2 The History of Palestinian Children’s Literature

Abstract

This chapter provides a preliminary historical overview of Palestinian children’s literature since the 1917 establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine before focusing on the period of 1948 until today. It divides Palestinian children’s literature into three periods: Palestinian children’s literature in Israel since 1948; in the Palestinian diaspora since 1948; and in the Palestinian Authority since 1967.

Introduction

Many Palestinian writers in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora have contributed to the development of Palestinian children’s literature. This chapter focuses on the general history of this literary subgenre from 1967 to the present.

Elad-Bouskilia considers Palestinian literature as that which is written by Palestinians. This definition was unproblematic only until 1948, with every Palestinian who wrote literature, whether within or outside Palestine until 1948, deemed a Palestinian writer. However, 1948 was a turning point, as the Palestinian literary community became divided between those who lived and wrote inside Israel and those who did so outside. Elad-Bouskilia believes that the questioning of whether some were Palestinian writers at all was driven by political considerations and not by how those writers defined themselves (Elad-Bouskilia 14–24, Cohen 122, Gottsfeld 76).

Hussam al-Khatib defines Palestinian literary writers as those Arab citizens who had habitually resided in Palestine until 1947, whether they subsequently remained or were exiled, along with everyone born to a Palestinian Arab father after this date, whether inside or outside the country. He argues that there are various impediments to applying this definition, including issues related to nationality and law. A large proportion of Palestinians live abroad in Arab and other countries and may or may not have a formalized nationality status. They may also contribute to the economy of the country in which they live, including literary and artistic production. Thus, Palestinian literary production has become heterogeneous, developing in a variety of environments and subject to diverse experiences. Some of it has remained faithful to the concept of a recognizable Palestinian Arab literature, but some is entirely assimilated into the literature of the place in which it is produced. Despite such complexities in defining what Palestinian literary identity encompasses, al-Khatib believes that the term Palestinian literature includes everything produced by those of Palestinian origin, whether within the original borders or in the diaspora (al-Khatib 21–23).

Palestinian Children’s Literature in the Mandate Period up to 1948

Several historical and political factors contributed to the crystallization of a sense of Palestinian belonging in the children’s literature of the Mandate era (formally speaking, 1923–48). The most important of these were the emergence of the Zionist project, the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and the formalization of the British Mandate for Palestine (al-Asad 195–208, Jibran 16–18). Palestinian aspirations to assert their own identity began to emerge in literature and politics in response to these developments. Palestinians perceived an imminent danger to their homeland and sought to express their patriotic sentiments toward it through poetry and prose. This led to the emergence of a distinctly Palestinian national literature (Jibran 16–18). The development of formal education, establishment of printing presses, and the emergence of political and cultural associations also contributed to its development. Arabic also became an official language in place of the Turkish of the now-defunct Ottoman Empire (al-Asad 195–208, al-Shaʿbi 25).

Some writing aimed at children had emerged from these early Palestinian literary flowerings, even as early as the late nineteenth century, but only sporadically. Certain Palestinian educators made an early contribution to modern Palestinian culture by focusing on and writing for children, especially textbooks. This sharpened an awareness of children’s status within society and fostered an incipient literature directed at Palestinian children. It is, of course, impossible here to discuss every such literary product in detail, so we will confine ourselves to the writers who most significantly contributed to the emergence of writing for children: Khalil Beidas (1874–1949),[[1]](#endnote-1) Khalil Sakakini (1878–1953), Isaaf al-Nashashibi (1885–1948), Iskandar al-Khuri al-Beitjali (1889?–1973), Ishaq Musa al-Husseini (1904–90), Ibrahim Tuqan (1905–41), and Mustafa al-Dabbagh (1898–1989). Before examining these writers individually, we should preface the discussion by saying that, in general, their knowledge of foreign languages and cultures was an important factor in shaping their political and social awareness (Jibran 18).

Khalil Baydas wrote a series of educational books for primary school pupils between 1898 and 1924, the first of which was the 1898 *al-ʿAqd al-Thamīn fī Tarbiyat al-Banīn* (The Precious Covenant of Educating Boys). He has also translated many stories from around the world (al-Asad 31–35). Al-Nashashibi is considered the first to have written poetry for Palestinian children, compiling them in a 1927 book, *Ashʿār ʿArabiyya* (Arabic Poems). In the same year, he issued an anthology of children’s songs entitled *Al-Bustān* (The Garden) (Salih *al-Nashāshībī* 12). The poet al-Baytjali published the book *Al-Ṭifl al-Munshid* (The Child Singer) in 1936 and another entitled *al-Mathal al-Manẓūm* (The Poetic Ideal) in 1937.

Al-Sakakini is considered the first to have written short stories for children. In 1942, he published the book *al-Jadīd* (The New), written in ascending degrees of sophistication to reflect children’s growing perceptibility. His stories are derived from contemporary realities as well as the popular heritage of the Palestinian people (*Mawsūʿ* vol. IV, 242). Al-Husayni published stories for schoolchildren between 1944 and 1947, including *Mudhakkirāt Dajāja* (A Chicken’s Recollections), *ʿAwdat al-Safīna* (The Ship’s Return), and *al-Kalb al-Wafī* (The Faithful Dog). Tuqan enriched the textbooks used in Palestine’s schools with poems and national paeans (Fasha *Dalīl* 127). Al-Dabbagh, a Department of Education inspector in the 1930s, took pains to ensure students had books to read in schools (al-Shaʿbi 30). The books published during this period were for systematically pedagogical purposes and presented themselves in a directly declarative way (Abu Bakr). Writers and educators in the Mandate era generally produced children’s literature in reflexive defense of the Palestinian identity, notably in the face of the Zionist movement (al-Shaʿbi 37).

