in Palestine. In this context, Ahmad's biased argument runs counter to history because the Jews have been part of ancient Palestine sharing a homeland with other, races and religions for ages. For example, when Palestine came under the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Majeed (1834-1861), the Jews were part and parcel of the Palestinian community and they had their own schools, synagogues and rabbis. Being convinced of the historical rights of the Jews in ancient Palestine, Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey allowed them to build many settlements to accommodate thousands of persecuted Jews who escaped to Palestine as a result of their genocide in Russia in the aftermath of "the assassination of the Tsar Alexander the Second in 1882" (qtd. in Sulaiman 1984:1). Prior to Herzl's decision to establish a Jewish state for "a people without a country" in a "country without a people" (qtd. in Ahmad 2000:139), it is apparent that, the Jews, like Christians and Muslims, were part of the Palestinian mosaic.

Integrated in totalitarian paradigms, assimilated from Islamic narratives about Palestinian history, Ahmad's view of the Middle East conflict is a radicalization of the issues of identity and race. Surprisingly, Uris's colonial discourse, in *The Haj*,¹ rooted in Zionist

ideology, becomes the counterpart of Ahmad's vision, mentioned above, because each one of them enforces a hegemonic narrative that negates the existence of the other undermining the possibility of promoting a multicultural dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians. For example, in *The Haj*, Uris uses Biblical and colonial discourses to impose his Zionist narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict banishing the Palestinians outside history. Based on nineteenth century theological debates about Biblical Israel where the Kingdom of David was viewed as a Jewish state, *The Haj* utilizes a Christian-centric narrative to fulfill the purposes of the Zionist author. In other words, the Zionist treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict in *The Haj*, aims to distort history by advocating a Euro-centric/colonialist myth as a way of nationalizing the land of Palestine. Therefore, the Palestinians are dismissed from Uris's Zionist narrative the same way they were dismissed out of their land in 1948 and in 1967.

Published in 1984, at a crucial time which Edward Said (1988:46) calls "the Great Terrorism Scare (1983-1987) when hysteria about Arab/Islamic fanaticism, hijackings, bomb throwing and hostage taking reached its panic peak". *The Haj* participated in deploying damaging stereotypes about Arab culture and traditions. For example, the colonial discourse of *The Haj* denounces the Palestinian people as remnants of a barbaric race reconstructing racial paradigms available for political manipulation in American culture in order to defile the image of the Arab people and the Islamic religion. Released at a time in which controversy over the legitimacy of the expansionist Israeli policies in the Middle East reached a zenith, Uris's novel participated in distracting western public attention from involvement with the tragic consequences of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), which culminated in the massacre of the Palestinian citizens in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila.

Obviously, Uris's book constitutes part of a category of fictional literature which has played a vital role in the shaping of the hostile image of the Arabs/Palestinians in the American collective memory. Viewing the Palestinians as savages and barbarians, dominated by tribal culture as well as a vengeful religion (Islam) which preaches violence and hate, Uris's narrative gives the colonizers the right to eliminate the Palestinian people in order to free the promised land for Zionist settlement. In Uris's (1984:6) narrative, the Palestinians are described as originally nomadic barbarians who infiltrated into Palestine from "the Arabian desert about two hundred and fifty years ago and purified the region for Islam through sword and fire." Apparently, the treatment of the Middle East conflict in *The Haj* is shaped by western monolithic discourses on the Orient in addition to the slave and Red Indian myths assimilated from American culture

because such narratives serve the same imperialistic interests pursued by the author.

In his discussion of the relationship between the East and the West, Said (1978:3) defines Orientalism as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient: “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient”. Located in the discourses of Orientalism and colonialism, *The Haj* aims to erase the identity of the colonized Palestinians by transforming them into “people without history” (Said 1979:23). Portraying the Palestinians as representatives of the forces of evil in the holy land and viewing the colonizers as carriers of civilization, Uris’s narrative categorizes the former not only as hostile but depraved. In this context, *The Haj* provides support for the powerful at the expense of the powerless depicting the colonizers as victims and the colonized as terrorists, humiliating those who are historically humiliated. Moreover, in *The Haj*, the Palestinians are reduced to one mass of Arab terrorism that must be exterminated, an image so pervasive that it seems to be “an almost Platonic essence inherent in all Palestinians and Muslims” (Said 1988:52).

