

## **Interpretations of History in Early Twenty-First Century Arabic Fiction: A Critical Analysis of Al-Saqqaf's *Qissat Irhabi***

**Riyad Manqoush\*, Noraini Md. Yusof and Ruzy Suliza Hashim**

*School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia*

### **ABSTRACT**

This essay is motivated by the issue of terrorism as mirrored in early twenty-first century Arabic fiction, particularly after the 9/11 attacks and the US occupation of Iraq. We examine the interpretations of terrorism in Hussein al-Saqqaf's *Qissat Irhabi* (2007) with the aim of exploring the treatment of recent history and also uncovering the ideologies, viewpoints and cultural nuances that prevail in Arabic fiction. By appropriating the theory of hermeneutics, from which the concept of interpretation is derived, the novel's utilisation of some historical events and issues can be made clear. This is because "interpretation" refers to a text's explanations and exploration of other texts. Our analysis shows that al-Saqqaf displays Judeophobic characteristics where he casts aspersions on the Jews, rabbis, Jewish fanaticism and Jewish terrorists whom he names "the Sicarii." He attributes terrorism to them. Being an Arab and a Muslim, al-Saqqaf exhibits the feelings and opinions of the ordinary Arab and Muslim people who indeed believe that the Arab and Muslim terrorist groups are masterminded by superpower Jews. Although al-Saqqaf's predisposition in his fictional account is attributed to his roots and faith, it also shows the reality of distrust between the Arabs and Jews.

*Keywords:* Judeophobia, terrorism, 9/11, Jews, Sicarii, Iraq

### **ARTICLE INFO**

*Article history:*

Received: 17 January 2011

Accepted: 12 December 2011

*E-mail addresses:*

[riadmanqoush@yahoo.com](mailto:riadmanqoush@yahoo.com) (Riyad Manqoush),

[animy@ukm.my](mailto:animy@ukm.my) (Noraini Md. Yusof),

[ruzy@ukm.my](mailto:ruzy@ukm.my) (Ruzy Suliza Hashim)

\* Corresponding author

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the USA has been engaged in a war against terrorism and consequently occupied Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. This essay is motivated by these historical events, particularly the 9/11 and the US war in Iraq, which have been mirrored in early

twenty-first century Arabic fiction. We intend to examine the interpretations of these historical incidents and the issue of terrorism in Hussein al-Saqqaf's *Qissat Irhabi* (2007), a novel written in the Arabic language, with the aim of exploring the ideologies, viewpoints and cultural nuances that prevail in contemporary Arabic fiction. The analysis will be framed according to our appropriation of the theory of hermeneutics as discussed by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Michael Gardiner, Larry Beck, Ted Cable, Edwin Barton and Glenda Hudson. By using the hermeneutic approach, we hope to explore the employment of current world issues in recent Arabic fiction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary texts encompass two realities – the reality within the text and the reality outside the text. Dominick LaCapra (1980, pp. 247) claims that what is written “inside” the literary text cannot be separated from what happens “outside” it. Similarly, Philippe Desan (1983, pp. 109) argues that any text must not be separated from outside reality because this “separation is a false problem and his epistemological distinction is even more problematic if, in a novel, historical facts are themselves recuperated within the discourse of fictitious characters.” This coincides with Zawiah Yahya's claim that good literature must mirror reality and must not be limited to a particular space and time (2003, pp. 17). However, when literary texts employ history, a number of components contribute to change or deform some of its contents.

Wayne Booth (2004, pp. 16) accepts the claims of “postmodernist Marxists like Louis Althusser ... that ‘ideology’ makes, or changes, realities.” Thus, sufficient knowledge of the ideology of the author can assist critics to “distinguish the good makings from the bad” (Booth, 2004, pp. 16). In other words, they can easily identify how history can be deformed, and explore the reasons behind such deformation.