Developments in Local Palestinian Children’s Literature after 1948

*Al-Nakba* (The Disaster) in 1948 and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel was accompanied by the emigration of numerous Palestinians writing for adults and children to many other countries. Those Palestinians who remained in Israel were subject to military rule by the Israeli state authority until 1956, becoming minority community members subject to restrictions after military rule was lifted in 1956. The Israeli authorities took control of the Arab educational stream and implemented educational policies aligned with their goals. This narrowed Palestinians’ opportunities to write for children beyond the strictures of those policy requirements and even limited the chances of children to become acquainted with works produced in the Arab world.[[2]](#endnote-2) As a result, the children’s literature produced was low in quantity and quality, little different from that preceding *al-Nakba*. This although some Palestinian writers continued to write for children in officially approved school textbooks. The approach to writing in this period, like that preceding it, was pedagogical in nature, and mostly consisted of songs aimed at pupils. Prominent writers in this regard were Manʿam Haddad (1919–97) and Georges Naguib Khalil (1932–2001).

Beyond these textbooks, Mahmud Abbasi (1931–) and Jamal Qaʿwar (1930–2013) wrote stories inspired by ancient Arab history and world heritage, both seeking to emulate the work of Kamil Kilani (1897–1959). That said, pupils would have readily detected the pedagogical aims of these short stories, which sought to introduce schoolchildren to Arab and Islamic history in suitably simple language (Abu Fanna *Ittijahāt,* Abu Fanna *Mirāyā* 23*,* Abu Fanna *Al-Qissa* 43). In the wake of Abbasi and Qaʿwar’s efforts, there was something of a revival in local writing aimed at children. Between 1960 and 1967, 24 books were published for children, whereas only two had been issued from 1948 to 1960. The Arabic-language magazine *Al-Yawm li-Awlādinā* (Today for Our Children), affiliated with Israel’s Labor Party, was also first published in 1960 (Abu Fanna *Āfāq* 95). However, most short stories remained directed at schoolchildren as such rather than toward the young generation in a more general sense. Ancient folk tales and the Arabized traditional heritage invoked in them served as the key source for children’s literature, with scant reference made to the children’s real life and environment (ʿAlaynat *Bayn al-Tarbiya* 13).

In the early 1960s, after the end of Israeli military rule, there was significant growth in local Palestinian literature, with the first wave of educated Palestinian young people beginning to take up positions in many fields of work, including the cultural sector. Schools were the nexuses for raising educational and cultural levels, shaping the characters of their pupils, refining their creative talents, and encouraging them to give something back. The contours of a new era overlaid those of the previous period, marking the emergence of *al-Tayyār al-Wāqiaʿī* (the Realist Tendency). The general impact of this era on the nature of Palestinian literature became clear after the 1967 Six-Day War (Elad-Bousikilia 14–27), with Palestinian children’s literature in Israel becoming increasingly removed from developments in the Arab world. While authors tended to write more frequently for adults, there was no significant change in such writing for quite some time, and there was very little literature written for children until the early 1970s. The opportunities to read children’s literature did significantly expand, with more materials provided to libraries after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Most of it was written by Egyptian writers such as Muhammad al-Harawi (1885–1939), Muhammad Saʿid al-Aryan (1905–64), and Kamil Kilani. These were the only such resources targeted at children in Israel beyond ordinary schoolbooks (Ghunayim *Al-Madār* 46–47).

The gradual opening up of possibilities, however, increased writers’ cultural and social awareness. Soon, Palestinian society’s view of children and childhood changed, with enhanced focus on their children, so central to the lives and activities of the community (Yahya *Taʾthīr* 218). Voices began to be raised calling for a vernacular literature dealing with local realities and problems arising from the particularities of the environment and conditions. *Al-Tayyār al-Wāqiaʿī* burgeoned within the children’s literature of this period. Literature addressed at children in Israel evinced a tendency, at least among some writers, to document local realities, focusing on village and community ties, nature, customs, traditions, respect for one’s family elders, and all aspects of these matters. Mustafa Murrar (1929–2021) was one such writer, most of his stories being inspired by the pre-1948 Palestinian countryside and its realities. His focus on the past, evident through the deployment of vernacular expressions in his short stories, was a prominent feature of his writing for children (Yahya “Ṣūrat” 201–27).

Another trend that emerged in this period was *Al-Tayyār al-Siyāsī* (the Political Tendency). The writings of *ʿ*Abd-al-Latif Nasser (1944–91) are representative of this trend, bearing a decidedly political character[[3]](#endnote-3) and being trenchantly critical of authority and the violence Palestinians faced in their own homes. We can see this, for example, in his 1982 short story “*Ana Lā*” (Not I), which appeared in a collection bearing the same title, and in the tale in that collection, “*al-Malik al-Qazam*” (The Dwarf King), which describes the Jordan regime’s oppression of the Palestinians in the camps there.[[4]](#endnote-4)

There were also increased efforts in this period to gather folk heritage material for use in children’s short stories. Abdullah Ayshan (1935–2009), a prominent writer using this approach, published stories and plays inspired by Palestinian heritage between 1973 and 1980, using simple vocabulary, the classical language (*al-Fuṣḥā*), and a folktale style of narration, often featuring familiar popular figures, such as the character of *al-ghūl* (the ghoul) (Yahya *Taʾthīr* 225). Munim Haddad (1940–) adopted a similar approach in his 1978 collections inspired by Palestinian folk tales entitled *Ṭāʾir al-Burhajān* (The Glitter Bird) and *Qiṣaṣ Shaʿbīya Maḥalīya* (Local Folktales) (Fasha *Dalīl* 55). Abbasi and Qaʿwar continued translating and Arabizing stories and plays drawn from world heritage and Hebrew literature between the years 1969 and 1986 (Fasha *Dalīl* 158), while Khalil continued producing his educational textbooks for schoolchildren.

