On Representations of the Palestinian Arab "other" in A Borrowed Identity (2014)

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Abstract: This study examines representations of the Palestinian Arab "other" in Eran Riklis's 2014 film A Borrowed Identity, an adaptation of Sayed Kashua's acclaimed novel Dancing Arabs. The film's protagonist, Eyad Barhum is a Palestinian teenager navigating identity and belonging within Israeli society after transferring to a Jewish prep school in Jerusalem. Through Eyad's network of relationships, the film illustrates his identity production through Palestinization, Israelization, and eventual Judaization, as he progressively distances himself from his Palestinian roots to assimilate into Israeli Jewish society. Using frameworks of representation, nationalism, and identity, the study highlights how Eyad's transformation reflects the complexities of identity production within a society marked by systemic oppression rooted in ethnic binaries. The film critiques but ultimately reinforces the boundaries of the Zionist vision of Israel as a Jewish state–rather than a state of all its citizens– by portraying Eyad's erasure of his Palestinian identity as the only path to equality and acceptance. This tragic conclusion underscores the impossibility of acceptance without assimilation in a society structured by ethnic hierarchies.

Introduction

A Borrowed Identity (2014) is a cinematic adaptation of Sayed Kashua's novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002) directed by Jewish Israeli director, Eran Riklis.[1] The film tells the story of Eyad Barhum, a Palestinian teen, who leaves his family and community behind after he is accepted to a Jewish prep school in Jerusalem. In school, he falls in love and develops a relationship with Naomi, a Jewish girl in his class. He also develops close personal friendships, and eventually familial bonds, with Yonatan–a Jewish Israeli teenager who suffers from (ultimately fatal) muscular dystrophy–and with Edna, Yonatan's mother. As Eyad's life becomes increasingly enmeshed with that of Naomi, Yonatan, and Edna, he questions, rejects, and ultimately *borrows*, as the title of the film suggests, or replaces his Palestinian Arab identity with a Jewish Israeli one.

Israeli cinema is publicly funded and backed by the Israel Film Fund–the IFF–which in turn, receives its budget from the national Ministry of Culture. While IFF-supported films include a diverse representation of the various ethnic groups in Israel–Palestinian, Druze, Jewish, Eritrean, etc. –there is seldom *multicultural* representation in any given film. This gets to the heart of the notion of cinema as a means of representation, and (re)creating prescriptive representations of reality and society. As evidenced by the types of films that get funded and produced by the IFF, Zionist representations of Israeli society allow liberal criticism and social transgression to a set point. In this study, I identify this point as a multicultural, shared-future between Israelis and Palestinians epitomized by inter-racial primary relationships.

In *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind*, the seminal work on the relationship of individuals to society by sociologist C.H. Cooley, primary relationships are defined as:

> Those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual. The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a 'we;' it involves a sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which 'we' is the natural expression…The most important spheres of this intimate association and cooperation…are the family, the playgroup of children, and the neighborhood…Primary groups are primary in the sense that they give the individual his earliest and completest experience of social unity and also in the sense that they do not change in the same degree as more

[1] Kashua is widely considered the foremost Palestinian culture critic within Israeli society. He is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and writes primarily in Hebrew. He left Palestine/Israel in 2014 and does not plan to return.

> elaborate relations, but form a comparatively permanent source out of of which the latter are springing.[2]

Here, Cooley establishes two groups: explicitly the primary, and implicitly, the secondary. The primary group forms the main circle of identification (and importantly, identity construction) while the secondary follows from that in a series of temporal, instrumental relationships.

We see prescriptive assumptions of what these primary groups *should* look like according to the types of films funded by the IFF and Ministry of Culture, extending from the primary unit, the collective "we" is either Jewish, Palestinian, Druze, etc. but never mixed. I understand this resistance to multiculturalism as stemming from the fear of assimilation.