Literary employments of history have been the focus of several scholarly pursuits. To conform to the scope of this essay, we shall refer to a few examples of Arabic works. For instance, Sinan Antoon (2002, pp. 66) examines the Palestinian Mahmud Darwish's poem, *A Non-Linguistic Dispute with Imru' al-Qays*, which was written after the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accord between the Israeli government and the Palestinian authority. Antoon (2002, pp. 66) argues that Darwish's “poem is read as an allegorical critique of [the] Oslo Accord.” Based on his analysis of the poem, he concludes that the Palestinian people are viewed in the poem as “victims” who are “forced to surrender and assume a role written for them by their enemies” (Antoon, 2002, pp. 73). Using history as the setting for his poem, Darwish exposes the way in which the Jews can manipulate the situation for their own good as the treaty serves the Israelis rather than the Palestinians. Similarly, *Qissat Irhabi* which uses the US occupation of Iraq as the setting can also be read as a critique of this incident, 9/11 and other events that are related to terrorism, particularly Jewish terrorism, which, in the novel, reads like a

phobia. This leads us to highlight the term "Judeophobia" which is defined by John G. Robertson (2003, pp. 108) as "excessive fear of Jews or an abnormal hatred of Jews." We will attempt to expose how al-Saqqaf's story fears and distrusts the Jews.

In addition to that, Nezar Ajaj Andary (2008, pp. vi) "examines five texts of creative historical production in Arabic literature and film." These works include Mahmud Darwish's poem entitled *Al-Andalus*, Radwa Ashur's novel called *Thulathiyyat Ghirnata*, Bensalem Himmich's novel named *Majnun al-Hukm*, Saadallah Wannus's play *Munamnat Tarikhiyyah* as well as Yusif Chahine's film called *Destiny*. At the end of his study, Andary (2008, pp. vii) deduces that the "the representation of history is crafted" by those "modern Arab writers" and also the "filmmaker . . . in order to address specific issues such as Palestine, the role of the intellectual, the Arab nation, and the concept of tyranny." Thus, writers can consciously or unconsciously reflect the issues of the society of which they are members. Yet, they might differ in their employment of that history because each author carries different ideologies.

Similarly, Muhsin al-Musawi (2010, pp. 22) analyses the post-renaissance Arabic literary writings which "leave behind the complex encounter with the West and bypass thereby the modernity binary of a backward tradition versus the offers of a European civilization." To arrive at this conclusion, al-Musawi focuses on Abd al-Hakim Qasim's *Ayyam al-Insan al-Sab'ah* (1969) and *al-Mahdi* (1977). His discussion ends with the

notion that "the post-nahdah (meaning post-renaissance) narrative interrogates other facts on the ground that relate to the nation-state, selfhood, family, communal life and religion" (Al-Musawi, 2010, pp.22, brackets mine). This is because the era of renaissance in the Arab World centres on Western impact on the Arab culture after Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798 (Allen, 2008, pp. 6). While Qasim's literary texts reflect this issue, al-Musawi reveals that the Arabs' perception of the "nation-state", "family", "communal life" and "religion" has changed due to the influence of the French culture on them. Hence, Arabic literature of that time reflected the political and social changes of the Arabs during the French occupation of Egypt. This reinforces what has been discussed earlier, that literature cannot evade outside reality.

### HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

A good discussion of the concept "interpretation" requires a return to the theory of hermeneutics proposed by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his article *Hermeneutics and Criticism*. Schleiermacher (1998, pp. vii) defines "hermeneutics" as the "art of interpretation." It is also referred to "as the art of understanding," "the art of presenting one's thoughts correctly," "the art of communicating someone else's utterance to a third person" and "the art of understanding another person's utterance correctly" (Schleiermacher, 1998, pp. 5). As he elaborates:

*Interpretation is the ability to teach, whether the meaning is articulated in speech or actions, so that the other person may think the same as the writer. – All interpretation, therefore, consists of two things, understanding of the meanings (ideas) articulated in the words and the proper explication of them. Whence in a good interpreter there must be delicacy of understanding and delicacy of explication (Schleiermacher, 1998, pp. 5, brackets original).*