In 1986, Jamīʿat Aṣdiqāʾ al-Aṭfāl al-ʿArab (Friends of Arab Children Association) decided to publish a new children’s magazine, *al-Ḥayat lil-Aṭfāl* (Life for Children), which aimed to direct domestic Palestinian children’s literature toward a greater commitment to Palestinian identity. Writer and its editor-in-chief, Muhammad Badarna (1956–), declared that the magazine’s mission was to serve both the homeland and the diaspora, adding:

Reinforcing the identity of children within the homeland is a goal that we must achieve in relation to every aspect of childhood. Given this standpoint, the Association has initiated a modern-style magazine in Arabic dealing with children’s literature with aims related to our heritage and identity.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Analysis of literary texts aimed at Palestinian children within Israel in the 1980s indicates that writers continued exploring these themes in the same vein. Mustafa Murrar, for example, continued publishing stories inspired by the Palestinian countryside. His 1988 collection *Awrāq Maṭrūd al-Halwāni* (Matrud al-Halawani’s Papers) includes 12 stories about the writer’s childhood under the British Mandate, inspired by his mission to preserve the memory of an important period in his people’s history (Abu Hajla 563–68).

The early 1990s were marked by major social, economic, and cultural changes in the Palestinian community within Israel. They prompted, among other things, a rapidly growing interest in children’s literature. Many cultural institutions emerged that took an interest in children’s literature, such as the Dar al-Ṭifl al-ʿArabī (The House of the Arab Child) in Acre under the supervision of the Jamīʿat al-Nisāʾ al-ʿAkkiyāt (Acre Women’s Association). One of its goals was to improve the cultural and educational level of pre-school children by publishing books aimed at them. It published *Alʿāb Tarbawīya li-Jīl al-Ṭufūla* (Educational Games for the Early Childhood Generation) in 1990 and *Hayyā Nalʿab wa-Natasallā fī Shahr Ramaḍān* (Hey, Let’s Play and Have Fun during Ramadan) in 1992 (Fasha *Dalīl* 158), both books relying more on illustrations than words, aiming to strengthen the Arab community in Israel’s collective sense of belonging and to focus on Palestinian customs and traditions.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In addition, several centers devoted to Arab-language children’s literature were established in Israel, starting with the Markaz Adab al-Aṭfāl (Center for Children’s Literature) at the Arab Academic College for Education in Haifa in 1995, through the Markaz Adab al-Aṭfāl al-ʿArabī fī Isrāʾīl (Center for Arab Children’s Literature in Israel) in Nazareth in 1995, the Markaz Thaqāfat al-Ṭifl (Center for Children’s Culture) in the Al-Aswar Foundation in Acre in 2005, and to the Markaz Adab al-Aṭfāl (Center for Children’s Literature) in Al-Qasimi College of Academic Education in Haifa in 2007.[[7]](#endnote-7) All of these promoted awareness about the importance of children’s literature, holding conferences and publishing research on the topic. They also encouraged authors to write for children by publishing such works themselves. The number of children’s books translated from Hebrew to Arabic has also markedly increased since that period. These institutions do not, however, operate on clear criteria when selecting children’s stories for publication, as these vary in quality and content and some topics are pursued somewhat repetitively (ʿAlaynat *Bayn al-Tarbiya* 12).

Setting their sights beyond the short story that has predominated in children’s literature, some institutions have become interested in poetry aimed at children, as is evident in works by Qaʿwar and Shakib Jahshan (1936–2003) in particular. The 1990s also witnessed the emergence of new poets, such as Fadil Ali (1952–), Lamis Kanana (1961–), and Ahmed Sawalha (?–). Children’s poems of this period tend to focus on young readers’ needs by placing children as the central protagonists. For example, most of the pieces in Fadil Ali’s 1995 poetry collection *Khaddī kal-Ward* (My Rosy Cheek) are educational in character, both by conveying messages aimed at children and by containing guidance for teachers and parents. Ali’s 1996 *Lī al-Dunyā* (The World Is Mine) and 2001 *Insān* (Humanity) anthologies continue this educational approach of seeking to develop children’s independent personalities.

The use of the colloquial dialect is also a notable phenomenon in the children’s poetry of that period, with Ahmad Sawalha’s undated *Qaws Qazaḥ* (Rainbow) and the work of Qaʿwar prominent in this regard. We also find a noticeable increase in the publication of poems that express both patriotism and a longing for the past.[[8]](#endnote-8) Qaʿwar’s poems, for example, tend to be patriotic in tone, expressing his powerful sense of connection to Palestinian heritage and desire to link the past to the present. His poetry frequently draws on popular expressions and proverbs. Kanana also seeks to introduce children to the history of the homeland, from the Galilee to Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and to deepen their sense of belonging to the homeland by depicting the nature of the terrain, with its plains, mountains, and trees, and exalting the glories of the Palestine’s past.