Throughout Jewish literature, the fear of assimilation–specifically through intermarriage–into respective gentile societies can be traced back to Deuteronomy 7:3 in which the Israelites are struggling to define themselves as a people and assimilation through intermarriage was seen as a cause for concern. Maintaining ethno-religious ties through Jewish marriage became the primary mechanism to preserve Jewish civilization in the fledgling diaspora.

The birth of the State of Israel, the self proclaimed nation-state of the Jewish people, inverted the historic power imbalance inherent to the Jewish fear of assimilation–the Jew as the disempowered minority and the gentile as the empowered majority.[3] In *A Borrowed Identity*, the Palestinian protagonist, Eyad Barhum, is the disempowered minority forced to assimilate to the majority-society when he transfers schools.

Over the course of the film, the viewer sees how changes in Eyad's primary relationships affect his sense of national identity. The beginning of the movie depicts his Palestinization through formal and informal education by his family, primarily his father, and his father's comrades in the Arab Communist party. Upon his move to Jerusalem, Eyad undergoes a process of de-Palestininization and subsequent Israelization. He is stripped of points of Palestinian national identification he had in Tira and becomes the "ideal" Arab Israeli–one who does not identify with Palestinian national aspirations. But this is not enough. Eyad comes to understand that the state of being (even the ideal) Arab Israeli is one of second class citizenship; to rectify this, he must become Jewish. The secondary relationships he established earlier in the movie with Yonatan and Edna become his primary relationships–his family–while his biological family fades into the background. As Yonatan succumbs to his illness, Eyad adopts, or *borrows* as the title of the film suggests, Yonatan's Jewish identity, and declares himself (as Eyad) dead. He thus begins his new life as an Israeli Jew, Yonatan–the son of Edna–in a tragic and bittersweet ending.

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[2] Charles Horton Cooley, Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 23-27.

[3] Adalah, "Israel's Jewish Nation-State Law," Adalah, December 20, 2020, https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/9569.

In this study, I posit that *A Borrowed Identity* pushes the limits of the Zionist imagination of Israeli society without transgressing its boundary of multiculturalism. The film accomplishes this goal through the protagonist's negotiation of his Palestinian and Israeli identities in order to represent a prescriptive vision of a diverse–but not multicultural–Israeli (and importantly, not Palestinian) society.

Palestinization

As a child, Eyad is educated by his family–primarily his father who is active in the local chapter of the Arab communist party –and his father's comrades who teach in the primary school.

An illustrative scene from the beginning of the film depicts Eyad's Palestinization through formal education in school. Eyad's teacher unfurls a map of Palestine at the front of the classroom and announces, "This is Palestine. That's the real name of this country, not Israel." A moment later he hears footsteps in the hall and quickly covers the map of Palestine with one of Israel. As the principal of the school–considered by the many in the Palestinian community in Tira to be a government agent–enters the classroom with an American Jewish benefactor, the teacher continues, "and so the second wave of Jews drained the swamps…" referring to the period of Zionist settlement in Palestine preceding 1947-8–the Palestinian *Nakba*/Israeli independence.[4]

It is illegal to teach Palestinian history, namely the *Nakba*, in Israel.[5] Thus, the very act of education in a formal setting becomes an act of resistance–an integral aspect of creating an enduring, collective Palestinian national identity, specifically within Israel where even the words Palestine and Palestinian were absent from Israeli textbooks before the year 2000 and remain taboo.[6]

On the subject of the construction of national consciousness in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines nationalism as "an imagined political community–and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[7] For Palestinians everywhere, the imaginary dimensions of this identity ring true. The Palestinian nation is segmented through an intricate system of permits and borders (i.e. 48-Israel, East Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza) and the systemic denial of a right to return for refugees in the diaspora. Despite differing legal statuses and the fact that many Palestinians do not (and perhaps never will) live in the same territory, they *continue* to identify under a shared national moniker. For Palestinian citizens of Israel, the properties of this national imagination carry a

[4] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 05:23.