As seen above, Schleiermacher emphasises that interpreters must be aware of the nuances of words because they require sophistication of the mind in making sense of the writer's ideas. This argument is consistent with that by Edwin Barton and Glenda Hudson (2004, pp. 100) which explains that "the verb *interpret* derives from the Latin *interpretari*, meaning 'to explain', and the noun *interpres*, 'a negotiator.' Thus, interpretation is an act of both explanation and negotiation." In other words, it is a process in which the interpreters intervene to simplify, "explain" and illustrate the ambiguities of a certain text to the readers. Within interpretation, texts can associate with, investigate and examine one another. They can also raise some questions and attempt to solve them.

The previous emphasis on understanding, simplification, explication and negotiation coincides with the argument

of Larry Beck and Ted Cable (1998, pp. 4) that "interpretation tells the story behind the scenery or history of an area. It is a process that can help people see beyond their capabilities." This can happen when the readers are aware of the context of the works produced. Due to their prior knowledge, interpreters become mediators between the "text and reader" and they can easily "explain" and "translate" the "meaning of the text for the reader" (Barton & Hudson 2004, pp. 100).

However, Michael Gardiner (1999, pp. 63) argues that "the hermeneutic approach stresses on the creative interpretation of words and texts and the active role played by the knower." This creativity validates the process of "interpretation" and indicates that its "goal is not objective explanation or neutral description, but rather a sympathetic engagement with the author of a text, utterance or action and the wider socio-cultural context within which these phenomena occur" (Gardiner, 1999, pp. 63). There is no doubt that interpreters are sometimes influenced by certain ideologies and views, but this can be avoided when interpreters do not force the text to explain a meaning that does not exist. Following this rule, one can assume that "the interpretation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity" (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 293). The above excursion into interpretation is required in our analysis of al-Saqqaf's investigation of history.

## INTERPRETATIONS OF HISTORY IN AL-SAQQAF'S *QISSAT IRHABI*

Al-Saqqaf's *Qissat Irhabi* (2007) was shaped by the actions of terrorism, particularly the terrorist acts which have occurred in Iraq after the US occupation. To make the analysis obvious, we will firstly highlight the plot of the novel. The story centres on a Yemeni boy, Yusof, who is kidnapped and deported with other Arab boys of his age through the desert to Israel and then by plane to the USA. They are put in camps inhabited by heartless and fanatic Jews called the Sicarii. Yusof and his friends are brainwashed till they believe that the Sicarii represent God. Although Yusof was not ordered to participate in 9/11 attacks, he has been sent to Iraq to practise terrorism within the different Muslim groups. Their organisation aims to spark religious and regional civil strife in Iraq for unknown reasons. One day, Yusof is given orders to explode himself in a Sunni mosque at *Salat al-Maghrib*. When he enters the mosque and hears the imam reciting the Quran, Yusof remembers his childhood in Yemen. He breaks into tears and leaves the mosque, ignoring the explosives that are fastened under his shirt. When he retreats, secret agents of the Sicarii follow Yusof and shoot him in the shoulder. He manages to escape from them and hides in a deserted house. There, an Iraqi student assists him and calls his family in Yemen. The story ends with Yusof returning to Yemen through Syria using a forged passport.

While al-Saqqaf attempts to convince his readers that international terrorism is

controlled by Jewish terrorists called the Sicarii, he investigates the issue of the abductions of Arab children. This is because he believes that there is a relationship between these incidents and the advent of terrorism. For instance, in his construal of the appearance of young Arabs in many terrorist actions, the author explains that those young Arabs were kidnapped and brainwashed by Jewish terrorists to carry out acts of terror on their behalf. For instance, after the disappearance of Yusof, the narrator of the novel states that "many other children were lost in similar accidents" (pp. 27). The motif of abduction is employed by the writer to designate that the disappearance of Yusof and the "other children" is not accidental. It is part of an elaborate plan engineered by a well-organised gang.