Along with these poems’ direct expressions of patriotism and nostalgia, we also find many writers drawing considerably on folklore in their short stories, suitably modified for today’s generation while preserving its original and distinctly Palestinian spirit. Abbasi, for example, decidedly focuses on documenting Palestinian heritage in a new way. He also tries to acquaint children with crafts on the verge of extinction by artistically reformulating popular songs from the past using allusions and narrative in a way that matches the spirit of the modern era. He explains that his allusions to Palestinian heritage seek to embed and nourish the roots of Palestinian identity in the hearts of children.[[9]](#endnote-9) Another prominent writer also putting a modern twist on local folklore is Abdullah ʿAyshan, whose stories are all based on Palestinian folk tales but reformulated to make them popular with contemporary children. Nabiha Jabbarin (1951–) adopts clear aims, methods, and vision in drawing on Palestinian folklore in her short stories. Her 2001 book *Aghānī Awlādinā Intimāʾ li-Bilādinā* (The Songs of Our Children [and] Belonging to Our Country) addresses Palestinian children through popular ballads, reminding them of these almost forgotten songs.

Other writers have emerged who work via independent or semi-official channels, allowing them to add a political dimension to their stories for children through allusions and symbolism. For example, Yacoub Hijazi’s (1947–) 2009 short story “Buḥayrat Marḥabā” (Marhaba Lake) does not mention the Palestinian *Nakba* directly, but in coded language when the lake dries up and the fish come out on the shore in search of salvation. The lake in the story symbolizes Palestine and the writer’s preoccupation with a sense of place is evident, especially in the face of attempts to obliterate its original identity. Ahmed Hussein (1939–) also talks about Palestine through symbolism in the short story “Khalīl wa-Jalīl” (Khalil and Jalil), in which he describes both the northern and the southern parts of the country and gives the characters placenames. Ain Ghazal in the story is a beautiful girl whose heart Khalil and Jalil duel over, but it is also no secret that this name is also that of a destroyed and deserted Palestinian village located on the Carmel plains south of Haifa. The symbolism here is clear (Muhammad Hamad 48–50).

This period also witnessed a great cooperation between West Bank writers and Israeli educational institutions in the field of children’s literature. The best example of this cooperation is the 1996 *Mawsūʿat al-Turāth al-Shaʿbī al-Filasṭīnī lil-Aṭfāl* (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Folk Heritage for Children) compiled by Abd-al-Latif al-Barghuti and published in *al-Ḥayat lil-Aṭfāl*. Sonya Nemer (1955–), who lives in the West Bank, has also published her works via the Al-Aswar Foundation, notably her 2007 short story “Mandūra.” Such works for children have been accompanied by an increased awareness of their importance and role in raising children and shaping their characters. Children’s joys and sufferings are expressed in some of these works, while others deliberately depict child characters as creative and proactive.

Within all these developments in children’s stories published in Israel, a revisionist trend has emerged that seeks to distance itself as much as possible from pedagogical literature and embrace a literature for children in which all literary dimensions can be enjoyed. Naim Araidi (1950–2015), well-known for his adaptation of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s (1941–2008) poem “Ana Yūsuf yā Abī” (“I Am Yusuf, Oh My Father”) for children, was one writer who embraced this trend. Likewise, Yaʿqub Hijazi selected Darwish’s poems entitled “*ʿAlā Hādhihi al-Arḍ Mā Yastahiqq al-Ḥayat*” (What Deserves Life in This Land). In his introduction to the 2008 book, Hijazi wrote:

The choice was difficult, due to the diversity of the contents of the poems and the distinctiveness in thought and language, but I envisaged the easiest text and the one closest to children’s souls and worlds. This poetry is interspersed with seductive language charged with honest human emotions and radiating beauty, joy, and love.

(Hijazi 5)

Another trend has emerged in the twenty-first century that focuses on propagating religious culture and symbolism among children. This religious trend is evident in the 2005 magazine *Ishraqa* (Sunrise) affiliated with the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Umm al-Fahm, which in 2009 began publishing the magazine *Ishraqa lil-Aṭfāl* (Ishraqa for Children) based on an Islamic perspective. Short stories for children from a religious perspective have also begun to appear (Czernitskyi *HaBiniat* 14). Murrar published a number of religious stories in 2003, including “Khurūf al-ʿĪd al-Saʿīd” (The Happy Eid Sheep), “al-Ḥajj wa-ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā” (Hajj and Eid al-Adha), “Ramaḍān” (Ramadan), “al-ʿĪd al-Saʿīd” (The Happy Eid), “Ḍayf Ramaḍān” (The Ramadan Guest), and “Ṣumnā wa-ʿAyyidnā” (Our Fasting and Our Eid) (Fasha *Al-Bīblyūgrāfiyā* 61). Abbasi has also published religious short stories including “*Hāla wa-Hilāl Ramaḍān*” (Hala and the Crescent Moon of Ramadan), “*Yāmin wa-Khurūf al-ʿĪd*” (Yamin and the Sheep of Eid), “Duʿāʾ wa-ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā” (Duʿa and Eid al-Adha), and “Silsilāt al-Qurʾān al-Karīm” (The Holy Qur’an Series). Likewise, Araidi published short stories in 2002 that focus on cultural and religious symbolism, including “Darajāt al-Miʾdhana” (The Steps of the Minaret), “al-Fiṣḥ” (Easter), and “al-Mīlād” (Christmas) (Fasha *Al-Bīblyūgrāfiyā* 49–51).