[5] Adalah, "Nakba Law-Amendment No. 40 to the Budgets Foundations Law," Adalah, 2011, https://www.adalah.org/en/law/view/496.

[6] Yael Teff-Seker, "Palestinians in Israeli Textbooks" (Jerusalem: Impact-se, 2016), https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/images/palbooks.pdf, 5.

[7] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

different tone precisely because they are citizens of a state that is actively oppressing the national aspirations of their nation through ideological and repressive apparatuses.

Eyad also receives an informal education in the dimensions of Palestinian nationalism from within, as opposed to that which he is exposed to in Israeli media. As a child, he sees a picture of his father, Salah, in an old Hebrew newspaper clipping and asks a Jewish Israeli peer to read it aloud for him as he can understand, but not read, Hebrew.[8]

"Three students were arrested in Jerusalem in connection with planting a bomb at a bus station in the city…One of the suspects is Salah Barhum, an Israeli Arab," his peer reads, "It's about some terrorist." "It's my Dad," Eyad responds with a smile.[9]

Later, Eyad asks his father what the word terrorist means. "There's no such word as 'terrorist,'" he replies, "the Jews invented it to confuse everyone. 'Warrior' is the right word."[10] Salah's deconstruction of the term "terrorist" and oppositional position of the term "warrior" echoes Derrida's notion of linguistic deconstruction, that is:

> the understanding that everything exists with its opposite and in fact it exists thanks to its opposite…The "binary opposition," in other words, those which are different from one another…can express a meaning as much as they are together, not by themselves.[11]

By positing "warrior" as the alternative, "true" meaning concealed within the term "terrorist," Salah implicitly illustrates the relative meaning from the Palestinian perspective and in doing so, teaches his son about their Palestinian identity. "Terrorist," he implies, is a word that bears the negative connotation that Jewish society has thrust upon it. "Warrior," on the other hand, is imbued with liberatory significance–what he suggests as the Palestinian meaning.

To further deconstruct the relationship between these terms, the viewer understands that in the Palestinian/Israeli context, they bear this meaning only when positioned in a binary relationship to each other; each term becomes the bearer of meaning for its "opposite."

It is through the combination of the formal education Eyad receives in school and that which he receives at home that he begins to develop his personal sense of Palestinian identity. The first complication we see of his identity construction is when his father drops him off for his first semester of school in

[8] At this point in the movie, Eyad's school has joined a program called Children for Peace for Jewish and Arab Israeli children to spend time together. He asks the Jewish Israeli boy he is paired with to read the clipping when they are spending time together.
[9] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 11:06.
[10] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 15:30.
[11] Ceren Yegen and Memet Abukan, "Derrida and Language: Deconstruction," *International Journal of Linguistics* 6, no. 2 (2014): 37, https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i2.5210, 52-53.

Jerusalem. When Eyad asks his father if he regrets the "terrorism"/"activism" that landed him in jail (what he had read about in the newspaper clipping as a child), Salah tells him, "we thought we could liberate Palestine from the Jews," to which Eyad asks, "Now you don't?"

"Now, we just want them to let us live with dignity," his father responds, softly.[12] In this moment of transition from Palestinian Tira to Jewish Jerusalem, his father, the figure that epitomized Palestinian nationalism for him his entire childhood, suggests to him there is no future in resistance, rather a future in quiet dignity. It is with this sentiment that Eyad enters school in Jerusalem.

Israelization

In Jerusalem, Eyad becomes the "other" as the only Palestinian Arab student in the entire school. In order to "fit in" he assimilates through Israelization and in doing so, de-Palestinizes himself. Eyad comes to understand what "Arab" means to Israeli Jews through personal experiences of "othering" as well as the curriculum. This "othering" is best understood through Edward Said's framework of orientalism espoused in his 1978 magnum opus *Orientalism*. Said describes orientalism as the occidental construction of the orient as the "other" against which it defines itself apophatically. Conjugated into the Israeli context, this becomes the Israeli construction of the Palestinian "other" against which it defines itself; everything the Palestinian Arab is, the Israeli Jew is not.