Promoting a perverted vision of the history of the Middle East conflict, *The Haj* emerges as a racist/colonial novel which feeds the imagination of western readers with distorted images about the Arab people and Islam in order to achieve dubious political ends integral to the ideology of its author. For example, while the Palestinians, prior to colonization are depicted, as barbarians inhabiting “an Indian country,” the new Jewish state is described as a paradise, established by the efforts of the colonizers. Further, in an interview, Uris calls for “unlimited military support for Israel” claiming that the Jewish state is “the only democracy in that part of the world” (qtd. in Manganaro 1988:12). Delineating Israel as an extension of western democracies and emphasizing that Israel is the only military frontier of the West in the region, Uris’s representation of the Middle East conflict leads to a construction of anti-Arab/anti-Palestinian paradigms reflective of his political ideology. Even the narrative strategy of the book is shaped by Uris’s biased perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which turns the novel into what Jean-Francoise Lyotard calls “grand narrative”(qtd. in Gohar 2001:29). In *The Haj*, the voices of the Arab, Palestinian, Jewish and British characters are blended into a monologic and imperial voice reflecting the author’s attitude toward the Middle East issue. In other words, the incidents of *The Haj* are historicized by a narrative structure that manipulates the voices of all the characters in the novel in order to

amplify the political ideology of the author overwhelming the reader with perverted images about Islam and the Palestinian people. Employing a narrative dynamic through which all the characters turn into mouthpieces expressing the views of the author, *The Haj* seeks to reconstruct history and obscure the hegemonic policies of colonization. By using narrators who view Palestinian society at the time of colonization as primitive, barbaric and pre-historic, Uris attempts to mystify the brutal process of conquest by making it seem to be the inevitable result of sweeping historical forces. In this context, *The Haj*, which depicts the Palestinian people as savages and barbarians who must be colonized, becomes part of the anti-Arab/anti-Islamic discourse integral to the American culture industry. Paradoxically, the more one reads the text of *The Haj*, the more s/he becomes familiar with Arab images as viewed in American culture and the less s/he learns about the Palestinians and the history of the Middle East conflict. In other words, the Palestinian subaltern remains inaccessible to the extent that the reader of *The Haj* learns more about colonialism and Zionism than s/he learns about the Palestinian or “the Orient” (Said 1979:12). Further, the Arab world and Palestinian society in addition to the Islamic religion are seen in *The Haj* only as what Said calls “communities of interpretations” which remain voiceless until being reinterpreted and reconstructed by the Zionist author. In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981:43) refers to the impact of the American media and culture machine in the formation of stereotyped images about Islam and the Arab world:

For most Americans (the same is generally true for Europeans) the branch of the cultural apparatus that has been delivering Islam to them for the most part includes the television and radio networks, the daily newspapers, and the mass-circulation news magazines, films play a role, of course, if only because to the extent that a visual sense of history and distant lands informs our own, it often comes by way of the cinema. Together, this powerful concentration of mass media can be said to constitute a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media.

In his prelude to *The Haj*, Uris depicts the Palestinians as a small minority living in the Tabah village, a microcosm of ancient Palestine prior to colonization. The Arab community in pre-colonial Palestine, according to the novel, consists of tribal factions who only understand the language of force: “[the dagger is] the weapon by which we rule our people,” says the old mayor of Tabah as he gives his “jeweled dagger” to his son (Ibrahim), in a death-bed scene “enacting the ancient rite of the passage of power” from father to son (Uris 1984:1). Nevertheless, the villagers refuse to select Ibrahim as the new mayor after the death of his father “breaking the Soukori [Ibrahim’s clan] hold of a century.”

Following his father's advice, Ibrahim forces his rivals by the power of the sword to change their minds, thus, "the election was over within a minute, with each one of the eight adversaries stopping before him [Ibrahim] one at a time bowing, kissing his hand and declaring his loyalty" (*ibid.*). From the beginning of the novel, a pre-Zionist Palestine is delineated as a small tribal community that was easily subjugated by the power of the sword: "Ibrahim Soukori was in his mid twenties and Mukhtar [mayor] of Tabah and he knew the power of the dagger in Arab life" (*ibid.*). By describing the Palestinians, in the prelude, as tribal factions, a dirty people who have no idea about "sanitation," "a herd of sheep," driven by "a dictator," and a barbarian race living in a primitive community where "there was no way to either rebel or protest" (*ibid.*:6), Uris establishes racial paradigms and apartheid discourses assimilated from western cultural mythology about a pre-European America and a pre-slavery Africa.

