This is not adequately edited, but I have started the process.

The Lost Place: The Image of Place in Palestinian Children's

Literature Between 1967 and 2001

Abstracts

this chapter discusses…

Place is one of the most basic elements in a literary work; it is where events occur, through which characters move, and by which the writer is affected. Yuri Lotman defines place as “a set of homogeneous things of changing phenomena, states, functions, or forms ... among them are relations similar to familiar and ordinary spatial relations such as contact and distance” (Lotman 8). For Lotman, then, place is a reality of living that affects people as much as they do it. To him, each place imposes its rituals and peculiarity on the people within it, so it is obligated by and subject to those rules that govern it and impose its being on humans. According to Gaston Bachelard was also interested in the concepts of place and their relationship to man, noting their aesthetic aspects. He states,

The principle point from which the author starts is that the old home, the home of childhood, is the place of familiarity and the center of imagination, and when we move away from it, we always remember it, and we project upon many aspects of material life, that sense of aesthetics and security that the old house provided us with (30).

Hence, the concept of place in Palestinian literature in general, and children's literature in particular, acquired its distinction. The stories were not content to only record the Palestinian reality. They created a special place with its distinct dimensions, a place with various connotations and meanings, carrying values of culture, heritage, politics, religion and humanity, which help the reader to understand Palestinian life, in giving meaning to life and to humanity as a whole.

The place for the Palestinian person is the lost homeland, not only the lost place. All people live in specific places, except for the Palestinian, because the place lives in him wherever he migrates, locates or settles down. The place, for the Palestinian, is not like any other place; it is a place that can only be discovered or retrieved by way of recollection through the revival of Palestine anew. the Palestinian's longing for his homeland cannot be experienced at all, because the Palestinian does not live in his original place, but in memory, waiting, remembering, and suffering for the departure of loved ones. The uprooting and erasure of the place, horror of the loss, burning of exile, alienation of the body, and the agony of human alienation were all together the formative elements that underpinned some of the Palestinian stories that confronted the dilemma of place (Mousa 30-38).

Through the reading of a large group of children's stories, it seems that the place appeared on two levels, the open place and the closed place. Places in children's stories differ in their characteristics and forms; they are not alike. It is these differences that give each place a certain particularity that distinguishes it. The first group contains Palestinian Children's Literature from 1967 to 1987. To begin with, Arab literature accompanied the Six-Day War in 1967, the result was the victory of Israel over three Arab countries combined. That defeat left a double setback that forcefully and violently shook the Arab world, and affected all levels of life. Along with Arabic literature, in general, and Palestinian literature, in particular, getting affected, Palestinian children's literature was also affected, with writers of that period tending to document the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation in their stories. Embodying the national notion and instilling it in the minds of children was a deliberate and conscious task that all writers expressed through their stories. The writers also worked on conveying the events, and depicting the suffering in the refugee camps, through which the Palestinian people lived, in a narrative form.

An example of this can be seen in the story *Knights and the Sea* (1989) by the Palestinian writer Mufeed Nahli, who was born in the village of Beit Natif in Hebron, in the West Bank, in 1939, and lives in Jordan. The story talks about a girl named Samra living with her parents in a beautiful village overlooking the sea, the majority of which inhabitants work in fishing. One day, Samra hears the sounds of cannons, as the village was subjected to a Zionist invasion. The village knights volunteer to defend and save it from the enemy, but they needed someone to go to the neighboring city with a handkerchief as a sign of victory. Samra volunteered for this dangerous mission. The story ends with the knights liberating the city from the enemy.

The sea occupies a prominent place in literature in general, and in Palestinian literature in particular. The sea is an open place loaded with symbolic connotations. Expatriates find in it the features of both loss and nostalgia at the same time. Writers have portrayed it as a symbol of injustice and tyranny, or a form of oppression, loss and forced departure from the homeland. In the *Knights and the Sea*story, the images of the house and of the sea appear, the latter in its diverse symbolic space, within two axes: the positive manifestations of the symbol, and the negative ones. The story begins with the use of the retrospection technique, as the writer/narrator remembers the beautiful house he lived in, when he was a small child, as stated in the following passage:

On the seashore…We had a beautiful house…Its dirt road was broad and wide… stretching across the wheat fields on the Palestinian coast to the faraway mountains in every Arabic country… And one night… A cold October wind blew over our little house… The wind uprooted its trees and destroyed its pillars, but its stone walls remain to this day, telling us a story every day (Nahli 9).

The writer has combined the image of the sea with memories. When a person grows up, he wishes to return to being young. He remembers all the days of his innocent childhood in that home, and by home, we mean that closed place, considered to be the cradle of the first human being, in which he was born and spent his childhood, and where he was raised and grew up, so a strong and solid relationship exists with it (Bachelard 38).