Eyad's experience as the Palestinian "other" is complicated because visually he can "pass" as a Jew–that is to say he does not look particularly "Arab." However, his Arabness reveals itself when he speaks. On the first day of school, Eyad is asked to read the first passage of the Hebrew Bible aloud in his literature class and is humiliated when his peers laugh at his Arab accent as he stumbles through the words:
בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ והארץ היתה תהו ובהו וחשך על־פני תהום
or, in the English transliteration, "*bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim v'et ha-aretz v'ha-aretz haya tohu vavohu v'choshech al pnei tehom*."[13,14,15] In Hebrew, this phrase contains the letter /p/ in the word פני (*pnei*). In Arabic, however, the sound represented by the letter /p/ does not exist. Native Arabic speakers struggle to pronounce the /peh/ sound naturally and often substitute with /beh/–the /b/ sound. As a consequence, Eyad is made acutely aware of his Arabness, and "incorrect" or lack of Israeliness. The context of the Hebrew Bible class compounds the effect of this othering. Unlike his Jewish peers, Eyad certainly would not have learnt Hebrew Bible in his previous schools; he would have received formal education in Islamic texts. He is not only othered by his accent,

[12] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 22:35.
[13] English translation: In the beginning, God created heaven and earth, and Earth was without form and void and darkness was set upon the deep.
[14] Sefaria, "Genesis 1," https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.1?lang=bi&aliyot=0.
[15] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 25:30.

but by his lack of familiarity with the text that is not "his" and does not purport to be.

The same day, Eyad meets Naomi–a Jewish Israeli girl in his class–who he quickly falls in love with and starts dating. On their first date, she teaches him how to say the sound /peh/ using a napkin.[16] This moment, though fleeting, foreshadows the power dynamics of their relationship to come. As Naomi teaches Eyad the "correct" accent,[17] she makes him palatable and "passing"…a more believable Israeli. A seeming act of kindness, she identifies what makes Eyad "other," his accent, and seeks to strip him of it. Throughout their relationship, Naomi is afraid to be seen in public with Eyad and refuses to tell anyone–her parents, most of all–that they are together. Only later on in the film (notably after he masters a flawless Israeli Ashkenazi accent) does Naomi feel comfortable "going public" with their relationship).

Eyad internalizes the "otherness" of his accent and begins to practice saying the sound /p/ to himself in the mirror in an attempt to "correct" himself. He repeats the word "Palestine" over and over again using Naomi's napkin method.[18] Ironically, it is through repetition of Palestine as a mantra (in English, no less) that he attempts and succeeds to disguise his Arab identity.

Eventually, he becomes so Israeli-passing that his friend Yonatan from the volunteering program says to him, "sometimes I forget that you're an Arab," when he hears Eyad speaking to his mother on the phone. Eyad responds with a short laugh, "Me too," to which Yonatan replies, "Don't worry. Someone will always remind you."[19] The inverse of Naomi's Jewish savior complex, Yonatan's dueling tone of brutality and empathy further contribute to Eyad's othering. It is almost as if he says, "You can try as hard as you want to be Israeli–you can change your accent and even date a Jewish girl–but you will never succeed. You will always be Arab. Other." In the moment, Eyad laughs it off as dark humor, a mere symptom of Yonatan's worsening disability. But, as the viewer will come to see, the sentiment remains within him.

The result of Eyad's Israelization is his de-Palestinization–he becomes the ideal Arab Israeli–one who speaks unaccented Hebrew (so as to not *sound* too Arab) without a strong sense of Palestinian national identity. In fact, the first time Eyad speaks unaccented Hebrew on screen, he is asked by his history teacher to explain the cause of the Israeli War of Independence. With a laugh he answers, "Oh the war? The Arabs, of course."[20] The class laughs and he continues, "The

[16] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 30:19.

