

A Treaty of Love – a novel by Samir El-Youssef.
Halban Publishers Ltd., 2009.

I have been haunted by this story since I finished it some weeks ago. Having read El-Youssef's previous book, *The Illusion of Return*, the power of his prose and the dynamism of his story line was not a surprise.

A Treaty of Love is a love story, but a blighted one; the spectre that hangs over the couple at the heart of the book, Ibrahim and Ruth, is the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, and it does so because Ibrahim is a Palestinian and Ruth an Israeli.

In spite of their national origins, Ruth and Ibrahim are very similar in many ways, each having come to Britain to get away from the cloying claustrophobia of their past, their upbringing and their family history. They have much in common, but unfortunately they cannot escape the emotional impact of events in the Middle East - the intifadas, the repressions – much as they might wish to, and they struggle to maintain their love and commitment to each other as issues far away and beyond their control try to tear them apart. The story is never predictable, and the conclusion is shattering, and the conviction with which Samir El-Youssef tells it is immensely powerful.

Above the story though, and I read it against the backdrop of the Israeli attacks on Gaza, is the way in which the Middle East conflict has brutalised successive generations of Israelis and Palestinians, ruined their past and blighted their future, and one concludes the story with a sense of overwhelming despair about the fate of two peoples, locked in a struggle that neither can win, ruining their lives and the lives of their children.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh