

**An Annotated Bibliography of  
Children's and Young Adult Books on the Arab-Israeli Conflict  
Containing Significant Anti-Israel Bias  
Compiled by Marjorie Gann**

Children's attitudes and ideas are influenced by the books they read, with lasting impressions of the heroes and villains of history formed by literature. Fiction and memoir are especially influential because they engage not just the intellect, but the emotions, and young readers often identify closely with the characters they encounter. For this reason, it is important to select books on controversial topics that are unbiased in both content and tone. The books in this list contain significant anti-Israel bias, to the point where many can be classified as mere propaganda.

I compiled this bibliography to assist teachers and librarians in identifying these books. Parents whose children are assigned books in school that arouse concern can consult this bibliography for evidence of bias. I have endeavored to substantiate all my findings of bias with documentary evidence.

Marjorie Gann

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**Children's and Young Adult Books on the Arab-Israeli Conflict**  
**with Significant Anti-Israel Bias**

Version 2, January 17, 2023, by Marjorie Gann

- [Abdelfattah, Randa. \*Where the Streets Had a Name\*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.](#)
- [Abdelrazaq, Leila. \*Baddawi\*. Charlottesville: Just World Books, 2015.](#)
- [Barakat, Ibtisam “Marked for Destruction,” in \*Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict\*, Laurel Holliday ed. New York: Simon & Schuster \(Pocket Books\), 1999.](#)
- [Barakat, Ibtisam. \*Tasting the Sky\*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: 2007; \*Balcony on the Moon: Coming of Age in Palestine\*. New York Farrar Straus Giroux, 2016. \[Sequel.\]](#)
- [Bashi, Golbarg. \*P is for Palestine: A Palestine Alphabet Book\*. Illus. by Golrokh Nafisi. Dr. Bashi: 2018; Bashi, Golbarg. \*Counting up the Olive Tree: A Palestine Number Book\*. Illus. by Nabi H. Ali. Dr. Bashi: 2019. \[Sequel.\]](#)
- [Bsharat, Ahlam. \*Code Name: Butterfly\*. Nancy Roberts, trans. London: Neem Tree Press, 2016.](#)
- [Carter, Anne Laurel. \*The Shepherd's Granddaughter\*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2008.](#)
- [Clinton, Cathryn. \*A Stone in My Hand\*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2002.](#)
- [Ellis, Deborah. \*The Cat at the Wall\*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2014.](#)
- [Ellis, Deborah. \*Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak\*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2004.](#)
- [Feldman, Jacquetta Nammar. \*Wishing Upon the Same Stars\*. New York: HarperCollins, 2022.](#)
- [Laird, Elizabeth. \*A Little Piece of Ground\*. London: Macmillan, 2003.](#)
- [Laskin, Pamela L. \*Ronit & Jamil\*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017.](#)
- [Lieberman, Leanne. \*The Book of Trees\*. Victoria, BC: Orca, 2010.](#)
- [Morpurgo, Michael. \*The Kites Are Flying!\* London: Walker, 2009](#)
- [Nye, Naomi Shihab. \*Everything Comes Next: Collected & New Poems\*. New York: Greenwillow, 2020; \*The Tiny Journalist: Poems\*. Rochester: BOA Editions, 2019.](#)
- [Nye, Naomi Shihab. \*Habibi\*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997](#)
- [Saba, Wadad. “A Christian Palestinian's Story,” in \*Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict\*, Laurel Holliday ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.](#)
- [Sokolower, Jody. \*Determined to Stay: Palestinian Youth Fight for their Village\*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press \(an imprint of Interlink Publishing\), 2021.](#)

**Abdelfattah, Randa. *Where the Streets Had a Name*. New York: Scholastic, 2008**

Thirteen-year-old Hayaat lives in Bethlehem, where she is separated from Jerusalem by the security wall constructed by the Israelis against terrorist operations – although the rationale for the construction of this wall is never spelled out in Randa Abdelfattah’s *Where the Streets Had a Name*. Instead, it is described in loaded language as “the ubiquitous Wall, twisting and turning, devouring the landscape, towering over the fields, villages and towns.”<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is a distortion, since most of the security fence is an electrified fence, not a wall at all.

Hayaat is strongly attached to her grandmother, her “Sitti,” and when the old woman becomes ill, Hayaat is determined to make the difficult trip back to her grandmother’s former home in Jerusalem (from which she was exiled in 1948), and return with some soil, to give her grandmother comfort and reaffirm her connection with her lost home. This she does with Samy, a boy filled with resentment over his father’s lengthy incarceration by the Israelis; Hayaat says to Samy, “your father’s a hero. Locked up all these years for no reason other than organizing protests and strikes.”<sup>2</sup> (p. 125) – an accusation, like many of Abdelfattah’s, that has to be taken with a grain of salt. It isn’t protests and strikes that the Israelis object to – it’s violence and terror.

Because the context underlying the restrictions on mobility depicted in Abdelfattah’s anti-Israel screed is never outlined by the author, a young reader will come away from *Where the Streets Had a Name* with the impression that the Israelis make Palestinian lives miserable for their sport. That the security fence was constructed, and that checkpoints function, to ensure that armed terrorists and suicide bombers don’t enter West Jerusalem to bomb cafes or stab Israelis is never explained. So while it may well be true, as Hayaat says, that “there’s a cloud of humiliation looming over us as the soldiers scold women when they don’t empty their bags quickly enough and order some of the men to remove their shirts and raise their arms in the air”<sup>3</sup> (p. 151), these measures save Israeli lives. Doubtless some young Israeli soldiers and border police are bored, inconsiderate, even abusive. There is a distressing account in the book of Israeli soldiers stationed in a home in Gaza in which they humiliate the father of the family by denying him use of his own bathroom until it is too late. Whether this is fact or fabrication is impossible for the reader to verify. But the IDF would not be in Gaza at all if it weren’t for the threat to Israel posed by Hamas.

Like many of her fellow Palestinian authors, Abdelfattah relies heavily on nostalgia for an idealized past to garner sympathy for the Palestinian cause, painting an idealized picture of the world she inhabited before tragedy struck her family. Sitti describes her ancestral home:

I lived with my parents and sister in a village on the top of a hill in Jerusalem,” she explains. “To reach our house you had to climb a steep stone staircase.”<sup>4</sup>

It is Sitti’s longing for her past that inspires Hayaat to sneak into Jerusalem:

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<sup>1</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 104.

I peer out at the landscape. I want to climb those stone stairs, touch the hills where Sitti Zeynab and her sister danced on their wedding days. I want to tear our papers and identity cards into a million tiny pieces and throw them to the wind so that each piece of me can touch my homeland freely.<sup>5</sup>

What Abdelfattah fails to tell her readers – and what she herself may not know -- is that the uprooting and dislocation of Jerusalemites in 1948 cut both ways; Jews whose families had lived for generations in the Old City were uprooted in that year. Sima Nightingale's family had lived in the Jewish Quarter for eight generations when, during the 1948 siege, an Arab sniper on the roof of the synagogue near her family home shot her grandfather dead as he went to fetch the last of his family's water supply. Puah Shteiner's family had been in Jerusalem for six generations, ever since her ancestor Rav Eliezer Bergman arrived in the city in 1835. She remembers fleeing her Jerusalem home with only the clothes she was wearing. "The world has heard of Arab refugees," Shteiner comments, "but there were also Jewish refugees." In fact, the Jewish Quarter was emptied of its Jewish residents by the Jordanian Army in 1948.<sup>6</sup>

The book offers a litany of accusations against the Israelis: that Jews who build in Jerusalem are "settlers," that home demolitions are wanton, that IDF soldiers shoot a man as punishment for his links to a suicide bomber." All of this makes the Israelis look like brutes who wantonly exercise unchecked power, because nothing is explained: that home demolitions have been extensively debated and ruled on by the Israeli Supreme Court, that the role of the IDF soldier is to arrest, not to carry out punishments, and that there is land that Israeli courts deem legal to build on, and other land on which building by Israelis or by Arabs is illegal.