[17] Of course, this means not only Israeli, but Ashkenazi. Many Mizrahi/Arab Jews speak Hebrew with an Arabic accent. Today, the Mizrahi accent has been largely erased through Ashkenazi domination of the culture industry and government ministries, and systemic violence against Mizrahi communities in Israel. Notably, all the Jewish Israelis that Eyad interacts with in *A Borrowed Identity* are Ashkenazi. While I do not address this complex dimension of ethnic representation in this study, it is one of many compelling avenues for further research.

[18] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 31:34.

[19] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 57:17.

[20] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 34:32.

Arabs rejected the partition plan and tried to prevent the establishment of the Jewish state. When the plan was accepted, in 1947, the Arabs launched a series of hostilities against the Jewish community, starting the War of Independence."[21] A clear parallel to his childhood schooling where he was covertly educated in Palestinian history,[22] this scene illustrates his transformation from Palestinian to Israeli as he adopts the Israeli "independence" narrative of 1947-8, over that of the Palestinian "*nakba.*" The authenticity of Eyad's performance of his national identity is left up to the viewer to discern. Eyad seems aware that he is both the butt and instigator of the joke. Perhaps he has internalized the Israeli perspective of himself as "other" so completely that he is willing to put himself down, just for a laugh? Perhaps he has truly been interpellated by the Israeli narrative? What is certain is the complexity of his process of national identification as elucidated by Stuart Hall:

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, which the new cinematic discourses 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.[23]

Reflecting on Eyad's production of his national identity, it is clear that he relies not on history itself, but on representations of history and the context of their reception. As a child, he is taught as a Palestinian, from the Palestinian perspective, in an exclusively Palestinian environment. When he transfers schools, he is taught from the Israeli perspective as the only Palestinian in a class full of Jews. Moreover, he is tokenized as "the good Arab"–when he makes jokes about Arabs[24] and his classmates laugh, they are laughing at him not with him.

As the only Palestinian in a Jewish school, he negotiates and (re)produces this identity from within the paradigm of Arab Israeliness. In one charged scene, Eyad transgresses the boundaries of what is (and is not) acceptable within the Israeli framework by refuting his literature teacher's analysis of the book they are reading in class by changing the reader's perspective from Jew to Arab and offering a Saidian orientalist reading in its place. His monologue is worth quoting in full:

> […] When I read it I think of the Arab twins, and not of Hannah. When I read it, I see two 'poor, violent, ugly Arabs' who've become the sexual fantasy of a woman losing her mind. I think how they never did anything wrong, apart from being Arabs. I think about what they represent to the

[21] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 34:38.
[22] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 05:22.
[23] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," *The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989), https://www.jstor.org/stable/44111666, 68.
[24] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 54:25.

> author, to the reader…and to the Israelis. I think of the 'primitive Arab' who is only interested in sex. The depiction of the 'wild, animalistic, primitive Arab' who is only motivated by his phallus…Is there anything worse Hannah can do? Is there anything worse a Jewish girl can do than sleep with an Arab? Usually, we're the ones who rape them with fiery eyes. That's what happens in Shai Agnon's stories. To him, Arabs just destroy. That's how Benjamin Tammuz writes, and Aharon Meged, and even A.B. Yehoshua. That's what happens to poor Dafni in his book 'The Lover.' Naim? God forbid. Naim, the dirty, Arab mechanic? Naim, who has to shower every time he meets Dafni? You know why, ma'am? It's easier for the authors and their readers when an Arab makes a move on a Jewish girl. He should at least take a shower. After all, we all know how Arabs stink.[25]