In his foreword to the book, Uris points out that the events of *The Haj* are "a matter of history and public records" emphasizing that the novel's scenes are created around "realistic historical events" used as "backdrop for the book." On the contrary to Uris's argument about the validity of the historical novel as reflection of reality, Hayden White (1978:82) points out that all historical narratives are fictional works of art, "the contents of which are much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in sciences." In his historical record of events, Uris portrays the Palestinians as a minority of nomadic barbarians who "ride donkeys" and sleep on "goat skin." By viewing the indigenous Palestinians as a barbaric minority living in the area of colonization before the arrival of the colonizers, Uris provides a pretext for their elimination since they are seen as a source of danger to the civilized project initiated by the colonizers. In this context, Uris's novel turns into a propaganda machine, which aims to distort the history of the Arab/Israeli conflict incorporating racial myths integral to American culture. For example, Palestine is depicted as a primitive land, "an Indian country," given as a gift by God to the Zionist colonizers to "refine, exalt and humanize the uncivilized barbarians of [the Middle East]" (qtd. in Gohar 2005:36). Like the Manifest Destiny myth of the New World which encourages colonial expansion across the frontier to include all the Indian territory in the American West, *The Haj* implies that the Zionist colonizers are ordained by God to create an idealistic society on the land which extends from "the Negev to Sinai deserts" where "Moses and the Hebrew tribes had wandered for forty Biblical years" (Uris 1984:24). Modelled on American colonial mythology, Uris's narrative involves the moral responsibility of the Zionist colonizers to bring civilization to the land of the barbarians where "The

poor fellahin [peasants] who worked in the land were fleeced by day by the Turks, marauded by the Bedouins at night and cheated by owners” (*ibid.*:16).

According to Uris (*ibid.*), the colonized Palestinians gained benefits from the process of colonization because the colonizers came to civilize a wasteland country where “there were neither schools, nor roads, neither hospitals nor new farming methods.” Uris’s narrative of a pre-historic Palestine which exists outside human history until being colonized by a superior race is an extension of colonial discourses about a pre-European America inhabited by a race of savages. Banishing the Palestinian subalterns outside human history, *The Haj* attempts to silence the Palestinian people restricting the space in which “the colonized can be re-written back into history” (Benita 1987:39). In other words, the Palestinians in *The Haj* remain the colonized victims of racial representations which “repress the political history of colonialism” (Jan Mohamed 1986:79). Imposing western/racial paradigms on his representation of the history of the Arab/Israeli conflict, Uris presumes the racial superiority of the colonizers over what Frantz Fanon (1967) calls “the Wretched of the Earth” in order to justify colonization. In *The Haj*, Uris rationalizes the process of colonization, which results in the conquest, and subjugation of the colonized; therefore, the Palestinians are viewed as racial stereotypes replacing negative images of Native Americans, African Americans and other minorities subjected to racism, hegemony and persecution in American history.

Consequently, Uris’s (1984:6) definition of a pre-colonial Palestine as a primitive land inhabited by a barbaric people “screaming to an unhearing Allah,” is not a reflection of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict but an extension of racial narratives maintained by American cultural and colonial mythology. Viewing a pre-colonial Palestine as what Nahum Goldman (1955:6) calls “the un-peopled land,” Uris (1984:6) affirms that Palestinians are not part of the indigenous people of ancient Palestine: “My family was the Soukori clan, which had belonged to the Wahhabi Bedouin tribe,” says Ishmael, Ibrahim’s son and one of Uris’s narrators. According to Uris’s narrative, the Arab community in Palestine prior to colonization consists of remnants of a tribal clan who came from “the Arabian Peninsula” leading the army of the Muslim conquest of the Holy Land. However, the Arab population of Palestine, according to the author, was reduced in number as a result of their defeats by what he calls “the invading armies” coming from Egypt and Turkey. Ishmael, an Arab character embodying the imperial voice of the author, portrays the Palestinians, prior to the era of Zionist colonization, as nomadic people who do not constitute a settled civilized community: “Our branch of the

[Wahhabi] tribe roamed an area between Gaza and Beersheba, crossing back and forth from the Negev to the Sinai deserts” (*ibid.*).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1967) argues that there is a time in which “the colonialist reaches the point of no longer being able to imagine a time occurring without him. His eruption into the history of the colonized is defied, transformed into absolute necessity” (qtd. in Gohar 2001:85). Pretending that the real history of Palestine starts with the Zionist colonization of the country, Uris states that prior to the arrival of the colonizers, Palestine was an empty desert and neglected wasteland “inhabited by snakes and mosquitoes” and visited by nomadic tribes from surrounding desert countries. Due to the Zionist colonization of Palestine, “the desolate wasteland whose fields had been raped, feudalized and abandoned by Ottomans and Arabs, were now being brought back to life” and “north of the ancient port of Jaffa, a new Jewish city sprang out of the sand domes: Tel Aviv, the Hill of Spring” (Uris 1984:22). As a result of Zionist colonization, the barren land which was neglected for centuries by the Arabs and Turks was metamorphosed into a civilized community and Jewish settlements called Kibbutzim “took on the chore and the sweet voice of spring time was heard in Palestine” (*ibid.*).