As proof that her attacks against Israel are untainted with prejudice, Abdelfattah offers her readers two "good" Israeli characters, but – given the author's premise that Israel is imposing unwarranted hardships upon a largely innocent Arab population – in fact the only "good" Israelis are those who oppose their government's measures. The "good" David deserted from the IDF after observing the misbehavior of soldiers when they took over a house in Gaza. He and Mali describe themselves as "peace activists" who are "on checkpoint watch" and are "against the occupation."<sup>7</sup>

The "occupation," however, is never explained -- neither how it came about, nor why, from the Israeli perspective, it has persisted since 1967. So young readers are left with the impression that the occupation was engineered by Israel to oppress another people. That under the Oslo accords large tracts of the West Bank are under the control of the Palestinian Authority, which offers considerable local (and quite corrupt) government is never disclosed by the author.

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<sup>5</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Honest Reporting video at: [jewishrefugees.blogspot.ca/2011/05/Jerusalem-refugees-of-1948.html](http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.ca/2011/05/Jerusalem-refugees-of-1948.html) Accessed June 6, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Abdelfattah, p. 129.

## Abdelrazaq, Leila. *Baddawi*. Charlottesville: Just World Books, 2015

Leila Abdelrazaq's family has a heartbreaking memory: Her father's village, Safsaf, was the site of what they report as a gruesome Israeli atrocity in the '48 war. What Abdelrazaq does with that memory, though, is revealing.

Her highly polemical graphic novel *Baddawi* appeals to the reader's emotions through a motif common to many Palestinian memoirs of the period before 1948. Abdelrazaq paints an idealized (and idyllic) picture of life in Palestine by conjuring up images of her grandmother: "Palestine is buried deep in the creases of my grandmother's palms. They once kneaded bread dough and sowed the seeds of her homeland in my family's village, Safsaf. Its name means 'the weeping willow.'"<sup>8</sup>(p. 16)

Ironically, from a left-wing perspective that would be highly critical of Orientalism as outlined by the anti-Israel scholar Edward Said, it's hard to see this motif as anything but an Orientalist trope of the passive, unchanging, eternal East.

The author then goes on to explain that her father Naji al-Ali was a political cartoonist, whose life she tells in *Baddawi*. Al-Ali had created a character, Handala—

a ten-year-old boy with spiky hair, bare feet, and tattered clothes. He always stood with his back to the reader, hands clasped behind him, as political events unfolded around him. Naji al-Ali promised that once the Palestinian people were free and allowed to return home, Handala would grow up and the world would see his face."<sup>9</sup>

The Palestinian is Orientalized as a passive child -- the grandchild of a creased, bread-kneading, seed-sowing grandmother. He has no energy, no agency, no ability to adapt to a changed reality.

Ironically, by insisting on this metonymy – child = Palestinian victimhood -- Abdelrazaq and her father favor infantilization and victimhood over growing up.

The book repeatedly accuses Israel of "ethnic cleansing": "But Zionist gangs were ethnically cleansing villages all over Palestine, committing widespread massacres,"<sup>10</sup> writes Abdelrazaq. According to the methodical and reliable Israeli historian Benny Morris, Israel did indeed commit some atrocities (as did the Arabs, though Abdelrazaq never alludes to these) in 1948, and there were villages which the Arab populations were "encouraged" to abandon during that war. Still, if Israel had really had a policy of deliberate and determined "ethnic cleansing," the population of Israel today would not be twenty percent Arab. That there was a war that the Arabs started by not agreeing to the UN Partition vote of 1947 is never mentioned. In fact, the reader will find no Arab-initiated violence in this book, no invasion by Arab armies in contravention of the partition policy of the UN.

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<sup>8</sup>Abdelrazaq, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Abdelrazaq, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Abdelrazaq, p. 18.

Glaring omissions, like any manifestations of Arab violence or aggression, are accompanied by out-and-out lies. Thus, the author claims that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza “was to become the longest and most brutal military occupation of modern times,”<sup>11</sup> neatly ignoring the Chinese occupation of Tibet (which began in 1950), not to mention Stalin’s brutal population transfers (the Crimean Tatars were deported in 1944) from territory his army occupied.

She also invokes the “Right of Return” for Palestinian refugees as (she claims) enshrined in “international law,” through GA Resolution 194. In fact, she claims that this “right of return” is guaranteed to “refugees and their descendants,”<sup>12</sup> a total fabrication. Despite what is claimed by many partisans of the Palestinian cause, refugee status is not heritable, so the only genuine Palestinian refugees are those who fled or were forced to leave Israel themselves in 1948, not their descendants.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Abdelrazaq, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Abdelrazaq, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> See “Does UNRWA Violate International Law?” at Honest Reporting: <https://honestreporting.com/does-unrwa-violate-international-law/> Accessed June 6, 2021. In the article “Peter Beinart in NYT: Root Cause of Gaza War is Israel’s Creation,” Honest Reporting demonstrates the double standard for counting Palestinian refugees: “[T]he United Nations treats Palestinians differently from the rest of the world’s refugees. Palestinians are under the auspices of UNRWA, an entity created *uniquely* for them that has transformed the concept of refugee into an inherited characteristic. As a result, UNRWA today counts four generations of Palestinians as “refugees” — more than 5 million people. This totally new definition is not supported by international law. And while in every other conflict around the world, refugee populations decrease over time, the number of Palestinian refugees has continued to rise – a phenomenon that has been weaponized against Israel. In fact, according to US government estimates, less than 200,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War of Independence are still alive.” See <https://honestreporting.com/new-york-times-peter-beinart-root-cause-of-gaza-war-is-israels-creation/> Accessed June 6, 2021.

Barakat, Ibtisam. “Marked for Destruction,” in **Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict**, Laurel Holliday ed., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

“Marked for Destruction,” Ibtisam Barakat’s account of her family’s experience of the Six-Day War, incorporates a gross distortion of Israel’s objectives in that war which the book’s editor, Laurel Holliday, leaves without comment.

Barakat’s family was living in the West Bank when Israel struck Egypt pre-emptively. As war broke out, her father ran home, crying, “Run back and tell your mother the war has started!”

Now, standing in the kitchen as my father’s words hung in the air like a brandished sword, my mother was reminded that her family, her people, and everything Palestinian were bound for *mass destruction* once again<sup>14</sup>. [My italics.]

But “mass destruction” was not the Israelis’ objective. This was a defensive war against four enemy nations whose leaders openly declared their genocidal intentions:

“Our basic objective will be to destroy Israel.” (Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, May 26, 1967)

“In the event of a conflagration, no Jews whatsoever will survive.” Ahmed Shukeiri, future chairman, PLO)<sup>15</sup>

Barely two decades after the Holocaust, Israel was defending itself against a second annihilation, not perpetrating “mass destruction” on the Palestinians.

People’s memories of terrifying experiences do not always tally with what really happened. As Barakat’s family hides in a ditch with Israeli warplanes flying overhead, Barakat reports that “bullets were being fired at my mom”<sup>16</sup>, but there is no evidence that the Israelis had any reason to waste their bullets on Arab civilians. Barakat recalls a fleeing man warning the family, “After their planes attack, they will be combing the area house by house. The word is that they will butcher every living thing that they find.”<sup>17</sup> If she remembers this correctly, it is no wonder her credulous family was terror-stricken, but in fact there was no butchery of civilians. In fact, according to Michael Oren’s definitive history of the Six-Day War, “Few Israelis even came in contact with civilians, most of whom had fled with the Syrian command, well in advance of the attackers,” and in general civilian casualties were “remarkably low” because Israel made sure that most of the fighting “took place far from major population centers.”<sup>18</sup>

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Holliday, p. 240.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, p. 270

<sup>16</sup> Holliday, p. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Holliday, p. 242.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, p. 306.