In fact, the fictional abductions in the story echo history. According to the International Muslim Women's Union (2009), "a number of cities and regions of Yemen have experienced disappearances and abductions of children of both sexes." Al-Saqqaf takes on this local problem of missing children using the story of Yusof to highlight Jewish terrorism. However, although the issue of children kidnapping is real, there is no evidence of the involvement of Jews in these crimes. These abductions of children may have happened due to a variety of reasons, but al-Saqqaf employs them to cast aspersions on Jewish organisations. This attribution can be seen when twelve years after the disappearance of Yusof, a man called Abdul-Qadus meets Ya'qub and Haj Said—Yusof's father and grandfather—

and gives them useful information about their lost son. As the man reveals, his Iraqi colleague, Wael al-Zubaidi who studies at al-Mustansiriya University, tells him that Yusof is still alive, hidden in a house in Iraq. Abdul-Qadus notifies the family that Wael “stressed that this matter must be top secret because your son is threatened by some dangerous groups. So, he is now stuck in the house. Your son has a very long and strange story” (pp. 29-30). Here al-Saqqaf attempts to connect the incidents of kidnapping of Arab children, especially Yusof’s kidnapping, with some of the “dangerous groups” that play an important role in world terrorism as will be explained further.

The author’s use of the phrase “strange story” is intended to attract the reader’s attention. This seduction is significant because it hints that the criminals do not fit into the expectations of the reader. Al-Saqqaf delays in revealing the identity of the gang that abducts children in order to increase his readers’ suspense so that when it is revealed much later, the shock will be staggering. At the end of the story, the picture becomes clear as in a flashback Yusof discloses to Wael what had happened to him after the strange man kidnapped him from Yemen as quoted below:

*He carried me and took me by a car to a distant underground place which was full of boys. The boys who came recently were screaming and the old ones were silent for they had cried enough but there was no help. We travelled through deserts,*

*wastelands and mountains, from a country to another. I remember that we went through the Empty Quarter, as I heard from the discussions of the persons who were in charge of our trip. Then, through al-Aqaba. I was with fellow Arabs, Kurds and other kids. We were handed over from one person to another as if we were goods. But they were not cruel to us. Finally, we found ourselves in a country its people do not speak Arabic. We studied Hebrew which many of its vocabularies are similar to Arabic particularly the pronouns, numbers, compass directions and days of the week... etc. We studied the Torah, and there were intensive classes in a type of astronomy which deals with the Biblical origins and then we studied al-Mashna and al-Jimara. These books are the interpretations of the Torah. All young students have supernatural intelligence. They were very carefully chosen from different countries and races (pp. 46-7).*

Yusof exposes that the strange man who snatched him from Yemen is an agent to an illegal international organisation that is operated by some fanatic Rabbis. Those Rabbis utilise the “Torah” and some Jewish “books” to brainwash the minds of the children and turn them into terrorists. While the author displays his knowledge of the Jewish religious books such as “al-Mashna”

and “*al-Jimara*”, an ideology can obviously be noticed in his explanation. For instance, the sentence “a country its people do not speak Arabic” is of significance because it implies that this terrorist organisation is not Arab-made. It might use young Arabs like Yusof to fulfil its strategies, but it is mainly under the control of fanatic Rabbis. Yusof also indicates that the country in which he studied and trained utilises “Hebrew” as a formal language. This portrayal is explicitly intended to expose Israel as the country that encompasses such terrorist organisations.