According to the preceding narrative, the colonized Palestinians should be grateful to the Zionist colonizers who turned “the malarial swamps” of Palestine into “a carpet of green” transforming the Palestinian wasteland into a modern country called Israel. In this context, the colonized Palestinians are persuaded to despise their own history because of its inferiority and look with awe at the history of the colonizers. Further, the colonial discourse of *The Haj* aims to damage the morale of the colonized Palestinians by viewing with contempt their own history as primitive and inferior compared to the superior history of the colonizers. Such colonial strategy leads to psychological colonization that remains for years after the end of the economic and political manacles of colonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1967:40) points out that the colonial system functions by deploying racial paradigms which widen the gap between colonizer and colonized leading to psychological colonization: “you are [civilized] because you are [colonizer] and you are [colonizer] because you are [civilized].”

Approaching the Palestinians on the eve of colonization as primitive people, colonized by a superior race, Uris attempts to degrade the native inhabitants of Palestine dismissing out of history an entire people with inherited traditions and unique culture. Throughout *The Haj*, Uris delineates the Palestinians as Bedouin barbarians comparing their primitive culture to the sophisticated culture of the colonizers, in order to underscore colonial assumptions about the ultimate moral inferiority of the colonized and the fundamental incongruity between

barbarism and civilization. Thus, *The Haj* not only aims to justify the displacement of the Palestinian people but also constructs a myth of pure racial paradigms that enforces the hegemonic/western discourse of the colonizers on the colonized subalterns. Inscribing the Palestinian non-western subject as unknowable, Uris's "grand narrative" seeks to negate both the pre-colonial world and the Orient.

In *The Haj*, the colonized Palestinian is depicted as a primitive Bedouin who came from neighboring desert countries not to settle in Palestine but to search for work in the emerging Jewish settlements. Due to his Bedouin origins, the Palestinian cannot be assimilated into the civilized society of the colonizers because in essence the Bedouin is "thief, assassin and raider and hard labor [for him] was immoral. Despite his ruggedness and destitution, the [Palestinian] Bedouin remained the Arab ideal" (Uris 1984:12). To validate the process of colonization, Uris portrays the colonized Palestinians as savages standing as obstacles on the way of civilization. Portraying the native Palestinian as a threat to the Zionist project of colonization, Uris argues that the Palestinian is vicious by nature since he lives in a society dominated by the tribal laws of the desert where the only way to achieve one's ambitions is "to destroy the man above and dominate the men below" (*ibid.*:17).

According to the above-cited narrative, the primitive Palestinians are not qualified to be part of the civilized Zionist community because of their inferiority. Therefore, they should be eradicated in order to pave the way for colonial expansion and settlement. Obviously, in his depiction of the Palestinians, Uris incorporates racial paradigms that appeared in embryonic form in seventeenth-century captivity narratives written by Puritan American authors and perpetuated by eighteenth-century frontier fiction. Like his American counterparts who found no evil in marginalizing the Native Americans in "reservations," the author of *The Haj* affirms the necessity of isolating the Palestinian "savages" in "refugee camps" because the primitive past must die in order to allow the civilized present to have its evolution. In its binary opposition, "good colonizer" versus "evil colonized," and in its racist discourse, *The Haj* promotes damaging stereotypes manufactured by the American culture industry and maintained by colonial mythology in order to degrade the Palestinian people by placing them at the bottom of the societal 'totem pole'.

Portraying the Palestinians as primitive people who live outside human history, Uris's narrative provides ready excuses for their eradication since they stay as barriers in the path of civilization. In *The Haj* the notion of the primitive and barbaric natives of Palestine mounts to a political myth which justifies the Zionist expansion in their territories. Uris's attempt to justify colonization and underestimate the

colonized transforms *The Haj* into what Leonard Thompson calls “political myth.” According to Thompson (1985:1), a political myth is “a tale told about the past to legitimize a regime” and a political mythology is “a cluster of such myths” that reinforces one another and jointly constitutes the historical element in “the ideology of the regime.” It is relevant to argue that the colonial discourse of *The Haj* incorporates political myths that aim to rationalize the process of colonization, ignoring its impact on the psyche of the colonized who must be consequently marginalized in refugee camps inside their borders, or anywhere else.