From the onset of hostilities, Israel's strategy was to repel an attack on Jerusalem by Jordan, whom the Israelis had begged to stay out of a war they knew was coming. The panic on the part of Arab families like Barakat's may have been triggered by Arab propaganda; we know, for example, that one Palestinian working for UNRWA in Jordan said that Arab politicians were spreading rumors that "all the young people would be killed. People heard on the radio," the UNRWA administrator went on, "that this is not the end only the beginning so they think maybe it will be a long war and they want to be in Jordan."<sup>19</sup>

*[Fortunately, Holliday's Why Do They Hate Me? is no longer available, though it may still be found on library shelves. But Ibtisam Barakat's Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood, 2007, is still accessible to young readers. It incorporates many of these distortions, and will not give young readers a true picture of the history of the Six-Day War. See the review of Tasting the Sky in this bibliography. See following entry.]*

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<sup>19</sup> Accessed May 12, 2021 at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/myths-and-facts-online-the-1967-six-day-war>



Barakat, Ibtisam. *Tasting the Sky*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2007. Barakat, Ibtisam. *Balcony on the Moon: Coming of Age in Palestine*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2016. [Sequel]

*Tasting the Sky* is Ibtisam Barakat's memoir of her experiences during and after the Six-Day War. It opens as a fleeing man warns Barakat's Palestinian family, "After their [the Israelis'] planes attack, they will be combing the area house by house. The word is that they will butcher every living thing that they find." (22)

But "butcher[ing] every living thing" was not the Israelis' objective. This was a **defensive** war against four enemy nations whose leaders openly declared their **genocidal** intentions:

"Our basic objective will be to destroy Israel." (Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, May 26, 1967)

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Barakat also accuses Israeli planes of shooting at her mother as the family hides in a trench upon the outbreak of hostilities, ignoring what really occurred between Israel and Jordan, whom the Israelis had begged to stay out of a war they knew was coming. The Jordanian attack on Israel began at 10:00 a.m. on June 5 with a barrage "on all enemy [Israeli] positions," which included civilian settlements in Israel's interior. At 11:15 the Jordanians lobbed 6000 shells at Jewish Jerusalem, damaging over 900 buildings (including Hadassah Hospital in Ein Kerem). They wounded over a thousand civilians, 150 seriously, and caused 20 deaths.<sup>22</sup> None of this is reported by Barakat.

The panic on the part of Arab families like Barakat's may have been triggered by Arab propaganda; we know, for example, that one Palestinian working for UNRWA in Jordan said that Arab politicians were spreading rumors that "all the young people would be killed. People heard on the radio," the UNRWA administrator went on, "that this is not the end only the beginning so they think maybe it will be a long war and they want to be in Jordan."<sup>23</sup>

Barely two decades after the Holocaust, Israel was defending itself against a second annihilation, not "butcher[ing] every living thing they can find," as Barakat would have it.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, p. 270

<sup>21</sup> Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, p. 306.

<sup>22</sup> Oren, pp. 186-187.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/myths-and-facts-online-the-1967-six-day-war>. Accessed May 12, 2021.

Other accusations are belied by the facts. For example, if the goal of Israel had really been to dispossess the Palestinians, why was her family permitted to return to their home in Ramallah after an absence of only four months and thirteen days (70)? Doesn't that indicate that dispossession of the Arabs was not Israel's primary goal in this war? True, the area was occupied, and Ibtisam's mother was scared by some poorly-behaved young Israeli soldiers who made rude gestures at her. But they were not ethnically cleansed from their home.

Barakat's memoir honestly reflects how the outbreak and consequences of the war appeared to her. But how it *appeared* is contradicted by documentary evidence, and should not be transmitted uncritically to the uninformed young reader.<sup>24</sup>

## ***Balcony on the Moon***

Barakat's memoir *Balcony on the Moon* picks up where her *Tasting the Sky* leaves off, tracing the course of Barakat's life from her childhood following the Six-Day War to her acceptance at university. It's a book about the effects of the war and the Israeli occupation on her family, but also about the author's love of school, her dawning love of writing, and her developing commitment to literacy and equal rights for women and girls.

Her story is also polemical, and her Author's Note, which outlines the context for her childhood and adolescence, is a one-sided account of the history of what to her is exclusively "Palestine." As she tells it, Israel was founded "because of the Holocaust and extensive Jewish immigration to Palestine, with the aim of making it a national home for Jews." In other words, Jews were interlopers, with no roots in this region worth reporting to young readers.

Is Barakat aware that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in Palestine since the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, well before the Arab invasion of the seventh century? Does she know that there were Jewish communities, some quite large, in Tiberias and Jerusalem? Why does she avoid mentioning Arab in-migration, which increased under the British Mandate in part because of economic activity and job opportunities generated by the Jews of the Yishuv (the Jewish settlement)? In fact, from 1922 to 1947, it was the cities with large Jewish populations, like Haifa, Jerusalem, and Jaffa, where the Arab populations increased most markedly, not the all-Arab cities.

Barakat also faults Israel for failing to implement UN General Assembly Resolution 194 which, she says, "aimed to facilitate a peaceful return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes," as though this was something simple to do.

To admit a large population of hostile Arabs into the nascent Israeli state would, of course, have been suicidal, especially when the young country was struggling to settle and accommodate hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing hostile countries in the Middle

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<sup>24</sup> For example, you will find this book on a list of recommended titles for synagogue youth at the "Reframing Israel" website – a site endorsed by a group of liberal rabbis who clearly consider it legitimate to educate synagogue youth that the Israelis, in '67, were not fighting a defensive war against an enemy aiming at their destruction, but were out to butcher Palestinians.

East and North Africa. The mass of Jewish refugees from Muslim countries – approximately equivalent to the number of Palestinian refugees -- is invisible in Barakat’s account.

As in *Tasting the Sky*, Barakat also offers a distorted history of the Six-Day War. She says it “occurred” in 1967, failing to acknowledge, as noted in the review of *Tasting the Sky*, what it really was: an attempt by four Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq) to wipe Israel off the map and even to annihilate the Jews.

Grateful to schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the life-altering education it offered her, Barakat paints a sanitized picture of the agency. She notes that it was the sole UN agency devoted to “one displaced people,” but fails to ask why the UN, which already had the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), with its extensive refugee-support network serving millions of post-World War II refugees, had to create one exclusively for the Palestinians. The truth is that this decision was political. UNRWA defined refugees differently; under the UNRWA definition, refugee status is passed on to future generations. Perhaps, having lost to Israel on the battlefield, the Arabs decided to perpetuate the conflict rather than resolving the refugees’ situation.<sup>25</sup>

UNRWA schools have been found responsible for teaching for conflict rather than peace,<sup>26</sup> and many of their teachers have posted inflammatory material on their Facebook pages.<sup>27</sup>

The map Barakat has selected on the page facing the opening section of her book implies that there was an independent entity called “Palestine” before 1948. This is the misinformation

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<sup>25</sup> See “Does UNRWA Violate International Law?” at Honest Reporting: <https://honestreporting.com/does-unrwa-violate-international-law/> [Accessed June 6, 2021](#). In the article “Peter Beinart in NYT: Root Cause of Gaza War is Israel’s Creation,” Honest Reporting demonstrates the double standard for counting Palestinian refugees: “[T]he United Nations treats Palestinians differently from the rest of the world’s refugees. Palestinians are under the auspices of [UNRWA](#), an entity created *uniquely* for them that has transformed the concept of refugee into an inherited characteristic. As a result, UNRWA today counts four generations of Palestinians as “refugees” — more than 5 million people. This totally new definition is [not supported by international law](#). And while in every other conflict around the world, refugee populations decrease over time, the number of Palestinian refugees has continued to rise – a phenomenon that has been weaponized against Israel. In fact, according to [US government estimates](#), less than 200,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War of Independence are still alive.” See <https://honestreporting.com/new-york-times-peter-beinart-root-cause-of-gaza-war-is-israels-creation/> [Accessed June 6, 2021](#).

<sup>26</sup> See IMPACT-se January, 2021 document, “Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in the Palestinian Territories” at <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Produced-Study-Materials-in-the-Palestinian-Territories.pdf> [Accessed June 6, 2021](#).