The Fragmenting of Palestinian Children’s Literature since 1948

Arabic-language children’s literature fragmented in Israel after *al-Nakba*. The vast majority of writers left for neighboring Arab countries in its wake, eventually becoming subject to the curricula prevailing in them, despite their divergences and contradictions (Ahmad 20).[[10]](#endnote-10) In the face of these new circumstances, writers continued to publish, each in their own way, while a new generation arose in the diaspora, some of whom became known as writers from the country in which they came to reside. For example, the works of Rawdat al-Hudhud, though she is a Palestinian born in Jaffa, are considered Jordanian literature (Miqdadi *Al-Qiṣṣa* 34).

There was little writing for children in the diaspora in this period, although some authors continued to produce poetry, songs, and anthologies for children to study in school. These books represented a form of continuity with the pre-1948 educational approach. Literature was directed mostly to adults, but the authors sometimes saw in it something suitable for children, whether in terms of artistic construction or content (ʿAlaynat 2013 9). The language of some of the songs, such as those of ʿAbd-al-Karim al-Karmi (1910–80) and Khalil al-Sakakini, was in a factual, reporting style, making it alien to children’s cognitive levels and vocabularies (al-Musallah *Adab al-Aṭfāl fil-Urdun: Al-Wāqiʿ wal-Ṭumūḥ* 43–45). Other writers documented Palestinian life before and after 1948, with the aim of “reviving Palestine” in literary terms. This period is evidently characterized by depiction of and nostalgia for the homeland: Radi ʿAbd-al-Hadi (1910–82), ʿAbd-al-Raʾuf al-Masri (1896–1960), and Fayyiz al-Ghul (1910–72). The last of them wrote between 1955 and 1966, penning stories inspired by Palestinian folk tales such as “al-Dunyā Ḥikāyāt” (The World is Stories), “Asātīr min Bilādī” (Legends from My Country), and “Sawālīf al-Salf” (The Forefathers’ Sidewhiskers) (ʿAlyanat 2013 10). Through these stories, their writers sought to preserve the essence of the vernacular originals’ artistry, to urge their continued importance, and to perpetuate the events of the original stories without changing them in a way that affected their narratives or sequencing. All to educate children about this folklore (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 45).

The 1967 Six-Day War defeat had an undeniable impact on the Arab literary movement (Ahmad 6, al-Shaʿbi 31). Many writers living in the diaspora notably stopped writing for children for an extended period due to the political situation, directing most of their works during that period at adults instead. However, in the late 1970s, writers’ interest in children’s literature revived. The appearance of *Majallat Sāmir lil-Aṭfāl* (The Samir Magazine for Children) in 1977 encouraged writing aimed at children, including that of Muhammad al-Qaisi (1944–2003), Mahm§ud Shuqayr (1941–), poet ʿAli al-Butayri (1944–), and others. This, in turn, encouraged a reconsideration in all areas of life and, within this framework, Palestinian intellectuals and writers turned their attention to childhood and children’s literature, with a notable accompanying preoccupation with national values (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 29–34). Some of these writers tried to incorporate new concepts into their stories, like the ethnic struggle against the occupiers, the values of the homeland, and the consequent deepening of the sense of belonging, highlighting heroism and the desire for liberation. Shuqair and Mufid Nahla (1939–) stand out in this regard (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 34). There was also an attempt to introduce new content into poetry via new artistic forms, with the poems dealing with the child’s aspirations for nationhood and freedom, while emphasizing the love of the land and optimism for the future. ʿAli al-Butayri and Mahmud al-Shalʿabi (1943–) are key poets in this change.

The Dar al-Fata al-ʿArabi publishing house established in Beirut in 1974 became an important resource in the dissemination of Palestinian children’s literature dealing with issues of freedom and patriotism. It published most of the books in the “*Qaws Qazaḥ*” (Rainbow) series, the “*al-Mustaqbal lil-Aṭfāl*” (The Future for Children) series, and the “*al-Ufq al-Jadīd*” (New Horizon) series. Most of them dealt with the Palestinian cause and the armed struggle in a symbolic manner without mentioning them directly. One of its publications was Ghassan Kanafani’s (1936–72) book for children entitled *Aṭfāl Ghassān Kanafānī* (The Children of Ghassan Kanafani), issued posthumously in 1979. It also published Kanafani’s *al-Qandīl al-Ṣaghīr* (The Little Lamp) in 1985. A number of writers also published *Ḥikāyāt Shaʿbiya min Filasṭīn* (Folktales from Palestine) in 1987, the aim being to contribute a further moral dimension to the world of values: originality. At the beginning of the 1980s, with Israel’s invasion of Beirut and accompanying political and military changes, Dar al-Fata al-ʿArabi lost access to financial and professional resources, especially after its headquarters and management moved to Cairo and subsequently to Amman. These changes led to a dwindling in its publications until it finally ceased operating in the mid-1990s (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 45). In 1979, Jamīʿat Nawras (the Nawras Association), a Palestinian publishing house, was founded in Beirut by writer Tawfiq Fayyad (1938–) to introduce Arab children to the issue of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This house was an extension of Dar al-Fata al-ʿArabi but wound down its activities after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (al-Shaʿbi 33).

These publishing houses encouraged writers to attach great importance to writing for children. Shahada al-Natur (1939–), who chose the animal world to explore the concerns of the homeland, and poet Mahmud al-Shalʿabi, who also raised patriotic issues of belonging and selfhood as concerns for children, were prominent figures influenced by this approach (Fasha *Dalīl* 107).