In this monologue, Eyad identifies the classic orientalist trope of fixation to the extreme: Arabs are both sexual predators and passive objects of a sexual fantasy in front of his Jewish girlfriend. Compounded with olfactory and tactile stereotypes of Arabs as impure and filthy, the makers of meaning–in this case, canonical Israeli authors–eliminate nuance and humanity through definition by negation. The Arab is a predator, the Jew is a victim; the Arab is dirty, the Jew is clean. The Arab "other" is thus (re)produced by Israeli authors as an unclean (morally and physically) sexual creature, and a threat to the purity of Jewish women and consequently, a scourge on Jewish society. When Naomi kisses him (her first public display of affection) it seems a victory for their relationship and inter-racial relationships more broadly. Perhaps it is through Eyad's public criticism of the Jewish hegemony of the Arab "other"–himself–that he wins favor in the eyes of his Jewish peers, and more importantly his Jewish girlfriend. However, it is only after assimilation through Israelization that he is in a position to negotiate with the hegemonic Jewish representational apparatus.

Judaization

As Yonatan's condition worsens, Edna asks Eyad to move in with them to be part of her and Yonatan's support system. What was once a secondary relationship–a friendship forced by a volunteering program–becomes primary as Eyad becomes their family and they become his.[26] Meanwhile, the absence of his own family is painstakingly noted and comes to a head when he misses his grandmother's death.

Back in Tira, he sits in his grandmother's room amidst her belongings. He remembers the request she made of him as a child to bury her in the white shrouds

[25] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 54:25.
[26] Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 23-27.

from Mecca. *He* was the one she had entrusted with this request, and now that she was gone, he had failed in his promise to her.[27] Unable to make good, Eyad returns to his new Jewish family in Jerusalem, cutting himself free of his Palestinian roots. His grandmother's funeral is the last time the viewer sees any on-screen relationship between Eyad and his family.

Eventually, time passes and Eyad settles into his new life with Yonatan and Edna as a full-fledged member of their family. He no longer speaks Arabic, only Hebrew, and celebrates *Shabbat*–the Jewish day of rest–with his new family. When he gets a job as a waiter, he realizes he will be paid more as a Jew than as an Arab; he secretly "borrows" Yonatan's Jewish ID, retiring his Arab one. Due to his disability, Yonatan had never held a job or bank account, so Eyad is easily able to forge a new legal footprint through his newly acquired Jewish documents, flawless Hebrew, and the fact that the two look alike–throughout the film the two boys relish the fact that they look so similar they could be brothers. In Israel, ID cards indicate the ethnicity of the card holder–Jewish, Arab, Druze, Circassian, etc.–with Jewish ethnicity carrying the most privilege.[28] Within Jewish society, it is not enough for him to be an "ideal Arab" despite his perfect Hebrew and "passing" appearance; he will always remain a second-class citizen as an Arab. Thus, Eyad realizes he must be Jewish…at least legally.

Pushing the boundaries of the Zionist imagination of Jewish society within the State of Israel, the film questions the legitimacy of the Arab-Jewish binary constructed through racialized ID system, ultimately rendering it false–or at least ineffectual–as Eyad slips into and out of his dueling Jewish and Arab identities. This binary is false, precisely because it is so easily transgressed. However, the film does not go as far to deconstruct the binary. Eyad is accepted as an equal member of Israeli society, not as his Arab self, but as his Jewish alter-ego.

This transgression deepens when Edna discovers that Eyad has "borrowed" Yonatan's identity. Instead of being upset with him as he begs for forgiveness, she quietly responds "It's alright…no one needs to know."[29] Eyad continues living as Yonatan, with Edna's blessing. When it comes time for the two boys to take their matriculation exams, Eyad takes them twice; first, as himself in Arabic, and then as Yonatan in Hebrew while Yonatan is bound to his bed, now paralyzed from muscular dystrophy.[30]

The cinematic parallel between the two test-taking scenes emphasizes the transmutability of Eyad's identity. Both scenes are shot from the same three angles: one shot of his back, one shot of Eyad's profile as he hands his (and Yonatan's) ID to the test proctor, and one from the proctor's perspective as he