<sup>27</sup> See UN Watch February 2, 2017 report to US Congress House Foreign Affairs Committee, “Poisoning Palestinian Children,” on UNRWA Teachers’ Incitement to jihadist terrorism: <https://unwatch.org/130-page-report-unrwa-teachers-incite-terrorism-antisemitism/> [Accessed June 6, 2021](#).

communicated in the notorious “map that lies” used as anti-Israel propaganda. It ignores the partition of the Palestine Mandate accepted by Israel and rejected by the Arabs in 1947, implying that all of Israel was a legal entity known as “Palestine” and stolen by Israel in ’48 and ’67.

*[An earlier piece of writing by Ibtisam Barakat, a memoir in Laurel Holliday’s Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict, published in 1999, makes the accusation that Israel’s aim in the Six-Day War was “mass destruction” of Arab Palestine. See the review of Barakat’s “Marked for Destruction” in this bibliography, in preceding entry.]*

Marjorie Gann

Bashi, Golbarg. ***P is for Palestine: A Palestine Alphabet Book***. Illus. by Golrokh Nafisi. Dr. Bashi: 2018; Bashi, Golbarg. ***Counting up the Olive Tree: A Palestine Number Book***. Illus. by Nabi H. Ali. Dr. Bashi: 2019 [Sequel]

In 2018, controversy broke out over a public reading of a picture book titled *P is for Palestine* by Iranian-Swedish-American author Golbarg Bashi, illustrated by Golrokh Nafisi. The book selects an object, custom or artifact from Palestinian culture as it walks young readers through the alphabet. The reading was held at the Highland Park (New Jersey) public library; Highland Park has a large Jewish community, and controversy quickly ensued.

The controversy was not over holding a reading of a children's book on Palestinian culture, but on problematic passages within the book. The one that made most headlines was the selection for the letter "I", which reads, "I is for Intifada." Illustrated by a man and child making the "V" for victory sign, the text continues, "I is for Intifada, Intifada is Arabic for rising up for what is right, if you are a kid or a grownup." But of course that isn't what the Intifada was; it was a violent uprising directed specifically at innocent Israeli civilians. In the Second Intifada, over 1000 Israelis were killed and many maimed and injured.

For the letter "H," the book offers "H is for Handala," a symbol less familiar to American or Canadian readers. "Hear his hellos," the text continues, "he is our hero." The image of "Handala" was created by Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali. In Al-Ali's own words, "Handala was born ten years old, and he will always be ten years old. At that age, I left my homeland, and when he returns, Handala will still be ten, and then he will start growing up. . . Things will become normal again when the homeland returns." Handala has been adopted as the symbol of the anti-Semitic BDS movement.

It is actually disturbing that a children's book would select two such negative symbols for young readers – one of a violent uprising, the other of a refusal to grow up and get on with life.

A few letters further, we find "M is for Miftah, Key of Return." The page goes on, "M is for Miftah, Key of Return. . . Mama's Mama, and my Jiddah's Mama's, for which I yearn." The key is used by angry Palestinians as a symbol of their loss of their homes, to which they claim to have a "right of return," although this is nowhere established in international law.<sup>28</sup> If the millions of descendants of the Palestinians who fled or were exiled in 1948 were accorded this

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<sup>28</sup> In the article "Peter Beinart in NYT: Root Cause of Gaza War is Israel's Creation," Honest Reporting demonstrates the double standard for counting Palestinian refugees: "[T]he United Nations treats Palestinians differently from the rest of the world's refugees. Palestinians are under the auspices of [UNRWA](#), an entity created *uniquely* for them that has transformed the concept of refugee into an inherited characteristic. As a result, UNRWA today counts four generations of Palestinians as "refugees" — more than 5 million people. This totally new definition is [not supported by international law](#). And while in every other conflict around the world, refugee populations decrease over time, the number of Palestinian refugees has continued to rise – a phenomenon that has been weaponized against Israel. In fact, according to [US government estimates](#), less than 200,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 War of Independence are still alive." See <https://honestreporting.com/new-york-times-peter-beinart-root-cause-of-gaza-war-is-israels-creation/> Accessed June 6, 2021.

so-called “right,” they would swamp the Israeli population and Israel would cease to exist as a Jewish homeland.

*P is for Palestine* is a propaganda tool advocating the elimination of the state of Israel. It is inappropriate for public readings in schools or libraries.

Without naming Israel, the book’s equally propagandistic sequel, *Counting up the Olive Tree: A Palestine Number Book* (2019), raises the accusation that Israeli settlers (the “woeful woodcutter”) cut down Palestinian olive groves, while children try to stop him, in verses like this one: “When the woeful woodcutter came to cut down the last olive tree/The kids cried, “Please don’t cut our precious tree in our land yet to be free!”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The accusation that Israeli settlers have cut down Palestinian olive trees is fraught with controversy, with claims and counter-claims. There are certainly extremists among the settlers, particular some segments of settler youth. However in October 2012, in response to the accusation that settler extremists set fire to Palestinian olive groves, the Shomron Regional Council released a video purporting to show Palestinians setting fire to their own olive grows. See Algemeiner, [Accessed June 6, 2021.](#)

## Bsharat, Ahlam, *Code Name: Butterfly*. Nancy Roberts, trans. London: Neem Tree Press, 2016.

In the Western Christian tradition, a martyr is an innocent individual, like St. Catherine of Alexandria, tortured on a spiked wheel for defending her Christian beliefs, or Saint Sebastian, bound to a tree, shot with arrows, and later clubbed to death for his devotion to his Christian faith. Their striking images in stained glass and statuary grace many of Europe's Gothic cathedrals.

Judaism, too, has its tradition of martyrdom. In the Yom Kippur afternoon service, Jews read the “martyrology” (“These shall I recall”), which chronicles the stories of ten rabbis and teachers who died for their faith -- men like Rabbi Chananya, whom the Romans tortured to death by wrapping him in damp wool and a Torah scroll, then setting him alight. None of these Christian or Jewish martyrs promoted violence.

The young adult novel *Code Name: Butterfly*, published in Arabic in 2009 and released in an English translation in 2016, takes a curious twist on the term “martyr” – a word echoed multiple times in this short book. From the perspective of author Ahlam Bsharat, a “martyr” is any West Bank Palestinian killed by Israelis. The word “terrorist” is not in Bsharat’s vocabulary, so we don’t learn why any of the victims of Israeli gunfire she cites sympathetically might have been targeted by Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Dalal Mughrabi, for example, is identified by Bsharat as a “martyred Palestinian freedom fighter.”<sup>31</sup> (In Palestinian textbooks, Mughrabi, who is lionized to this day by the Palestinian Authority, is held up as a heroine to be emulated.)<sup>32</sup> The facts tell a different story: In concert with ten other Palestinian and Lebanese terrorists, Mughrabi led the 1978 Coastal Road Massacre, a bus hijacking in which 35 Israeli civilians, including thirteen children, were murdered and 71 injured.

Recognizing that the book’s young readers will require context, the book offers a glossary, which provides this definition of “martyr”:

*Martyr (noun, and verb ‘to be martyred’):* In the context of the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, a martyr is someone who dies or is killed while supporting the Palestinian cause.

The author’s slippery use of neutral-sounding terms like “resistance” and “supporting the Palestinian cause” sanitizes terrorism. The spurious “support” cited here bears no resemblance to the non-violent support offered to just causes like the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s—marching peacefully, for example, or sitting in at segregated lunch counters. In striking contrast, the “support” offered by Palestinian terrorists consists of car-rammings, stabbings, shootings, and bombings. The term “Palestinian territory” also reflects the author’s

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<sup>30</sup> The closest it comes to recognizing that terrorism might be alleged against these “martyrs” is in the Glossary entry for Mughrabi, which acknowledges that she is “seen as a terrorist” by Israel.

<sup>31</sup> Bsharat, p. 56.

<sup>32</sup> See “EU Study sees incitement in Palestinian textbooks, kept from public,” in Jerusalem Post, June 9, 2021, at <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/eu-study-finds-incitement-in-palestinian-textbooks-remains-unpublished-670505>.

bias, since no part of the West Bank belonged to a sovereign Palestine in 1948 or 1967. Before '48 it was under the British Mandate; before the Six-Day War it was illegally occupied by Jordan. It is currently more accurately described as “disputed.”