The Palestinian cultural movement’s transfer to Amman resulted in initiatives to promote Palestinian children’s literature there, with most being published by Dar al-Karmal and Dar Ibn Rushd in the Jordanian capital. Muhammad al-Zahir (1951–), Yusuf Hamdan (1944–), and Rashad Abu Shawar (1942–) were among those writing for children. Perhaps what particularly distinguishes these writers is that they wrote directly about the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation. Instilling the national idea in the minds of children was a deliberate and conscious mission that all these writers pursued through their stories (Asʿad 72).

Miqdadi affirms that patriotic content was widespread in the short stories and poems addressed to children by Palestinian writers living in the diaspora, highlighting the past of their forefathers (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 33). Palestinian writers also focused on depicting the suffering in the refugee camps and the longing to return to the homeland.

The early 1980s witnessed a salient tendency to document Palestinian history among writers in the diaspora. One such writer is Rawda al-Hudhud, who wrote a large anthology of short stories under the title *Ḥikāyāt Buṭūliya lil-Aṭfāl* (Heroic Tales for Children); the first, entitled *Fī Aḥrāj Yaʿbad* (In the Forests of Yaʿbad), published in 1979 (Ahmad 34–45), deals directly with the national issue, and realistically discusses modern heroic acts, documenting the relevant historical material for the stories at the end of each tale (Miqdadi *Al-Qiṣṣa* 61–63). She furthermore published a collection of stories in 1985 entitled *Ḥikāyāt al-Ghūl* (Tales of the Ghoul) that had been compiled by the writer Fayiz al-Ghul in 1966, thus drawing on folk tales and presenting them to children with some modifications and including suitable illustrations (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 45).

The 1987 First Intifada further encouraged diasporic writers to address Palestinian suffering through children’s stories. The depiction of resistance is apparent in children’s stories of this time, such as in Hani al-Titi’s (1959–) *Ghābat Ḥayfā* (The Forest of Haifa) 1991 anthology, in which the writer seeks to consolidate the values and principles of the struggle and to foster awareness of the Palestinian cause and its continual battle (al-Hudhud “Al-Intifāḍa” 2 and 12–19).

Al-Hudhud continued to publish stories drawn from the history of the uprising. She wrote *Laylā wa-Fūrn al-Ṣumūd* (Layla and the Furnace of Steadfastness), the short story “Sirr Sakkīn ʿĀmir wa-Majzarat al-Aqsā” (The Secret of Amir’s Knife and the Al-Aqsa Massacre), and stories of heroism for children reflecting the reality of the Intifada entitled *al-Mulaththam wa-Jarīmat al-Aḥad al-Aswad* (The Masked Man and the Crime of Black Sunday) (Fasha *Dalīl* 225).

Some writers in the diaspora, such as al-Butayri, Shahla al-Kayyali (1942–), Rashid Issa (1951–), Munir al-Hur (1950–), refrained from directly mentioning the Intifada in their poetry and prose works but continued to highlight the Palestinian cause and the liberation movement either directly or through coded language. In the 1990s, there were a number of writers in the diaspora who devoted most of their literary production to children, whether short stories, poetry, plays, or novels. Poets such as al-Zahir, al-Butayri, al-Shalʿabi, and Issa continued to write for children and their collections were printed, sung on cassette tapes, or otherwise disseminated. The publications of these four poets represent almost half of those published for children in that decade (ʿIsi *Shiʿr* 76).

Along with these already described developments, new topics and new ways of presenting topics emerged, such as those relating to the environment, nature conservation, and human rights. We find, for example, some of al-Zahir’s poetry, such as *Kawākib al-Asrār* (Planets of Secrets), revolving around the issue of children’s rights.

Some writers, inspired by events and personalities from history, continued to document these in their stories. The works of al-Hudhud are notable in this regard, particularly her short story collection *Ḥikāyāt al-Arḍ al-Ṭayyiba* (Tales of the Good Land) (Fasha *Dalīl* 224) that introduces children to the heroic acts of their forebears. In this work, she states that the reason for her orientation toward history is that it is necessary for children to understand the heroism and events of the past in a format that they can accept, so that heroism is not presented in either a bland sloganizing or with a view to sowing hatred in the hearts of children (Miqdadi *al-Qiṣṣa* 71).

Palestinian Children’s Literature in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967

The Israeli authorities imposed a blockade after their occupation of West Bank and Gaza in 1967, naturally including a cultural embargo that inevitably negatively affected the cultural environment. This had an impact on enthusiasm for writing, with some authors leaving the craft permanently and others curtailing their productivity, whether because of the exceptional circumstances they found themselves in, or their direct involvement in the political struggle against the occupation, or due to being among the number of writers, such as Shuqayr, who were deported from their homeland.

In the late 1970s, the literary movement in the West Bank and Gaza managed to move beyond the sense of suffering that had prevailed after the June setback in 1967 and writers resumed their literary activities, without any notable changes from the stylistics of the early 1960s. Writers’ intentions at that time were to document Palestinian realities and sufferings through realist stories, with Ibrahim al-ʿAlam (1941–), Samia al-Khalili (1953–), and Ali al-Khalili (1943–2013) notable in this regard. These stories are distinctive in the bold way in which they expose children to the realities of life and prompt them, directly or via symbolism, to help change them. Realistic stories received increasing attention, with the national issues infused into much of everyday life experience and its tragic realities. Consequently, these stories bore the imprints of war and jihad against the enemy and addressed both the past and the present of the homeland question (Ahmad 79–82).