Although the validity of al-Saqqaf's claim above might be questioned, this does not lessen the fact that he has bravely shed light on the Jewish terrorist organisations which are mostly ignored by many people. Referring to some events that happened in the past can be of assistance in analysing this argument. According to Houfman (2006, pp. 97), in 1968, “Rabbi Meir Kahane” founded the Jewish Defence League (JDL) which used “violence” and “terrorism” to protect the Jews from “enemies.” Due to its fanatic and illegal activities, this organisation was categorised by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as “a violent extremist Jewish organization” as can be seen below:

*On December 11, 2001, Irving David Rubin and Earl Leslie Krugel were arrested by the Los Angeles Joint Terrorism Task Force for conspiring to build and place improvised explosive devices (IEDs) at the King Fahd Mosque in Culver City, California, and the local office of Congressman*

*Darrell Issa. Rubin and Krugel were subsequently charged with conspiracy to destroy a building by means of an explosive, as well as possession of a destructive device during and in relation to a crime of violence. Rubin and Krugel were active members of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a violent extremist Jewish organization. Statements by Rubin and Krugel indicated that they had planned the attack against the mosque to demonstrate the militancy of the JDL. Krugel further indicated that the attack was planned to provide a “wake up call” to the Muslim community. It was determined that Rubin and Krugel had already acquired the necessary components to build an IED, including pipes, fuses, and smokeless powder (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2004).*

Those terrorists are neither Arabs nor Muslims. They are Jews like the Sicarii, the antagonists of al-Saqqaf's novel. By highlighting their terrorist attempt in the excerpt above, we can deduce that al-Saqqaf's description of the Sicarii is not merely fictional; it is consistent with historical documents. This cohesion between history and the story can also be seen when al-Saqqaf attempts to investigate and explain the internal secrets of the terrorist explosions that occur in Iraq after the US occupation. For instance, Yusof reveals that:

*I murdered a lot of people in the same flash way which I had excelled in when I was in Israel. I was eager for martyrdom to pursue Elazar, but I wasn't given a chance to participate in the events of September. When I had the chance today to blow up myself at Salat al-Maghrib, a strong feeling prevented me of pulling the string of the explosive belt. As planned, I should kill at least hundred prayers at al-Kadhimiya, at the shrine of the two Imams Musa al-Kadhim and Mohammed Jawad, when it was crowded with players. I knew that the snipers of the Sicarii were watching me from the nearby rooftops and walls. The red laser of their guns was always on my body. They were ordered to shoot me if I did not perform the mission. This occurs in their all explosive operations (pp. 54).*

This description can be an answer for those who wonder about how Muslim terrorists explode mosques, despite being Muslims themselves. Islam is a religion of peace – it is senseless to kill fellow Muslims in the house of God. The novelist makes overt this fact that the terrorists who explode mosques are not Muslims. They are the “Sicarii”; and the Sicarii are Jewish terrorists. This interpretation is justifiable because of the novelist’s own knowledge of the phenomenon of missing children as well as his own predisposition on the Palestinian problem.

The reading above is in line with the notion that “interpretation tells the story behind the scenery or history of an area. It is a process that can help people see beyond their capabilities” (Beck & Cable, 1998, pp. 4). Hence, al-Saqqaf’s use of “history,” especially terrorism, is not only a matter of reflection, but a critical employment. The author attempts to “see beyond” the historical events and issues which he utilises in his narrative.

Likewise, the previous quotation shows that the terrorists are forced to perform their missions. When Yusof is about to commit the crime, he realises “that snipers of the Sicarii were watching [him] from the nearby rooftops and walls. The red laser of their guns was always on [his] body.” This is because “they were ordered to shoot [him] if [he] did not perform the mission.” These details may sound unimportant, but they are indeed very significant for understanding the text’s interpretation of history. By this portrayal, al-Saqqaf explains that some Arab terrorists are used as scapegoats by the Sicarii. In other words, al-Saqqaf claims that just like Yusof and his friends in the story, many Arabs and Muslims are used by Jewish terrorist organisations to perform terrorist deeds.