As this coming-of-age novel opens, the unnamed teenage narrator launches into the type of adolescent prattle we expect from the genre: frustration with her family, criticism of their contradictions and pettiness, mockery of her friend Haya’s obsession with nails and make-up, and disgust with her father’s devotion to his exploitative Israeli employers. She wants to leave “Palestine” until, at the end, she attends a family wedding in Jordan, undergoing a metamorphosis like the butterfly she adopts as her code name, and recognizing that “Palestine” is where she belongs.

The motif of code names mirrors the author’s worshipful attitude towards terrorists: The narrator’s nationalist cousin Mays takes on the code name “Dalal Mughrabi,” and Nizar, Butterfly’s “secret beloved” (who will be “martyred” by the Israelis near the end of the book) had adopted the code name “Abu Ammar,” Yassir Arafat’s code name.

*Code Name: Butterfly* is anti-Israel propaganda disguised as literature. Its naive readers, ignorant of the complex history and realities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, will empathize with the young narrator’s hatred of Israelis, whom she portrays as oppressors of her people. Told that the narrator’s cousin, Muhammad, is “locked up, serving the first of three consecutive life sentences,” will readers ask what crimes Muhammad committed, or, more likely, empathize with a victim of Israeli heartlessness?

Unsurprisingly – and notwithstanding the book’s demonization of Israel and Israelis – *Code Name: Butterfly* has garnered international recognition: Its cover displays the “IBBY<sup>33</sup> Honour List” label, raising its profile for purchase by schools, libraries, and bookstores. One review touts it as “one of the few YA novels available in English that presents life under occupation from the perspective of a Palestinian writer”<sup>34</sup> -- a dubious claim to anyone familiar with Ibtisam Barakat’s *Tasting the Sky* and *Balcony on the Moon*<sup>35</sup> or the corpus of work by Naomi Shihab Nye.<sup>36</sup> The School Library Association, in its Riveting Reads listing, called *Code Name: Butterfly* “funny, enlightening, and affecting.” One wonders if their reviewer even noticed the author’s unconscionable use of the term “martyr.”

*[To read this review online go to the CAMERA website at camera.org and search under “Marjorie Gann.” CAMERA is a media-monitoring organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of the Middle East. I thank CAMERA for graciously granting permission to reprint it in my bibliography.]*

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<sup>33</sup> International Board for Books for Young People.

<sup>34</sup> “On the Other Side of the Wall: A Review of Code Name: Butterfly,” by Lyn Miller-Lachmann, in *The Pirate Tree: Social Justice and Children’s Literature*. <http://www.thepiratetree.com/2016/10/19/on-the-other-side-of-the-wall-a-review-of-code-name-butterfly>

<sup>35</sup> See entries for Barakat in this bibliography.

<sup>36</sup> See entries for Nye in this bibliography.



## Carter, Anne Laurel. *the Shepherd's Granddaughter*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2008.

*The Shepherd's Granddaughter* delivers a clear message: Israelis, in the person of IDF soldiers and privileged settlers, are usurpers in the West Bank.

The book's heroine, Amani, is a twelve-year-old Arab girl whose family has been herding sheep "for more than a thousand years" in the West Bank village of Al-Khalil. Amani wants to continue that tradition, but regulations to protect Israeli settlers put her family at the mercy of debilitating restrictions on their movement, making it hard for them to earn a living under the Israeli occupation.

What Carter does not tell her readers is that Al-Khalil has another name -- Hebron. It is the site of the Cave of Machpelah, which, according to the Biblical account,<sup>37</sup> the Jewish patriarch Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite to bury his wife Sarah. Until the Jewish community of Hebron was driven out by the murderous Arab pogrom of 1929,<sup>38</sup> Jews had been living there virtually uninterrupted since the Byzantine era, likely longer than the purported thousand-year presence of Amani's family.

When Israel won the Six-Day War in 1967 – an aggressive war launched by Egypt, Jordan and Syria to annihilate the State of Israel – and captured the West Bank, it never occurred to the Israelis *not* to resettle their historic city, the heart of the Jewish homeland, from which a millennium-old Jewish community had run for their lives in 1929.

To Carter, the Jewish settlers are interlopers. To the Jews, they've come home.

Carter ascribes all restrictions on Palestinian movement to Israel's will to dominate the Palestinian population. But, as historian Yaakov Lozowick explains, "the present no-movement restrictions don't appear on the 1997 map. Nor did they exist in 2002, at the height of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada. They were put in place, or rather they evolved, as part of that war. . . . Sucking the life from the heart of Hebron and transforming it into a ghost town was not a result of the settlements, which were all there a decade before the 1997 partition."<sup>39</sup> What Carter ascribes to Israeli malice was put in place to protect Israelis against Palestinian attacks. But these attacks – the Intifada – barely register in Carter's book.

Carter also accuses settlers of poisoning the water supply of Amani's sheep. There are indeed extremists among some West Bank settlers, and the Israeli government took a stronger stand against the notorious Hilltop Youth once their provocations became obvious. But Carter seems unaware that accusing Jews of poisoning has a long and shameful history. In the Middle Ages Jews were accused of poisoning the Christians' wells to cause the Black Plague. In 1983 a yellow dust on a West Bank school's windowsill was cited as evidence that Israel was deliberately releasing poison. In the end, the yellow dust proved to be nothing but pollen, and the

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<sup>37</sup> Genesis 23:11-20

<sup>38</sup> In 1929, instigated by the Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Al-Amin Hussaini, Arabs in Hebron attacked the Jewish residents, killing sixty-seven and wounding another sixty. The riot was sparked by a false rumour that Jews were attempting to take over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> Yaakov Lozowick, "Hebron Regrets to Inform Jerusalem," December 2009

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gczZhu09kwKL-NOBq2wdDHjzIJjJOObXFBMZbFliVQ/preview> Accessed June 6, 2021.

Israelis uncovered a deliberate PLO plot to spread the poisonous rumour.<sup>40</sup> Given the long history of this anti-Semitic canard, Carter would do well to ask herself why she received the malicious libel so uncritically.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, called on by Israel to conduct an independent investigation, concluded that the schoolgirls' symptoms, attributed by the PLO to poisoning by Israel, were psychological or caused by hydrogen sulphide, a smell released by raw sewage.

<sup>41</sup> There have been many similar accusations. For example, in 1999, Suha Arafat, Yassir's wife, announced publicly that the Israelis used poisonous gas against Palestinians to increase cancer cases among women and children, and poisoned the PA's water sources with chemicals. The director of the PA's Committee for Consumer Protection said Israel supplied chocolates that cause mad cow disease to the Palestinian market. The Palestinian UN representative accused Israeli authorities of injecting 300 Palestinian children with the HIV virus.

## Clinton, Cathryn. *A Stone in My Hand*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2002

Cathryn Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand* is set in Gaza City between 1988 and 1989, during the First Intifada, when Gaza was still under Israeli occupation (which ended when Israel withdrew entirely in 2005). The author's purpose is to elicit sympathy for the people of Gaza, especially the youth, who come into conflict with Israeli soldiers during the Intifada. One of the book's themes is the gap between the radicalism of the youths of the city and their parents' caution and wariness. Although the older generation expresses only rare sympathy for the Israeli soldiers they encounter, they know what will happen to their hot-headed boys in confrontation with the Israelis, and warn them against the risks they are taking.

The focus of the novel is on the perceptions of young Malaak, who has been silent, almost entirely non-communicative, since her father's disappearance after going off to Israel to work. It unfolds that he was killed in a bus bombing by Islamic Jihad, one of the most radical terrorist groups in Gaza. Despite this, Malaak's brother Hamid and his friend Tariq join the stone throwers and get involved in terrorist actions.