The First Intifada resulted in increased suffering of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, and this was unsurprisingly reflected in the children’s stories of the time. There was a marked preoccupation in the Territories with both childhood and direct and unambiguous addressing of the conflict with Israel that was mired in violence (ʿAlaynat *Yaldut* 122). Writers took great care to incorporate their ideas and politics into the stories of childhood. Considerable vocabulary and imagery from the uprising, such as of the martyr, the occupation, the arrests, and the resistance, became prominent. Writers also portrayed children’s encounters with the occupation and focused on depicting Israelis negatively as violent while portraying Palestinians positively as either victims or heroic resisters.[[11]](#endnote-11) Such characterizations appear in Jamil al-Salhout’s (1949–) 1989 short story collection *al-Makhāḍ* (The Ford), all of whose protagonists are children. These stories describe another aspect of the suffering of the Palestinians and its impact on the life of the child—the arrest of fathers and their enforced absence from their families. Aida Ayoub’s (1950–) short story “Nūra,” from her 1990 anthology *Qiṣas lil-Aṭfāl min Wāqiʿ al-Intifāḍa* (Stories for Children from the Reality of the Intifada), reveals the suffering and loss the daughter experiences after her father’s arrest, as she prefers to remain silent so as not to burden her family with her cares (ʿAlaynat “Ṭufūla fī Ṣirāʿ” 28).

During this period, writers interested in preserving the collective Palestinian memory through children’s literature appeared, such ʿAbd-al-Rahman Abbad (1945–), who wrote the collections *Dhākirat al-Burtuqāl* (Memory of Oranges), *Dhākirat al-Zaytūn* (Memory of Olives), *Dhākirat al-Nakhīl* (Memory of Palms), and *Dhākirat al-ʿAṣāfīr* (Memory of Birds) (Fasha *Dalīl* 6–239). These works map the chronic and acute exigencies of Palestinian life in all their social, religious, and patriotic dimensions. The image of the homeland that emerges in his writings symbolically expresses a sense of belonging and national identity (al-Karki 121–58).

The works of West Bank and Gazan writers diverged after the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This divergence emerged out of differing political affiliations and opinions on the Accords among Palestinian writers, which was reflected in some of their works. The sense of the “other” began to impose its presence in many stories’ agendas, especially among local and Palestinians who began returning following the Accords. We mention here, by way of example, Mahmud Shuqayr, who returned to the homeland in May 1993. In his story “*Qalat Maryām Qala al-Fatā*” (Maryam Said, the Boy Said), the conflict is depicted as a struggle between Eastern and Western civilizations, not between the strong, as represented by the Israelis, and the weak, as represented by the Palestinians. The writer also airs values new to children’s literature in this story, such as those related to freedom of thought and expression (ʿAlaynat “Ṭufūla fī Ṣirāʿ” 32–33).

Comparing Abd al-Rahman Abbad’s works before and after Oslo, we find that the collection *Dhākirat al-ʿAṣāfīr*, published in 1996 after the Accords, features matters of pedagogy and cognition, since most of the stories in this collection are educationally and psychologically oriented (al-Karki 121–58). The writer sought to paint a new picture of the Palestinian child, as no longer merely rebellious, combative, and self-sacrificing, but also intelligent, inquisitive, tolerant, open to the world, and nature loving. This is also evident in Ali al-Khalili’s 1998 story “Mūsīqā al-Arghafa” (Music of the Flatbreads) in which he tries, through the child Ahmed, the hero of his story, and his family, to make observations on the transformations that have taken in Palestinian society in the West Bank and the Gaza after Oslo. The writer urges an end to the occupation while also, as one longing for peace, constructing a vision of a Palestinian state based on pluralism and tolerance as inevitable developments (Shuqayr *Al-Tasāmuḥ* 29–30).

Muʾasasat Tāmir lil-Taʿlīm al-Mujtamaʿī (The Tamir Foundation for Community Education) was established in Jerusalem in 1989, subsequently moving its headquarters to Ramallah in the West Bank. The Foundation has worked on the development of children’s literature at all levels, issuing books of a variety of subjects, with the tendency toward realism prevalent in its publications (Badwan 21–22). It also provided books for children in the Occupied Territories through the publishing unit it established in 1992. In addition, it has encouraged children to write essays, stories, and poems for its magazine *Yirāʿāt* (meaning both “fireflies” and “pens”).

During this period, institutions, centers, and projects were established, such as the Awghārīt lil-Nashr wal-Tawziʿ (Ugarit for Publishing and Distribution) house in 1997 (Badwan 21–22), the Markaz Badīl (the Badil Center) in 1998, the al-Mashrūʿ al-Waṭanī al-Tanmawī li-Adab al-Ṭifl al-Filasṭīnī (National Developmental Project for Palestinian Children’s Literature”) in 1997, and Markaz al-Bīrah li-Tanmiyat al-Ṭufūla (Al-Birah Center for Childhood Development), this last on the initiative of the Swedish Diakonia Foundation. All of them have tried to contribute, through studies and conferences as well as through writing and publishing, to shaping the character of Palestinian children, deepening their cultural capital, encouraging them to be creative, and fostering the reading habit, while elevating the status of books and making them available to every Palestinian child.

It is notable that the children’s stories written after the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–05) were pacific in character and limited to affirming the right to resist for the sake of freedom. Naglaa Bashour’s (1947–) 2004 short story “*Shaʿnūnat al-ʿĪd*,” for example, makes observations on the siege of the Church of the Nativity during the Israeli invasion in 2002 while foregrounding the mutual Muslim-Christian tolerance and coexistence inside the church (Fasha *Al-Bīblyūgrāfiyā* 12).