In addition to what has been discussed earlier, two other truths are revealed in the same quotation. The first is about “Elazar,” the spiritual father of the Sicarii, and the second relates to the 9/11 incidents. In fact, Elazar is not a fictional character, but a real leader of the Sicarii who lived in the first century. According to historian



Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1995, pp. 35), "in 66 A.D. the Sicarii, headed by Menachem" practised a number of "assassinations" against the Romans and also against their Jewish "opponents." When Menachem "was killed," the Sicarii were led by "Elazar Ben-Yair" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995, pp. 36). After losing many men in Jerusalem, "the rest of the Sicarii ... fled to Masada, where they remained" (Ben-Yehuda, 1995, pp. 36). There they committed a strange and bloody suicide death; Elazar gave his orders to the Sicarii to kill each other in order to avoid being arrested by the Romans (Ben-Yehuda, 1995, pp. 36). This history proves that the novel's employment of the Sicarii and Elazar mirrors past historical happenings.

The second hint based on the same evidence is that Yusof "wasn't given a chance to participate in the events of September." In other words, the novel relates the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the Sicarii, not to Arab terrorists. This idea is repetitively used in the story. For instance, Yusof, in the quotation below, repeats the same notion that the Sicarii are the masterminds of the 9/11 attacks:

*I was professionally trained in Washington in institutes that belong to us (the Jewish Defence Forces) in a battalion called (the Fires of the Torah). Although we were still young, we gained an extensive experience. We were given practical courses in how to use a plane and drive it onto small targets that did not harm it. I was scheduled to use an aircraft to do bombing missions*

*in Washington and New York in the early Hebrew year, but in the last moments I was turned into a reserve. My leaders planned to reserve me for important tasks in the Middle East. That's what Rabbi Mahnash'ul, who was in charge of us, told me (pp. 51, brackets original).*

The author's emphasis on the words "aircraft" and "bombing missions" as well as his reference to the two American cities, "Washington and New York," are intended to elucidate that the incidents of 9/11 were planned by the Sicarii. In addition to that, the fictional name of Yusof's group, the "Jewish Defence Forces", shows a startling resemblance to the historical record discussed earlier, especially to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2004) which indicates that "on December 11 2001, Irving David Rubin and Earl Leslie Krugel were arrested by the Los Angeles Joint Terrorism Task Force for conspiring to" explode "King Fahd Mosque in Culver City, California." Investigations revealed that both "Rubin and Krugel were active members of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a violent extremist Jewish organization" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2004). Comparing the name of the terrorist organisation in history with the one in the novel can indubitably be helpful in understanding the impact of history on the novel. The former is the "Jewish Defense League" and the latter is the "Jewish Defense Forces". The two names are approximately the same. This

similarity strengthens al-Saqqaf's belief that terrorism is controlled by the Sicarii and other Jewish fundamentalists. Yusof further explains:

*I was taken to Iraq, with dozens of boys younger than me, to blow up mosques of Sunnis and Shiites with the purpose of making the members of the two doctrines fight and kill each other. Our assassinations centred on the moderate sheikhs of both Sunnis and Shiites (pp. 53).*

Yusof reveals the Sicarii's plan for Muslims to engage in a civil strife between the "Sunnis and Shiites." Therefore, they explode Sunni "mosques" and attach their crime to the "Shiites" and vice versa. To get quick results, they "assassinate" Iraqi religious scholars and "sheikhs" who support "moderate" Islam. Killing those people is intended to pave the way for the fundamentalists and terrorists. This version of the Iraqi war discloses that the writer is suspicious of the hidden agents who control international terrorism.