According to *The Haj*, the Zionist settlers have colonized a land which was empty except for a few numbers of tribal people originally coming from surrounding countries, who profited from the process of colonization. In Uris’s view, the Palestinian people as a whole were remnants of barbaric tribes originated in the Arabian desert and lived a nomadic life in the region called Palestine during the eras of the Ottoman and British occupation. Strongly tied to their roots in what Uris calls “the Wahhabi tribes of Arabia,” the small Arab population of Palestine stayed in the Holy Land only because they were attracted to the rewarding work opportunities in the Zionist settlements. Apparently, one of the political/colonial myths, utilized by Uris in this context, is the small population myth which signifies that the colonized natives (the Palestinians) constituted a minority in the land of colonization (Palestine) prior to the arrival of the colonizers. By reducing the number of the Arab community in a pre-colonial Palestine to few clans and remnants of nomadic tribes, Uris aims to justify the subsequent domination of the allegedly primitive and numerically few natives.

Categorizing the Palestinians as part of a barbaric and nomadic community which must be colonized by the carriers of western civilization, Uris banishes the former outside human history simply because history in Uris’s view starts with the arrival of the colonizers in the land of colonization. In other words, a pre-colonial Palestine, like a pre-Columbus America and a pre-slavery Africa, exists outside history until it is placed on the map of the world by the Zionist colonizers. On this basis, colonization becomes an inevitably historical process aiming to bring civilization to a backward and primitive region and modernize a barbaric people who consequently get benefits from the privilege of being colonized by a superior race. Echoing Uris’s narrative, Teddy Kollek, the Zionist mayor of Jerusalem refers to some of the privileges gained by the colonized Palestinians in the aftermath of colonization:

We’re opening a large Arab library in Jerusalem, built out of money we raised, not from Arabs. All the rich Arabs haven’t given us a penny. It will be the freest library in the Arab world. You couldn’t have all these books in Egypt or in Syria. Each one of these countries

excludes a large number of books published somewhere else. In Jerusalem, they [Palestinians] can have all the books (qtd. in Kurzweil 1992:425).

Describing Israel as the only oasis of democracy in the Middle East, Kollek views the Jewish state as a benevolent country offering charity to the poor Palestinians, ignoring the brutalities committed by the Israeli military machine during confrontations with the Palestinian citizens in the occupied territories. Further, Kollek's narrative, like its counterpart in *The Haj*, depicts the colonizers as carriers of the banners of civilization:

When we came back to Jerusalem we did not destroy a single mosque or a single church or a single monastery. This is the situation (*ibid.*).

Like Uris, Kollek delineates the Zionist colonizers as messengers of love and peace who came to modernize Palestine, not to usurp its territories and drive its native people to live in exile and refugee camps. To Kollek, the Palestinian people should be grateful to the Zionist colonizers who offer them the privilege of living in a country colonized by a democratic state [Israel]:

They should accept that they live under better circumstances than any other group elsewhere else. The fact is that there is more freedom of access to holy places, more freedom of expression, of teaching. They have a free press which they never had (*ibid.*).

Contrary to the narratives of Uris and Kollek, Penny Johnson argues that Israel is "an occupying force" which denies Palestinians any right to a nation and territory. "In order to suppress Palestinian national feelings," argues Johnson (1988:7), the Israeli colonizers "have imposed a veritable routine of repression" which includes "massive land confiscation, demolition of houses" and "torture of prisoners" in addition to "closing of schools" and "the suppression of expressive culture and censorship" of Palestinian publications. In a similar context Meron Benvenisti (1983:131) argues that the Israeli policy of censorship aims to "eradicate expression" which "suggests that Palestinians are a nation with a heritage" (*ibid.*). Moreover, Sara Brown points out that the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories have prevented the Palestinian people from writing their own history censoring "educational curricula which teaches Palestinian children little about their people's history" (qtd. in Gohar 2001:127).