During this period, the number of authors who wrote for the young generation also increased significantly. Jamil al-Salhout published the novel *ʿAshsh al-Dabābīr* (The Hornet’s Nest) in 2007; Shuqair published the novel *Kawkib Baʿīd li-Ukhtī al-Malika* (A Far-Off Planet for my Sister, the Queen) in the same year, foregrounding citizenship and patriotism by featuring aspects of the Palestinian cause (Shuqayr *Al-Tasāmuḥ* 31).

Changes in values also affected the stories inspired by Palestinian folklore, with some writers drawing on it and on traditional methods of storytelling. In this field, Zakaria Muhammad (1950–), Sonya Nimr (1955–), al-Salhut, Sharif Kanaʾina (1936–), Nimr Sarhan (1937–), and others emerged. An example of this approach is Dima Sahwil’s 2009 short story “Riḥlat al-Sulṭān” (The Sultan’s Journey), which emulates the folktale style. The story revolves around promoting love for the Sultan as a lover of knowledge and not tyrannical in his opinions, noting that the advocacy of tolerance has a place here. We also find these changes reflected in the stories of Sharif Kanaʾina, in which the Palestinian colloquial language is prominent and of which Kanaʾina says that the folk tale template used serves primarily the enjoyment of those who hear it read aloud.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Given the publication of hundreds of stories for children in the West Bank and Gaza, we cannot even briefly cover all aspects of the topics at play here. However, we can affirm that nationalist values were not absent from children’s stories in the period after the Al-Aqsa Intifada; they were simply accompanied by the emergence of new values of openness, acceptance, understanding of the other, concern for the environment, and pacification.

During this period, the focus on children’s magazines also increased, in tandem with a strengthening use of cultural and religious symbols. Thus, for example, Muʾasasat al-Ashbāl wal-Zahrāt (Lion Cubs and Flowers Foundation), affiliated with the Fatah Movement, issued the *Waʿd* (Covenant) magazine, which covers various topics of interest for children, especially the understanding of Islam and its history. The *al-Fatḥ lil-Aṭfāl* (Fatah for Children) magazine for children, affiliated with the Islamic Movement in the West Bank, was also published in this period, with the goal of familiarizing Palestinian children with their homeland (Czernitskyi *HaBiniat* 16).

Summary

This chapter has covered the history of Palestinian children’s literature from 1967 to the present, showing how many Palestinian writers in Israel, in the West Bank, in Gaza, and in the diaspora have contributed to its development.

With the 1960s emerged new currents in children’s literature, including the trends toward realism and politics. Palestinian children’s literature took another turn in the early 1990s, as attempts to collate archives of Palestinian folklore and employ what they contained in children’s stories increased. This period was marked by great changes in the structure of Palestinian society inside Israel, in the West Bank, in Gaza, and in the diaspora, prompting a greater preoccupation with children’s literature.

Political events had a major influence on the content of stories aimed at children. The events of the First Intifada were reflected in children’s stories, with a strong focus on childhood and the conflict with Israel characterized by violence. After the Oslo Accords, the conflict was represented more as a struggle between Eastern and Western civilizations rather than between the powerful, represented by the Israelis, and the weak, represented by the Palestinians. Children’s stories written after the Al-Aqsa Intifada tended to have a pacific character and to limit themselves to affirming the right to resist for the sake of freedom.

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1. Baydas, a pioneer of the modern Arabic short story in Palestine, graduated from the Russian Teachers’ College (the Seminary) in Nazareth and spoke Russian fluently. He was familiar with writers like Pushkin and Tolstoy and translated many of their works into Arabic: see ʿAlaynat, *Bayn al-Tarbiya*, 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On the political and economic circumstances after *al-Nakba*, see Jarbawi and Khalil 26–54. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. ʿAlaynat emphasizes Nasser’s political role in the Communist Party and its impact on his political awareness, his view of the Palestinian issue, and his criticisms of the authorities, not just the Israeli ones but also those of the neighboring Arab countries: see *Bayn al-Tarbiya* 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. On Nasser’s works, see Yahya *Taʾthīr* 232 and ʿAlaynat *Bayn al-Tarbiya* 15–17. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Interview with Badarna on January 12, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See http://myschool.co.il/daraltiflar. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See http://www.qsm.ac.il/web/Main.aspx?did=67&pid=0. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Interview with Kanaʾina, April 11, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Interview with Abbasi, August 5, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Of those studies which indicate the programmatic differences, of course due to organizational differences, see particularly Bashawwur *Al-Qaḍīya* and ʿUthman. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Studies of children’s literature in the West Bank and Gaza during the First Intifada pre-eminently include that of Salwa ʿAlaynat, who finds that children’s stories reflect the internal and external conflicts as being between generations, classes, and cultures. She also finds that Israelis are represented in all the violence experienced by children in the invasion and destruction of their homes, exchange of gunfire, arrests, and so on (Ṭufūla fī Ṣirāʿ 13–47). Rafiʿa Yahya also indicates that the content of children’s stories of this period vary between reportage and comical styles, as is familiar in children’s literature generally (Ṣūrat 43–62). Walid Ihshayyish finds that there is a distinction between writers with regard to which patriotic values they focus on and that the image of self-sacrifice and martyrdom is very evident in these tales (1991, 35–51). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The 2001 collection *Qawwil yā Ṭayr* contains 45 stories which Sharif Kanaʾina confirmed, in my January 15, 2013, interview with him, were preserved in the colloquial dialect because it was an important way to teach national identity. Hence, the stories are read aloud in public, not read in book form. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)