[27] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:23:30.
[28] Israeli citizens and Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have blue IDs and Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip have green IDs. There is no representation of Palestinian residents of the West Bank and/or Gaza Strip in *A Borrowed Identity*, all IDs are blue, Israeli IDs.
[29] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:20:40.
[30] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:21:21.

confirms Eyad's identity for the test. In the first and second angles, the viewer assumes the perspective of an intimate observer, watching closely as tension builds. Will the proctor accept Eyad as Yonatan? The civics test he is taking fades into the background as the true test–passing as a Jew–takes center stage. The tension reaches its peak in the third shot as the viewer assumes the perspective of the proctor confirming Eyad's (now, Yonatan) identity. The test begins. This does not matter for Eyad, though. He had already "passed" the real test–becoming a Jew.

When Yonatan dies a year later, Eyad–who has been living as Yonatan while studying abroad at university in Berlin–returns for the funeral. He takes his personal documents (as Eyad Barhum) to the Islamic Religious Council in Jerusalem (IRC) and declares himself dead.[31] In a twist of dramatic irony, the IRC official notes how similar the young man before him (Eyad, himself) looks to the picture of Eyad Barhum on the identity card who has now been pronounced dead, before reminding him to return the ID to the Ministry of the Interior.[32]

Edna and Eyad bury Yonatan in an Islamic cemetery, wrapped in Eyad's grandmother's burial shrouds from Mecca, and Eyad fully assumes his identity.[33] By burying Yonatan in these shrouds, Eyad buries himself, his grandmother, and Yonatan together, laying his life as Eyad behind before stepping into his new life as Yonatan.

Conclusion

Throughout the film, Eyad discovers, negotiates, assimilates, and renegotiates his national and ethnic identity from Palestinian to Arab Israeli to Jewish Israeli. As a child he is socialized (and nationalized) outside of the Jewish cultural apparatus that dominates Israeli society. His Palestinian community in Tira actively works to imagine and preserve their national affinity despite their Israeli citizenship. Upon his move to Jewish Jerusalem, his personal development as a Palestinian ceases, and he comes to understand his status as that of "Arab other" rather than a "Palestinian other." Within the Israeli construction of the "Arab," Palestinian national identity is non-existent. Perhaps a mere utterance of the word "Palestine" would speak a national identity into existence and undermine the Israeli myth of the utter falsity of a shared Palestinian consciousness. Eyad becomes the "ideal Arab"–he has a Jewish girlfriend, best friend, and adoptive mother. He speaks unaccented Hebrew. He passes. It is from this vantage point that he negotiates his Arab Israeli identity from within the Jewish paradigm. In class, he identifies patterns of racist representations of Arabs in the Israeli literary canon and his teacher's reproduction of these representations through teaching these texts without calling into question the hostile Arab other. With time, Eyad understands that no matter how well he "passes" it will never be

[31] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:32:34.
[32] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:32:46.
[33] *A Borrowed Identity*, directed by Eran Riklis (2014), 1:34:42.

enough if he remains Arab. To fully assimilate, he must become Jewish. He first borrows and then assumes Yonatan's identity as a Jew, pronouncing himself as Eyad, dead.

The Zionist vision of Israeli society sponsored by the Israel Film Fund and the Ministry of Culture propagated in *A Borrowed Identity* permits criticism–and even occasional transgression–of the ethnic limits through a recognition of the false binary between Jew and Arab. However, the film ultimately reproduces the ethnic binary by preventing Eyad's full acceptance as his Palestinian, or even Arab, self within Israeli society. When the Palestinian Arab "other" that Jewish Israeli society constructs itself against threatens to dilute the "Jewishness" of Israeli society it must be nullified. Cut off from his Palestinian background and encouraged by his adoptive Jewish mother, Eyad internalizes the Israeli notion of Arab as "other" and erases his Palestinian Arab identity. In a tragic ending, Eyad gets what he wants most of all–to be equal–which is to say, Jewish.

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