Likewise, the novel explicates that the Sicarii are also responsible for the murders of Iraqi scientists and scholars. For instance, Yusof recounts that "there is a terrorist plan to be implemented by the Sicarii through exploiting the need and poverty of the Iraqi people to kill more than a thousand scientists including energy scientists, university professors and moderate sheikhs" (p. 76). Similarly, one of the minor characters in the novel called Marwan Fakhri says

that he knows "a lot of Iraqi scholars, of different arts and sciences, were recently assassinated in terrorist acts" (p. 103). Identifying the killing of "a thousand [Iraqi] scientists" as their main aim indicates that the Sicarii intend to prevent any scientific development in Iraq. This is probably because the Sicarii fear that the power of this Muslim country can be used against their homeland, Israel. This fictional portrayal has some historical roots particularly when put against Aljazeera's report:

*Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, an alarming number of the country's leading academics have been killed. A human rights organisation puts the number at about a thousand and has a documented list of 105 cases. These professors, it says, were not random casualties - they were assassinated. The first documented case is that of Muhamad al-Rawi, the president of Baghdad University, who was killed on 27 July, 2003, when two men entered his private clinic, one of them feigned severe stomach pain and was doubled over. Concealed against his stomach was a gun with which he shot al-Rawi dead. Assassination incidents continued after al-Rawi's shooting. Dr Majid Ali was assassinated in 2005, shot four times in the back. He had a PhD in physics and was one of the best nuclear energy experts in Iraq. The Paris-based Arab Committee for Human Rights*

*(ACHR), an international NGO which has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, has issued an international appeal for help to protect Iraqi academics (Janabi, 2006, Aljazeera).*

As illustrated by Ahmed Janabi, a journalist affiliated to Aljazeera, the number of "Iraqi scientists" who were assassinated after the "US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003" is about "a thousand." In fact, this is the same number mentioned in the novel where Yusof relates that "the Sicarii" intend to "kill" about "a thousand [Iraqi] scientists." In addition to that, the way in which the two Iraqi scientists "Muhamad al-Rawi" and "Majid Ali" were killed reveals that the killers hated Iraq and the Iraqi people. This reinforces al-Saqqaf's interpretation that the killers are "the Sicarii" who consider Iraq and the Arab nation as enemies of Israel. The Jewish terrorists do their best to stop any scientific progress in the Arab World to keep it weak compared to Israel.

Similarly, many intellectuals argue that terrorists cannot perform their missions without having facilities from people in charge of security. This argument leads al-Saqqaf to create a fictional world that uncovers the possible ways in which people cooperate with such organisations against their own countries. For instance, Yusof reveals that:

*The Sicarii use hi-techs in their missions. The Death Squads are only means to achieve various*

*goals. There are a number of parties who cooperate and contract with them to achieve common interests and some cooperate because they cannot say no to the Sicarii. Others do that in the hope of maintaining their positions, or to preserve their reputation after leaving their positions; for the Sicarii use an immoral process of intelligence. They lure the target victim to be stealthily recorded and filmed in shameful situations. Threatened of spreading the film, the victim is forced to facilitate their missions and temporarily or permanently work for their interests ( pp. 69-70).*

Thus, the "Sicarii" know very well that the sexual scandals are the point of weakness of the politicians and many famous people, particularly in conservative countries. It will be impossible for those people to oppose and refuse to "cooperate" with this organisation, if they are "threatened of spreading" their "immoral" "recorded" "films" to the public. This is one of the scenarios which show how people are forced to cooperate with the Sicarii and terrorist organisations. The writer also gives another deduction when Yusof tells his father that "there are individuals, who despite their affiliation to official security bodies, get information and then sell it to those who pay more" ( pp. 129-130). Although these scenarios can be incorrect, they however provide evidence that al-Saqqaf's story reflects the skepticism and wariness of Arabs towards the Jews. The

world looks at the Arabs and Muslims as perpetrators of terrorist acts but the novelist here provides an antithesis to that image.

