

Faqir, Fadia. *Nisanit*. NY: Penguin Books, 1990.
Review by Dr. Sandra Alfonsi

This is first novel which I was asked to review. *Nisanit* was written by Fadia Faqir, a Jordanian-born university professor currently teaching in England. My first concern about *Nisanit* was its place on the AP Honors English reading list: placed alongside such major authors as Cervantes and Jules Verne and major works of world literature such as Gilgamesh, it differs thematically because of its pervasive themes of hatred and death and the psychotic behavior of its hero and/or anti-hero. Most urgent is the fact that although *Nisanit* is a work of fiction, it teaches inaccurate and biased history to young students who have very little factual knowledge of the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts and therefore teaches and promotes anti-Semitism.

Nisanit does not fit into the category “Heroes” assigned to it. Section C includes such major authors as Cervantes and Jules Verne and major works of world literature such as Gilgamesh. The other authors included here are very well known and highly respected abroad and in the US. Fadia Faqir is a Jordanian who lives in England and is relatively unknown there both as a writer and a professor at the University of Lancaster where she teaches. A few of her works can be found on agenda-based reading lists of Arab professors who teach Middle Eastern Women’s Studies in US universities. Furthermore, *Nisanit* differs thematically from all of the works included in Section C. Because of its pervasive themes of hatred and death and the psychotic behavior of her hero and/or anti-hero, Fadia Faqir’s book in no way duplicates the thematic aims of such writers as Cervantes and Jules Verne and her main character Shadeed has nothing in common with such classic heroes as Don Quixote and Passepartout.

Although *Nisanit* is a work of fiction, it teaches inaccurate and biased history to young students who have very little factual knowledge of the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts. To cite only two examples of egregious inaccuracy:

(1) Faqir fails to incorporate in her novel universal Arab refusal to allow UNWRA to use money given by Israel to build sewer systems, streets and apartment compounds in Gaza, thereby alleviating many of the horrendous conditions that she so poetically describes.

(2) Faqir presents the Israel Defense Forces as perpetrators of sadistic methods of torture and creates a world in which these methods are their “standard operating procedures”. I am in no way saying that excesses do not take place during interrogation of prisoners – we need only look at what happened in Baghdad when US Army soldiers interrogated Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison. However, no one – writer, historian or civilian, would ever say that such excesses are standard operating procedures of the US Army. Yet this is exactly what Faqir’s book is teaching your students about the IDF. The truth is that the IDF is not involved in any interrogation of civilians and brings to court-martial any IDF soldier or officer tried for and

convicted of brutality during interrogation of soldiers who are prisoners of war. The only exception to the interrogation of civilians by the IDF is made if a terrorist - a civilian and not a combatant in a recognized army, is caught in the middle of active fighting while trying to locate his comrades. All civilians suspected of being terrorists are interrogated by the SHABAC – the security service and interrogations by the SHABAC are regulated very carefully by the law known as the SHABAC Bill.

Faqir is virulent in her hatred of Israel and this permeates the book. *Nisanit* enhances negative ethnic stereotypes and teaches unabashed hatred of Israel and Israelis. As an aside, Faqir's descriptions of the interrogations go beyond normal imagination. If indeed such methods exist, she may know of them as standard operating procedures when Arabs interrogate their own people as collaborators or when they interrogate captured Israelis. If she fabricated these procedures on her own, then she verges on the criminally insane and definitely does not belong on any reading list. The most urgent issue that needs to be addressed is the fact that *Nisanit* teaches and promotes anti-Semitism. The inclusion of this book reflects an unimaginable lack of sensitivity for the Jewish students who are in your classes and who will bear the brunt of any and all anti-Semitism that the book may engender.