Home is a place for daydreams, beautiful memories, and everything related to the beautiful past that a person loves to remember. And when we leave it, we have memories of it. An image of the house appears in the following section:

And her beautiful village used to sleep and wake up under the shade of olive trees…Samra stood… in front of the little house…She knocked on its doors…She sat waiting…From afar, she saw the village empty of people…Its sons came out from among the hills, and went down to the seashore, and she felt something heavy hitting her head.... She wondered: What happened? She did not wait in front of the house... She jumped among the ears of wheat (Nahli 11).

In the next passage, the writer uses the connotation of the place through the sea symbolism to show nostalgia for the homeland. It is inseparable from the writer who longs for the homeland from which he got far away, in exile and diaspora.

Toward the end of 1987, the first intifada (uprising) erupted, which indirectly increased the suffering of the Palestinian people, so it was not surprising that this was reflected through children's stories. The focus on the issue of the conflict with the Israeli has also emerged, directly and clearly, and in a context characterized by violence. Encouraged by the first intifada, writers continued to embody Palestinian suffering through children's stories. The image of the Palestinian cause emerged, and also the movement of struggle and fight against the enemies to liberate the Palestinian land, whether directly or through coding. *Haifa and the Seagull* (1991), written by Tawfiq Fayyad, who was born in 1939, in the village of Al-Muqeblah, in the Galilee, is considered among the first generation that witnessed and lived the Nakba in 1948. He ended up moving to Tunisia and settling there, to this day.The story is about a young girl named Haifa (after the coastal city of Haifa in Israel). She lived with her parents and grandfather in a tin house on the seashore in Beirut. One day, Haifa saw her grandfather holding the fishing nets and heading towards the boat. She wanted him to take her with him, as usual, but this time the grandfather did not agree, and told her that he was going to a faraway place. The girl was sad, because her grandfather would leave her, and return to his home in the city of Haifa.

The story begins with a description of the closed place, which is the house in which the girl Haifa lived. But she does not like her house in Beirut, because it is made of tin, making it hot in the summer, and allowing rain water to infiltrate it in the winter. This seems to be a reference to the conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the diaspora, and the restrictions imposed upon them in building, working, and freedom of movement, as shown in the following passage:

Haifa is a young girl with a dark complexion, who lives with her parents in a tin house on the seashore in Beirut. Haifa does not like her house very much, because it becomes very hot when the sun rises in the summer. In winter, water runs from the cracks in the roof, and the cold wind almost blows it away (Fayyad 2).

The happiness of the girl Haifa is evident when she stands in front of the sea, the open space, as the following section shows: “But Haifa has always been happy, because she loves the sea so much, and loves those beautiful white birds that always flap their wings in space, and hover over her grandfather's boat when he goes far out to sea” (Fayyad 3).

The sea, in the above section, is a symbol of the homeland, represented by the city of Haifa, to which the writer's attachment is highlighted. Haifa, with its beauty and the splendor of its shoreline, reflects the features of the homeland Palestine, with the beauty of its sea. The city of Haifa, with its beautiful image, resembles the image of the homeland, as its sea is a reflection of Palestine, because Haifa is unlike any other city except Palestine, the homeland, which the writer symbolized by the sea.

One day, she saw him holding the fishing nets and heading towards the boat. She preceded him and sat in the boat as usual, but this time he took her in his arms and lowered her, saying: ‘Today, you do not go with me, Haifa’. Haifa said, ‘Why, Grandfather’? ‘Because I'm going so far today, there's another Haifa behind the sea, beautiful like you, and always waiting for me (Fayyad 6).

The dialogue scene here presents the dialectic of the relationship between the self and the place, between nostalgia and the dream of return, symbolizing the return dreamt by the Palestinian who was forcibly displaced. Here, the image of the symbol/place undulates, oscillating between distance and proximity in a whirlpool of tears, fueled by longing and the anguish of separation. It ends with an existential question that carries the wish of reaching Haifa, the city-symbol of the entire homeland, in a metaphorical shift, highlighting the dialectic of the relationship between the Palestinian and his homeland.

Through the dialogue between the grandfather and the granddaughter, the grandfather (the writer) yearns for his homeland in an attempt to search for freedom and revolution, so the image of the sea is invoked in the above section, as if it would grant him freedom and return to his homeland. The grandfather’s heartbreak prompted him to tell his granddaughter that he would return alone to Haifa, in an indication that the hope of return is near, and that he believes that it is time for him to return to his homeland, Palestine, where he was raised, and had his beautiful memories on its land.

Several emotions dominated the writer in this text, and there was more than one feeling in his heart. At the beginning of the story, he was possessed by a feeling of exile and alienation, but things changed in the previous section, as we see him coding the return with the sea, the one that will return him, and lead him to safety, to his beloved homeland. He is sad because of his distance from the homeland to which he dreams of returning.