In compliance with the narrative of Kollek, *The Haj* aims to glorify the colonizers for their efforts and achievements in the land of colonization ignoring the painful consequences of colonization on the psyche of the colonized Palestinians. In order to underline the superiority of the colonizers, Uris's narrative functions by conflating

racial paradigms which consolidate the image of the Palestinians as both barbaric and degraded. While portraying the colonizers as civilized pioneers, the colonial discourse of *The Haj* demonizes the Palestinian and his culture in order to justify his elimination from the land of colonization. The process of demonization includes the deployment of racial representations enhancing the myth of the Palestinian as a nomadic barbarian which parallels the myth of the savage Indians of the New World. For example, the author of *The Haj* demonizes Ibrahim, the mayor of Tabah by depicting him at the zenith of his degradation as he forces his sixteen-year-old wife to have sex with him in spite of suffering from vaginal bleeding. Highlighting the image of the Palestinian as a brute, corrupted by an inferior religion and a primitive culture, Uris affirms his removal and transference out of the civilized community of the colonizers. In spite of being a friend of the Zionist colonizers and regardless of his ambitions to be isolated from the Arab community and live under the Israeli flag, Ibrahim is not allowed to be assimilated into the new emerging state of Israel. His race, religion and culture confine him to be a stereotype that eventually alienates him from the civilized world of the Zionist colonizers.

Viewing Palestine prior to colonization as a primitive community and a waste land inhabited by nomadic barbarians and tyrannical patriarchs, Uris justifies the displacement of the Palestinian savages who are corrupted by the knowledge and habits they gained from their religion (Islam). Guided by a religion which breeds hatred and vengeance, the native Palestinians, according to *The Haj* constituted “the original driving force behind Islam for it was their men who had filled the ranks of Muhammad’s first armies and spearheaded the Muslim conquest” (Uris 1984:17). Uris’s argument about Palestine as a non-Arab country, invaded and occupied by Arab tribes is integrated into narratives associated with the European/medieval crusades against the Arab world. In this context, the Zionist conquest of Palestine is legitimized on a Biblical basis and the process of colonization is justified as the restoration of the holy land of Palestine from the Palestinian/Muslim invaders who turned it into a wasteland. Unlike the Zionist colonizers, the Arab/Palestinian invaders are viewed as dirty savages and blood-thirsty barbarians. By delineating the Palestinian subaltern as “despicable in his character and totally blameworthy for the misery that has befallen the historical region known today as Israel” (Manganaro 1988:3), Uris negotiates the possibility of his displacement. Fictionalizing Palestine prior to colonization as a primitive village called “Tabah,” Uris (*Ibid.*) argues that Tabah is part of “ancient Canaan” which is “a land bridge” between “the powers of the Fertile Crescent Mesopotamia and Egypt.” Historically, Tabah or ancient Palestine is not an Arab land according to Uris (*Ibid.*) because waves of

Semitic tribes drifted or swarmed into Canaan and settled to create a pre-Biblical civilization of city states that were eventually conquered and absorbed by the nomadic Hebrew tribes.

According to *The Haj*, there were few Arab/Palestinian inhabitants in Palestine until the time of the Muslim conquest when Muhammad came to Tabah (ancient Palestine) followed by the armies that swept out of the desert under the banner of Islam to evict the Christians from the Holy Land (*ibid.*). Obviously, the history of ancient Palestine as depicted in *The Haj* seems to exist only in the fictional imagination of the author because the Muslim invasion of Palestine took place many years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, during the reign of Umar Ibn Al-Khattab.

In *The Haj*, Uris points out that after the Muslim conquest of Palestine, the farms and lands of the region were sold to wealthy landlords from Turkey, Syria and Lebanon who exploited the poor and illiterate Palestinians. Uris also states that the nomadic inhabitants of Palestine who came from the Arabian desert with the Muslim conquest were not interested in the land because they did not intend to settle in a country full of swamps and rocks. When the Zionist colonizers arrived in Palestine they restored the sold land of Palestine from Syrian and Turkish feudal lords using all possible means. According to Uris, the colonizers not only restored the land of Palestine from foreign landlords but also provided the few population of the country with many work opportunities in the Jewish settlements (Kibbutzim) where they were able to survive under better conditions. Uris's argument that the Palestinians are originally primitive Bedouins coming from the desert not to settle in Palestine but to search for work in the emerging Jewish settlements is recently echoed by Kollek. In a 1992 interview, Kollek points out:

When we came back there were hardly any Arabs in Palestine. The vast majority came because they were attracted by the labor conditions created by the influx of Jews (qtd. in Kurzweil 1992:425).