Although Clinton certainly does not advocate terrorism, she promotes an exculpatory narrative: that it is born out of desperation on the part of youth with no prospects for a future: As one character explains, "The young men of Gaza are tired of standing by the road, hoping for a day's job. Waiting, waiting for some Israeli to come up and check our muscles and stare into our eyes. We are not animals. We are *Shabab*" [translated by Clinton as "young activists," but referring to the gang of stone-throwing boys].<sup>42</sup>

Aiming for some nuance, Clinton acknowledges the level of indoctrination the youth of Gaza are exposed to; in Malaak's words, "Hamid shakes his fist as he speaks. I just stare at him. He must have heard those words from someone else."<sup>43</sup> She also concedes the humanity of some Israeli soldiers. Noticing Malaak, the young heroine of Clinton's novel, running in the street, one soldier looks down an alley to be sure she is not injured.

Still, the dominant theme of Clinton's book remains what she views as Israeli crimes and the soldiers' brutality. Malaak's father invokes a mythologized past predating the foundation of the State of Israel: "Ah, Malaak, when I was a boy, we lived in the country in a little village. Jews, Christians and we Muslims. We lived in the same place without fighting. Can you believe that, Malaak?"<sup>44</sup> What is complex, controversial, and in need of context, Clinton records as indisputable, as when the grandfather evokes the Deir Yassin massacre:

"My father, blessed be his memory, was the *mukhtar*, head of our village. He had much land and even a car. when he heard that the LEHI, a Jewish unit, had attacked Deir Yassin and massacred many Arabs—men, women, and children—he told the people of our village to flee. Most came to Gaza. My father didn't know that when the war was over, the Israelis wouldn't let

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<sup>42</sup> Clinton, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Clinton, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Clinton, p. 24

us return to our homes. Now our village is gone. The Israelis bulldozed it and built a settlement for Jews in its place.”<sup>45</sup>

She shows Israeli soldiers overreacting to stone-throwing Arab youths. They beat one boy for throwing a stone, though he was not the perpetrator.<sup>46</sup> When another boy raises a Palestinian flag (in violation of IDF regulations) during his brother’s funeral, he falls to an Israeli bullet.

I see the soldiers lift the rifles. I look for tear gas canisters, but there are none. The young man with the flag drops to the ground, and a moment later I hear a shot and see the coffin tilting forward.<sup>47</sup>

Can Clinton substantiate this serious accusation? Or is it based on hearsay taken at face value?

Clinton is oblivious to the Jewish past in the region. She quotes Hamid’s justification for his terrorist acts without comment: “They stole our land.”<sup>48</sup>

Malaak describes her longing to revisit Jerusalem. She remembers a picture on her wall “from a family visit to Jerusalem during happy times. . . . When I was little, I would close my eyes and pretend that I was in that beautiful place in Jerusalem and that nothing had changed since that picture. I would smell the jasmine. I would eat the olives.”<sup>49</sup> Malaak’s older sister asks, “Can you imagine living in your family home and tracing your family back hundreds of years? Everyone living in the same place?”<sup>50</sup>

What Clinton fails to tell her readers, and what she herself may not know, is that uprooting and dislocation of Jerusalemites in 1948 cut both ways. Sima Nightingale’s family had lived in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City for eight generations when, during the 1948 siege, an Arab sniper on the roof of the synagogue near her family home shot her grandfather dead as he went to fetch the last of his family’s water supply. Puah Shteiner’s family had been in Jerusalem for six generations, ever since her ancestor Rav Eliezer Bergman arrived in the city in 1835. She remembers fleeing her Jerusalem home with only the clothes she was wearing. “The world has heard of Arab refugees,” Shteiner comments, “but there were also Jewish refugees.” In fact, the Jewish Quarter was emptied of its Jewish residents by the Jordanian Army in 1948.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Clinton, p. 25

<sup>46</sup> Clinton, p. 89.

<sup>47</sup> Clinton, p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> Clinton, p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> Clinton, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> Clinton, pp. 101-102

<sup>51</sup>Honest Reporting video at: <http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/2011/05/jerusalem-refugees-of-1948.html> Accessed June 6, 2021

Ellis, Deborah. *The Cat at the Wall*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2014

Deborah Ellis's *The Cat at the Wall* paints an idealized picture of children on both sides of the divide yearning for peace and of teachers encouraging peaceful values while the Second Intifada rages in the streets. In this fanciful book, an Arab boy named Omar has been left behind in an apartment in Bethlehem. Sharing the refuge with him are two Israeli soldiers, sent to check out the building for terrorists. In an absurdly contrived scene, Omar's teacher and classmates approach the building, hoping to extricate the boy:

Ms. Fahima, with fear all over her face, tried again to open the door.

"Let me inside!" she cried out in Hebrew. "Let Omar go and take me in his place!"<sup>52</sup>

Painted as a self-sacrificing pacifist, this devoted teacher counsels her students that "misunderstanding the context could lead to a conflict,"<sup>53</sup> absurdly warning them not to look in the windows of the apartment: "Children, it is not polite to look in someone's windows. Just because we are under occupation, that's no reason to forget our manners."<sup>54</sup> It strains credulity that Ellis witnessed a scene like this in Bethlehem during the Second Intifada.

Ms. Fahima seems to be Deborah Ellis's creation, but how typical is she? It has been documented by UN Watch that many of the teachers in West Bank schools run by UNRWA (the UN special agency devoted exclusively to Palestinian refugees) are radicals<sup>55</sup>, and by IMPACT-se (the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education) that the curriculum and textbooks in these UN-run schools glorify martyrdom.<sup>56</sup>

The context of the conflict occurring in Bethlehem is vague. Though the role of Israeli soldiers looms large in this account, in fact Bethlehem is situated in Area A under the Oslo accords, and therefore under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli army is not allowed in except when Israel is in danger from events there.

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<sup>52</sup> Ellis, p. 132 [Check]

<sup>53</sup> Ellis, p. 118.

<sup>54</sup> Ellis, p. 95

<sup>55</sup> See UN Watch February 2, 2017 report to US Congress House Foreign Affairs Committee, "Poisoning Palestinian Children," on UNRWA Teachers' Incitement to jihadist terrorism: <https://unwatch.org/130-page-report-unrwa-teachers-incite-terrorism-antisemitism/> Accessed June 6, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> See IMPACT-se January, 2021 document, "Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in the Palestinian Territories" at <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Produced-Study-Materials-in-the-Palestinian-Territories.pdf> Accessed June 6, 2021.

## Ellis, Deborah. *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. Toronto: Groundwood, 2004

Deborah Ellis's *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*, stirred up considerable controversy when it was published in 2004, especially after it was short-listed for the Ontario Library Association's Silver Birch Award (a book award selected by children in schools throughout the province). Jewish community organizations contended that it presented Israeli actions in the West Bank during the Second Intifada in a very negative light, without sufficient context, and treated suicide bombers sympathetically

As the terrorist campaign known as the Second Intifada raged in Israel and the territories from 2000 to 2005, Canadian children's author Deborah Ellis visited the region to interview Arab and Israeli children about their lives, their fears, and their hopes for the future.

Although Ellis is sympathetic to children on both sides of the conflict (the book alternates the perspectives of Arab and Jewish children), some of the anti-Israel claims don't withstand scrutiny. One example is a disturbing photograph of two women at a demonstration in Israel holding up a poster that reads: "Don't shoot at ambulances." The picture caption purports to provide context, describing the demonstrators as "Israelis protesting against their government's policies".

Set in the middle of a children's book about the Arab-Israeli conflict, the photo certainly makes Israel look bad. What kind of government would shoot at ambulances?

In an interview<sup>57</sup>, Ellis admitted that she had not investigated this claim. She didn't verify IDF (Israel Defense Forces) policy on ambulances either with an IDF spokesperson or with a soldier. What follows is a direct transcript of the orders a member of the IDF told this author he was to follow at checkpoints regarding ambulances:

After it was discovered that [ambulances] were being used to smuggle terrorists and weapons (which they began doing because ambulances were getting special treatment), the policies regarding ambulances were: Only open fire if there is an immediate and direct threat to your life, meaning that if it doesn't stop at the checkpoint you can only shoot if (A) the vehicle went out of its way to hit you, or (B) somebody shoots at you from the vehicle. If the vehicle didn't stop when approaching a checkpoint, spikes would be spread to puncture the tyres of the car, but no shots. There may have been individual cases where specific intelligence was directed at a specific ambulance (identified by licence plate #) and the rules were stricter [meaning, more lenient], but I *seriously* doubt that even in those cases there would be an order to fire without identifying a direct threat.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Telephone interview with Marjorie Gann, June 14, 2018. Recorded with permission.