The Oslo Agreement (1993) represents a paradoxical stage in the life of the Palestinian, and in his struggle to recover the place. This paradox appears in more than one way, and there is no doubt that the political and cultural paradoxes are the most prominent manifestations. When we follow the works of the writers after the Oslo Accords, we find variations in their positions regarding these accords, in line with their political affiliations. Their views were reflected in some of what they produced, and the “other” began to impose its presence on the agenda of many stories, especially among local Palestinians and those returning in the wake of the Oslo Accords.

The writer wanted to paint a new picture of the Palestinian child. This child is no longer only the resistor, the fighter, and the martyr, but he has become intelligent, questioning, tolerant, open-minded to the world, and a lover of nature. The story I chose for this period is *The World Has Changed* (1996), by the writer Mustafa Murar, who was born in 1929 in the Palestinian village of Jaljulia, and died in 2022. This is a story about the mouse Lahmas, who lives in a hole in the ground. He sneaks one day into a classroom at the nearby school, curious to know what children learn about animals. The mouse slips between the layers of a folded map to watch what is happening. He listens to the students mention many animals, except for the mouse. He gets angry, and tries to defend himself.

Palestinian writers have expressed their human solidarity and national affiliation by employing the image of the land in their stories. After the Nakba in 1948, the concern of the Palestinian who remained and lived inside Israel became steadfastness, clinging to his land and continuing the struggle and sacrifice, despite all the intimidation he faced. Mustafa Murar is one of those who witnessed the suffering of the Palestinian people, and that clearly left its mark in his stories for children. The love of the land, according to Murar, is the love of the homeland. This is demonstrated when the mouse says, "I want to make an agreement with the owners of the house, an agreement of friendship and non-aggression. I will mention to you and to them some of the terms of the agreement" (**3**). The mouse had a peace agreement with the owners of the house, but on his own terms. On the one hand, he wants to live in peace, while on the other hand, he does not want to leave the land and the homeland. His defense of his home validates man's defense of his land and homeland. It is clear that the story refers to a change in the world after the Oslo Accords. The writer here is talking, symbolically, about peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Pay attention to me, we make a peace that is witnessed by every peace-loving person in this house. The cat asked him: Will it be unilateral peace? And the mouse responded quite insistently: Rather, all parties to the conflict will bear witness to it, and participate in the signing. Then everyone knows his limits, and peace is established (Murar 6).

The writer, Mustafa Murar, tried to convey to the children what he feels, through coding, that peace can happen, and it is not impossible, but he reiterates and confirms his old position towards the “other,” that we should not trust anyone even if we make an agreement with him.

The writer also used terminology unique to the Palestinian people, in their steadfastness against the Israeli might, as in the following passage:

The mouse Lahamas was listing his conditions, while he was standing at the door of his house on the way to the garden. When his voice rose, the cat, Fattash, took notice of him, so ran towards him, wanting to pounce on him. However, the mouse declared that he was one of the house animals, so did not move from his place, and stood steadfast and defiant (Murar 9).

In the above passage, the writer mentioned that the mouse was one of the animals of the house, alluding to the fact that the Palestinian who lives inside Israel is one of the owners of this land, and he struggles to protect the land of his fathers and grandfathers, on the one hand, and extend a hand of peace to the Israeli “other,” on the other hand.

In concluding this study, we were able to come up with some observations and results related to the significance of place and its manifestations in children's stories from 1967 to 2000. The place is considered one of the main components in the creative works directed at children. The writers, in their respective stories, were interested in the place, and gave it great attention, because it bears certain connotations, especially since Palestine, the lost place for the Palestinians, is under Israeli occupation. This made them cling to their land, and everything related to the homeland.

We also noticed that the “place” differs in the stories, in terms of form. There are open places like the sea, as we saw in the stories of the *Knights and the Sea* and *Haifa and the Seagull*. For the Palestinian writer, who lives in the diaspora, far away from his homeland, the sea carries symbolic connotations, which differ from one writer to the other according to the writer’s experience and his own visions. The sea has a great presence in their writings, and assumed aesthetic, psychological and political dimensions. The symbolic connotations were that the sea was a symbol of the homeland, nostalgia, steadfastness, childhood memories, and the return to the stolen homeland.

Writers also showed interest in other open places such as the land. To the Palestinian people, the land represents the safe place, the motherland Palestine, and it is the history in which pages childhood memories are written. If the land is lost, then Palestine is lost. The Palestinian writer was also interested in describing the closed place, as we saw in the story of *Haifa and the Seagull*, describing the house to which a person resorts seeking comfort and tranquility, and it is the place that includes the people closest to him. The house is the familiar place where we were born, the childhood home, and is one of the most important closed spaces, as it is a spatial area for which the writer expresses his longing. The place remains stuck in the Palestinian writer's mind and memory, whether this Palestinian lives inside Israel, or in the diaspora, so he directs his sight from those open spaces to his occupied state of Palestine.

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