In the narratives of both Uris and Kollek, there are attempts to distort history by viewing Palestine prior to colonization as a wasteland inhabited by barbarians. Seeking to obscure the damaging consequences of colonization and settlement on the psyche of the colonized, Uris depicts the Palestinians on the eve of colonization as primitive people who benefited from the process of colonization. Being the target of Uris's cultural misrepresentations, the Palestinian people as viewed in *The Haj* remained ignored and neglected to the historical ghetto, the simple-minded concept of pre-history. Considering the history of the colonized, prior to the arrival of the colonizers as inconsequential, Uris's narrative provides a pretext for the colonization

of Palestine and the subjugation of its native inhabitants. In other words, by viewing the Zionist conquest of Palestine as a historically inevitable march of progress toward the establishment of a civilized/Jewish state on the ruins of a pre-historic country, Uris's narrative underlines the necessity of eliminating the Palestinians or transferring them into refugee camps inside and outside their borders. In this context, *The Haj* emerges as a historical narrative which aims to distort history by justifying the dispossession of the colonized Palestinians removing them in time just as they have been physically removed in exiles and refugee camps due to the Israeli expansionist policies.

In addition to incorporating discourses of barbarism to view the Palestinian society, the incidents of the novel are historicized by a narrative strategy which turns all the narrators/characters into voices articulating the racial/colonial ideology of the author. For example, Ibrahim, the mayor of Tabah and the close friend of the colonizers, laments his futile attempts to save his people from ruin in a world where revenge is a sacred ritual and hatred is a noble thing. Further, Ishmael, Ibrahim's son is depicted in *The Haj* as a young man who hates his father, his culture and religion particularly when he conceives the wide gap between the primitive community of Tabah and the civilized world of the Jewish Kibbutz. Ishmael's feelings of inferiority are intensified as he confronts the great differences between his native village [Tabah] with its "garbage dumps and open sewers" and the civilized life of the colonizers inside the settlements: "Until I saw the Jewish Kibbutz I did not know that things like playground or toy rooms or libraries ever existed" (Uris 1984:9).

Ishmael's visit to the Jewish Kibbutz dramatically changes his life bringing about extreme feelings of self-hatred and an inferiority complex born out of acknowledging the great cultural/civilizational gap between the colonizers and the poor village community of the colonized. Dreaming of a better life, Ishmael wants to be assimilated into the emerging Jewish community which offers him promises of a different world. Nevertheless, Ishmael's ambitions are considered as taboos in Uris's narrative which portrays Palestine as a Jewish land, a gift given to the Zionist pioneers as part of the divine rights bestowed by the Jewish God upon his chosen people after living for centuries in exile and Diaspora. In *The Haj* the Jewish settlements, the habitation of the colonizers who are the carriers of western civilization, are juxtaposed to Tabah, a poor Arab village, "an Indian country" where nomadic Palestinians live a primitive life riding donkeys and sleeping "on goatskin rags" (Uris 1984:9). Because the worlds of the colonizer and the colonized are realms apart, it is impossible for Ishmael to be

assimilated into the civilized and sophisticated community of the colonizers.

Deploying cultural paradigms adapted from American colonial mythology and narratives of Orientalism, Uris depicts Tabah as a patriarchal community where women are oppressed and humiliated. For example, Nada, Ibrahim's daughter, according to Uris, longs to break out of "slavery to freedom" which is only attainable in the Jewish Kibbutz. As victims of a world dominated by fear, hate and greed, the Arab women in the Palestinian community of Tabah are subjugated by oppressive traditions and a religion that turns them into slaves:

They [women] were always separated from men on social occasions.
They could not sing or dance at weddings except off by themselves.
They could not travel without a male member of the family to oversee the family honor (Uris 1984:122).

Nada, Ibrahim's daughter, challenges the religious taboos of the tribal Palestinian community, willingly prostituting herself as a way of rebellion against an oppressive father and a decadent culture. Being involved in illicit relationships with more than one person at the same time, Nada, in the eyes of the Palestinian people, becomes a whore who has brought shame to her family and community. When Ibrahim was informed of his daughter's sexual violations, he brutally murdered her, mutilating her body. Taking revenge for the cold-blooded assassination of his sister, Ishmael, Ibrahim's son, revealed to his father that his two wives, Hagar and Ramiza had been brutally raped by Iraqi soldiers during the 1948 war. In a pornographic scene, Uris's narrator visualizes the rape drama as ten Iraqi soldiers repeatedly have sex with Ibrahim's wives in a barbaric manner. Paving the way for Ibrahim's madness, Ishmael decides to punish his "savage father" (*ibid.*:518) who murdered Nada, by revealing the rape incident which he had kept secret for a long time.