<sup>58</sup> Email from Israeli soldier, September 16, 2010.

Despite this, a child reading *Three Wishes* will encounter the words of Salam, a Palestinian child interviewed by Ellis: “I’ve even seen soldiers shoot at an ambulance. . . They don’t care. They just want to kill us all.”<sup>59</sup>

Ellis also tackles the subject of suicide bombing, a common occurrence during the Second Intifada. Initially, she explains this curious phenomenon this way:

Suicide is usually associated with despair, with the person unable to see any other way to solve their problems, and being unable to face another day in their current circumstances. . . . Suicide bombers kill themselves by strapping dynamite or some other explosive material to their bodies. They then go into a public place, detonate the explosive and blow themselves up. They also blow up whoever is around them. . . A number of Palestinians have killed themselves and many Israelis this way.<sup>60</sup>

The emphasis here is on the despair of the Palestinians; nowhere is the type of “public place” specified – but these were most often places where young people congregated, like ice cream parlours, Sbarro pizza shops, young people’s clubs. Nor is it made clear that the explosives were packed with ball bearings, bolts and other pieces of metal calculated to maim and cause brain injuries. And it’s not just despair that impels suicide bombers to do their damage. They were psychologically manipulated by handlers who targeted vulnerable, depressed young people. Suicide bombing is not a spontaneous act.

The author shifts, curiously, from merely reporting that “other Palestinians consider suicide bombers to be martyrs, or heroes,” whose “photos are posted in Palestinian towns and camps,” to labelling them as martyrs without quotation marks or attribution:

People who die as martyrs are said to have special places in paradise.<sup>61</sup>

[T]heir walls decorated with posters of Palestinian martyrs.<sup>62</sup>

Which are they – “martyrs” or martyrs? Ellis seems to be confused, but surely there is little resemblance between these youths and Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi, who preached and practised non-violence, and gave their lives for those principles.

Finally, Ellis makes categorical assertions about international law that do not withstand scrutiny. Since, in talking about the Second Intifada, Ellis feels it necessary to address the question of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, she states categorically that the West Bank settlements are illegal:

Settlements are Israeli communities that have been built on Palestinian land occupied by the Israeli army after the 1967 war. They were begun by people who wanted to claim that land for Israel even though under international law, the land belongs to the Palestinians.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ellis, *Three Wishes*, p. 101

<sup>60</sup> Ellis, *Three Wishes*, p. 99

<sup>61</sup> Ellis, *Three Wishes*, p. 99

<sup>62</sup> Ellis, *Three Wishes*, p. 100

<sup>63</sup> Ellis, *Three Wishes*, p. 63

In fact, there is scholarly debate over the legality of the settlements. While it is not necessary to go into this debate here, it should be noted that there are two sides to this argument, and eminent legal scholars like Professor Eugene Kontorovich and Ambassador Alan Baker provide substantive legal arguments for the legality of Israel's settlements on the West Bank.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Alan Baker, "Ten False Assumptions Regarding Israel," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Baker's Point 5 addresses the assertion, "Israel's settlements are illegal and violate international law." <https://jcpa.org/article/ten-false-assumptions-regarding-israel/> Accessed June 6, 2021.



## Feldman, Jacquetta Nammar. *Wishing Upon the Same Stars*. New York: HarperCollins, 2022.

Teachers and librarians are often on the lookout for books offering an even-handed approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Authors, in both Israel and the diaspora, have attempted to rise to the occasion: Many employ a device that easily degenerates into cliché – a relationship between two children on opposite sides of a cultural divide who, by the story’s end, become good friends. The message seems to be: If kids can forge a friendship across a great geopolitical, ethnic, or religious divide, why can’t adults?

Books like *Enemy Territory* by Sharon E. McKay and *Crescent Star* by Nicholas Maes (both Canadians) use their adolescent Arab and Jewish characters as mouthpieces for the opinions of Arab and Jewish adults. As they seesaw between the two perspectives, novels constructed along these lines suffer under the weight of the politics.

There are exceptions. In Israeli Daniella Carmi’s *Samir and Yonatan*, it is the inner lives of a group of very diverse children in a Jerusalem hospital ward (Arab, Jewish, and Russian), not the political tensions between Jew and Arab, that command the reader’s attention. Carmi never preaches, but in a culminating scene, when Arab Samir and Jewish Tsahi surreptitiously pee together into a potted plant in the hospital’s corridor, the tension between the two boys is released in a way that rings true. In fact, it is the books by Israeli authors that present a finer-grained, more accurate picture of life in Israel and the territories. *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea*, by Valérie Zenatti (who spent her adolescent years in Israel), never resolves the tension between, her teenage Israeli and Arab protagonists; it simply portrays them honestly.

In contrast, books by non-Israelis often read as though fashioned whole cloth out of the writer’s hopeful, but ungrounded, imaginings. The recently released *Wishing Upon the Same Stars* is a case in point.

When Yasmeen Khouri’s Palestinian-Lebanese family moves from Detroit, with its large Arab community, to San Antonio, Texas, Yasmeen wants nothing more than to fit in. Ironically, of all the girls she meets in her new school, it is Ayelet Cohen, a Jewish girl, who shares her sense of being different. The two outsiders bond readily.

But there’s a problem. Yasmeen’s grandmother’s Jerusalem home was demolished by the Israelis. Ayelet’s father grew up in Israel, so Yasmeen feels compelled to conceal from her anti-Israel father the inconvenient fact that Mr. Cohen is her after-school Math Lab coach. The tensions between the families are resolved at the end, when the Cohen family helps the Khouris rescue Yasmeen’s grandmother’s garden in San Antonio from a flash flood.

*Wishing Upon the Same Stars* presents the two friends as agents of this reconciliation, but the price of the families’ friendship is to distance the Cohens as much as possible from Israel. When Yasmeen’s father accuses Mr. Cohen of being “an Israeli [who] thinks demolishing people’s homes is all right,” Yasmeen protests, “But Baba, Mr. Cohen . . . isn’t like those people. . . His daughter, Ayelet, says her dad’s family moved to Israel when he was in high school, but he wanted to raise his kids here in Texas. He’s American, too . . . just like us.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Feldman, p. 205

The message? A good Israeli is one who isn't like "those people" (read: "like those Israelis"). In fact, a really good Israeli, like Mr. Cohen, doesn't want to live there.

Nor is Feldman averse to tarring Israel with the "a" word: After explaining that "the West Bank and Gaza Strip aren't inside a modern-day country Palestine," without clarifying that they're under the powerful thumbs of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, she has Mr. Khouri lay this accusation at Israel's door:

"It is becoming apartheid now," my father mutters. "Palestinians have no rights."

"Apartheid?" My sister wipes her wet face with the back of her hand. She grabs a sparkle pen, scribbles the word down, then leafs through her dictionary. She reads aloud, "Apartheid comes from a language in South Africa called Afrikaans. It means apartness; segregation or discrimination on the grounds of race."

She takes a deep breath and blinks at Baba. "What a powerful word," she says, and he nods.<sup>66</sup>

Feldman leaves the young reader with the impression that Mr. Khouri speaks the truth – that Israel practises "segregation or discrimination on the grounds of race," just as apartheid South Africa did. It doesn't occur to her to introduce a character to offer countervailing evidence, like the following:

- Israel appoints Arab justices to its Supreme Court.
- It was an Arab judge, George Karra, who sent Israeli President Moshe Katzav to prison.
- Twenty percent of Israeli doctors are Arab, equal to the Arab percentage of Israel's population.

Nothing like this was possible in apartheid South Africa.

