Arab literature is also Israeli

Adding a special category for work in Arabic to the Sapir Prize would be a step toward expanding Israeli literary space so that it includes everyone.

Chassia Chomsky Porat and Azar Dakwar

The writer and runner-up in the Oz Prize in Israel, Azar Dakwar, the Sapir Prize for Arabic literature, the second in the new category, was born in the United States. The prize winner received US$10,000 (about NIS 40,000), and Dakwar, who was born in Baghdad, is the author of short stories and a few novels, including *Distraction*. Dakwar, who moved to Jerusalem with her family when she was seven, has lived in Israel for the last 25 years. Since the prize was established in 2006, 19 writers have been honored, including four women, and the prize is given every two years. According to Chassia Chomsky Porat, Israel’s ambassador to the US, the prize recognizes the role of the Arab community in Israeli society, and to “strengthen the bonds” between the two communities.

Dakwar was born in Baghdad to a Yemeni-Iranian family and spent most of her childhood in Iraq. She later moved to the US, where she earned her BA in theater and science at Vassar College, and her MA in communications at New York University. Dakwar’s first novel, *Distraction*, was published in 2011, and her second, *The Last of the Jews*, was published last year. Dakwar spoke about her work and her views on the role of Arab literature in Israel at a recent event in Jerusalem. Dakwar believes that Arab literature has a unique voice and can contribute to the cultural dialogue in Israel. She is currently working on her third novel, which is set in Iraq and revolves around themes of family, identity, and war.

Since the prize is intended to foster literary works that explore the theme of Israel and its Arab citizens, the writer has published several works that deal with these themes. Her novel *Distraction* was published in 2011 and was shortlisted for the Sapir Prize. Her second novel, *The Last of the Jews*, was published last year and was also shortlisted for the Sapir Prize. Dakwar has also published several short stories and novellas, including *The Last of the Jews*, which was published in 2011 and was shortlisted for the Sapir Prize.

The writer, who is also a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, described her work as uniquely Israeli and Arab. Dakwar believes that her work reflects the complex nature of Israeli society, which includes both Jews and Arabs. She also believes that her work reflects the importance of Arab literature in Israel and the need for it to be recognized and appreciated.

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