Prior to his madness, Ibrahim pursued a tyrannical policy as the mayor of Tabah and its absolute ruler enforcing a reign of terror on his people. As an illiterate dictator, Ibrahim not only embodies the Arab/Palestinian male mentality according to Uris's racial paradigms but also the mentality of all contemporary Arab rulers. As a sex maniac and an Arab stereotype Ibrahim forces his second wife Ramiza, sixteen years old, to have sex with him shortly after giving birth to a child. Ibrahim's vulgarity and sexual sadism with his young wife are underlined to emphasize his barbaric nature: "Everything which happened in the bedroom could be heard in the next room" (*ibid.*:6). Further, in Ibrahim's household, women, according to Uris, are constantly dealt with as slaves who are forced to wash his feet and take

care of him in spite of being aware of his diverse relationships with prostitutes.

Like Ibrahim, Sheikh Walid Aziz, the chief of what Uris (*ibid.*:30) calls "the Palestinian Wahhabi tribe" is also interested in prostitutes and belly dancers and he mistreats his wives who are routinely beaten if they question his orders." Sheikh Walid forces his sixteen year old daughter, Ramiza, to marry Ibrahim at the age of fifty in return for money and gifts. In *The Haj* Uris delineates the Arab males as sex maniacs whereas the Arab women appear as voiceless, featureless and mindless creatures who are content with of eating "the leftovers in the kitchen" after the men eat their meals. Further, a newly born girl, according to Uris, is a disgrace to any Arab/Palestinian family in Tabah while the male baby is given all credits including a long term breast-feeding. Throughout Ishmael's narrative voice, Uris (*ibid.*:5) describes such a primitive tradition: "As a male child I was entitled to my mother's breasts for as long as I demanded them and was not weaned until my fifth birthday." Depicting Tabah "ancient Palestine" as a backward community which brutalizes women, Uris aims to justify colonization which will inevitably eliminate all forms of barbarism from the colonized land.

In *The Haj*, the Palestinian subaltern is viewed as the enemy of women and the enemy of civilization and humanity. Uris's depiction of the Palestinian enemy incorporates "garbage language" which, according to Noam Chomsky (1971:65), "is not only the voice but also the deed of suppression." As Herbert Marcuse (1969:74) argues in *An Essay on Liberation*, this language not only defines and condemns the Enemy, it also creates him, and this creation is not the Enemy as he really is but rather as he must be in order to perform his function for the establishment.

Apparently, Uris in *The Haj*, degrades the Palestinian enemy categorizing him as non-human in order to justify his displacement and genocide. The destruction of the humanity of the Palestinian enemy is achieved in different ways in *The Haj* particularly by not calling him by his proper name but by a different one usually a humiliating term. According to Uris's narrative the Palestinian is a sex maniac, a vicious beast, a nomadic savage and a barbarian living in infested territories threatening the peaceful/civilized community of the colonizers. Obviously, the bulky text of *The Haj* includes sufficient examples which reveal no sense of empathy with the colonized Palestinians, transforming the novel into a propaganda machine reflecting the author's political ideology.

In *The Haj*, Uris's biased treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict is explicitly shaped by anti-Arab/anti-Islamic narratives assimilated from western culture and American mythology. Depicting the

Palestinian people as an inferior race dominated by tribalism and a religion breeding a culture of hate, Uris's narrative appropriates racial/colonial discourses associated with black and Native American peoples of the New World. The desperate attempt of the Zionist author to degrade the colonized Palestinians and defile their cultural and religious traditions affirms the colonialist aspects of the novel throwing doubts on its legitimacy as a representation of the history of the Middle East conflict. Importing colonial American conventions into his fabric of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Uris renarrates the story of the frontier emphasizing the necessity of marginalizing the savages of Palestine into filthy refugee camps in order to pave the way for the Zionist pioneers to bring western civilization to the Holy Land.

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Note

¹ The author of *The Haj* is a contemporary American novelist with mass audiences according to recent critical reviews. Leon Uris is the author of more than ten novels with wide-ranging popularity, in academic and non-academic circles, particularly the Middle East masterpieces, *Exodus*, *Jerusalem: Song of Songs* and *The Haj* which was published many times in the United States and Europe due to the reputation of the author and the significance of its themes. Many critics consider the novel as faithful representation of the Middle East conflict. For example, Gerald Green argues that the author had the courage and honesty to put the Middle East conflict in perspective adding "If I had the power I would make *The Haj* required reading for the entire membership of the United Nations." Other critics expressed similar sentiments claiming that "no serious study of the Middle East would be complete without the perspective of this novel."