## CONCLUSION

Based on our discussion of the novel, we can conclude that *Qissat Irhabi* displays Judeophobic characteristics. The novel centres on the Jews, Rabbis and Jewish fanaticism and Jewish terrorists who are called the "Sicarii." This emphasis is intended to attribute terrorism to the Jews. For instance, al-Saqqaf shows that the terrorists who explode Sunni and Shiite mosques in Iraq are not Muslims, but extremist Jews who do that to spark civil strife between the Iraqis, or probably Arab terrorists brainwashed and forced by Jewish terrorists to carry out such operations. The novel also attempts to uncover the means by which the terrorists force people to cooperate with them. In addition to that, it elucidates that Jewish terrorists are the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks and the murders of many Iraqi scientists and scholars after the US occupation. In fact, being an Arab and a Muslim, al-Saqqaf has been able to reflect the feelings and opinions of the ordinary Arab and Muslim people about terrorism. His slant on history mirrors the voices of the Arab people who indeed believe that terrorism is controlled by hidden superpower Jews. Al-Saqqaf's predisposition in his fictional account is attributed to his roots and faith but it also shows the reality of distrust between the Arabs and Jews. While history will always be used as a source of inspiration and setting

for writers, the ways in which it is exploited will reveal deep-seated prejudices and ingrained beliefs.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, R. (2008). *Introduction*. In Allen, R., & Richards, D. S. (Eds.) *The post-classical period: parameters and preliminaries*, pp. 1-24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Musawi, M. (2010). Beyond the modernity complex: Abd al-Hakim Qasim's re-writing of the nahdah self-narrative. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 41(1-2), 22-45.
- Al-Saqqaf, H. (2007). *Qissat irhabi [Tale of a terrorist]*. Sana'a: Bin Obadi Centre.
- Andary, N. A. (2008). *A consuming fever of history: A study of five urgent flashbacks in Arabic film and literature* (Ph.D thesis dissertation). University of California, Los Angeles.
- Antoon, S. (2002). Mahmud Darwish's allegorical critique of Oslo. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 31(2), 66-77.
- Barton, E. J., & Hudson, G. A. (2004). *A contemporary guide to literary terms with strategies for writing essays about literature*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Beck, L., & Cable, T. (1998). *Interpretation for the 21st century: Fifteen guiding principles for interpreting nature and culture*. Champaign: Sagamore Publishing.
- Ben-Yehuda, N. (1995). *The Masada myth: Collective memory and mythmaking in Israel*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Booth, W. C. (2004). *The rhetoric of the rhetoric: The quest for effective communication*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Desan, P. (1983). From history to fiction: a reading of Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*. *Pacific Coast Philology*, 18(1/2), 108-113.

- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2004). Terrorism 2000/2001. Retrieved on November 20, 2010 from [http://www.fbi.gov/publications/terror/terror2000\\_2001.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/terror/terror2000_2001.htm)
- Gardiner, M. (1999). *Bakhtin and the metaphors of perception*. In Heywood, I., & Sandywell, B. (Eds.). *Interpreting visual culture: Explorations in the hermeneutics of the visual*, pp. 57-71. London: Routledge.
- Houfman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism: Revised and expanded edition*. New York: Colombia University Press.
- International Muslim Women Union. (2009). *Muhakamah ramziyah li mertakibi al jara'im: khatf al-sighar wa tajneedahom intihak lil tufulah fi al-Yaman [Mock trial of the perpetrators of crimes; the abduction of children and recruiting them is a violation of childhood in Yemen]*. 23 January. Retrieved on November 20, 2010 from <http://muslimaunion.com/news.php?i=11851>.
- Janabi, A. (2006). SOS over Iraqi scientists. *Aljazeera*, 10 April. Retrieved on November 26, 2010 from <http://english.aljazeera.net/archive/2006/04/200849142018420416.html>
- LaCapra, D. (1980). Rethinking intellectual history and reading texts. *History and Theory*, 19(3), 245-276.
- Robertson, J. G. (2003). *An excess of phobias and manias*. Los Angeles: Senior Subscribe Publications.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1998). *Hermeneutics and criticism, and other writings*. (trans.). Bowie, A. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zawiah Yahya. (2003). *Resisting colonialist discourse*. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