As for home demolitions, Feldman never explains why the grandmother's home was demolished. Homes are demolished because they're built illegally or unsafely, or to prevent future terrorist attacks. But home demolitions in Israel aren't arbitrary; they must follow strict legal procedures, and home owners can, and do, appeal demolition orders through the court system

Feldman reads Israeli history backwards, crediting the Holocaust for Israel's creation and, shockingly, contriving a fanciful parallel between the Arabs' "nakba" ("catastrophe") and the Holocaust: "Our Nakba came from the Holocaust, too,"<sup>67</sup> states Yasmeeen. In fact, by the time Theodore Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, the Zionist project was already underway. And the "nakba" meant *mass displacement*; the Holocaust meant *mass murder*. It's only Israel's enemies who fail to see the difference.

Reviews of *Wishing on the Same Stars* have been positive. The *School Library Journal* reviewer writes that the "information, thoughts, and feelings relating to the conflict are expertly done." This is patently untrue, since the book reflects no expertise about Israeli law regarding

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<sup>66</sup> Feldman, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Feldman, p. 234.

home demolitions, no expertise about the history of Zionism, and ignorance of human rights abuses by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

Children's book reviewers, even Jewish ones, aren't experts in Israel's history; they look at plot and relatability of characters, not at historical accuracy. Unfortunately, issuing from a major publisher, *Wishing Upon the Same Stars* will be welcomed for an "even-handedness" it doesn't possess. Parents and librarians concerned about how Israel is presented to young readers need to draw attention to its weaknesses, and point to more accurate books. It's time for Israeli authors to write them!

*[This review is reprinted from the website of CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis. To read it online, go to [www.camera.org/article/even-handedness-in-childrens-books-on-israel-means-getting-the-facts-right/](http://www.camera.org/article/even-handedness-in-childrens-books-on-israel-means-getting-the-facts-right/). CAMERA is a media-monitoring organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of the Middle East. I thank CAMERA for graciously granting permission to reprint it in my bibliography.]*

Marjorie G...

Laird, Elizabeth. *A Little Piece of Ground*. London: Macmillan, 2003

Elizabeth Laird's *A Little Piece of Ground*, written in collaboration with Palestinian teacher Sonia Nimr, met with controversy from the moment it was published in Britain in 2003. Phyllis Simon, co-owner of a Vancouver, Canada, bookstore, urged Laird's publisher (Macmillan) to reconsider publication of the book, pointing out that "there is not even one mildly positive portrait of an Israeli in the entire book. . . . *A Little Piece of Ground* . . . is for children, the overwhelming number of whom clearly haven't a clue about this conflict, and thus depend on books like this for the opinions they form about what goes on in the Middle East."<sup>68</sup>

Laird answered Simon as follows: "The book is written through the eyes of a 12-year-old who just sees men with guns. It would not have been true to my characters to do otherwise," she writes<sup>69</sup>.

But this is disingenuous: Who but the author made the decision to paint the Middle East conflict exclusively through the eyes of a twelve-year-old Arab boy living in Ramallah during the Second Intifada? Karim sees his father humiliated at checkpoints; not only has he no idea why the Israelis have set these up in the first place, it's a question he wouldn't think to ask. Karim and his friends are confined inside by endless curfews which to them seem arbitrary, and there is no voice in the novel to explain them. Soldiers damage his school; are they just throwing their weight around, or are they looking for stashes of weapons? The reader isn't told.

In fact, Laird never explains anything the soldiers do. What she lavishes her considerable stylistic gifts on is depicting Israeli soldiers not as what they really are -- teenage boys in tanks -- but as tanks incarnate:

The Israeli tank that had been **squatting** at the crossroads just below the apartment block for days now had moved a few metres closer."<sup>70</sup>

"He could imagine the great armoured **machines** lying down there, like a row of **green scaly monsters, crouched** waiting to **crawl** back up the hill and **pin the people of Ramallah down** in their houses again . . . ."<sup>71</sup>

Language like this dehumanizes and demonizes Israeli soldiers. As mutant *green scaly monsters*, they *squat, crouch, crawl* and *pin the people of Ramallah down*.

One can only imagine the outcry if an American author employed similarly loaded terms to Black youths in an urban gang: "She could imagine the great **hulking panthers, crouched** behind the parked cars waiting to **pounce** on any passerby who neared their hiding place." Caricaturing Israelis in the same way, though, gets a pass.

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<sup>68</sup> Teacher's Guide for *A Little Piece of Ground*, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Teacher's Guide, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Laird, pp. 4-5

<sup>71</sup> Laird, p. 12

Laird makes no moral distinction between aggressive and defensive violence. She doesn't care to find out *why* the IDF might have shelled that Gaza refugee camp. In 2002, 17 rockets and 455 mortar shells were fired at Israel from Gaza, and in 2003 there were at least 123 rockets and 514 mortars fired.<sup>72</sup> But to Laird, neutralizing rockets and mortars to protect the lives of your civilian population is morally equivalent to shooting civilians in a café.

Nor does the novel really care about Israeli victims of terror. When terrorist operations are mentioned, the novel's tone – heightened and sympathetic when Arab victimhood is reported – is oddly flat: “Since a Palestinian gunman had shot two people in an Israeli café two weeks ago, the Israelis had set up another curfew, which meant that the whole city had been locked down.”<sup>73</sup>

*Note: Although association does not necessarily imply collaboration or even agreement on political issues, it perhaps bears noting that Laird's husband worked in the 1970s for UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Administration, created in the aftermath of the 1948 war exclusively for the benefit of Arab refugees (though not of Jewish refugees from Arab lands). UNRWA is notorious for its pro-Arab bias and its staff for cooperation with terrorist groups like Hamas and Fatah.*

*[For a more detailed review of A Little Piece of Ground, see my review on the CAMERA website at [www.camera.org/article/a-little-piece-of-ground-by-elizabeth-laird-london-macmillan-2003/](http://www.camera.org/article/a-little-piece-of-ground-by-elizabeth-laird-london-macmillan-2003/). CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis) is a media-monitoring organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of the Middle East.]*

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<sup>72</sup> Figures from Israel Security Agency.

<sup>73</sup> Laird, p. 5

Laskin, Pamela L. *Ronit & Jamil*. New York: Harper Collins, 2017

Pamela L. Laskin's *Ronit & Jamil* does a Middle Eastern *West Side Story*, retelling Romeo and Juliet as a love story between two adolescents. Ronit's father is a pharmacist in Jerusalem, Jamil's a doctor who shuttles between Ramallah on the West Bank and a hospital in East Jerusalem. As the youngsters catch a glimpse of each other over the fence that divides them, they move from attraction to clandestine rendezvous, and from there to the consummation of their desires. The book's poems, which alternate between the two lovers, carry a political payload.

Many of these highlight the similarities in the lovers' backgrounds (both mothers make great hummus, falafel, baba ghanoush); others highlight the conflicting perspectives of Arab and Jew, as in this poem, spoken by Jamil:

**Hands<sup>74</sup>**

Abi's hands  
soft as dates  
when he touches  
the wounds of a child  
swept from the streets,

but I remind him  
"some of our people  
wear bombs  
on their bodies."

"Because there is no electricity  
no running water  
no health care,' he shouts  
then adds  
"our people wear bombs  
because of this."

In her attempts to show the perspectives of both sides, the author justifies the barbaric practice of suicide bombing as an inevitable response to a lack of running water, electricity and health care. Nor does she offer any explanation of the electricity shortage or the health care issues she cites. Under the Oslo accords, for example, health care on the West Bank is controlled not by Israel but by the Palestinian Authority. The accusation that Israel is responsible for water shortages there has been rebunked by Prof. Haim Gvirtzman, professor of hydrology at the Institute of Earth Sciences at Hebrew University and a member of the Israel Water Authority Council, who points

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<sup>74</sup> Laskin, p. 46.

to serious issues in water conservation and the maintenance and development of water infrastructure on the part of the Palestinian Authority.<sup>75</sup>

Marjorie Gann

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<sup>75</sup> Haim Gvirtzman, "The Truth Behind the Water Libels," BESA Center Perspectives Paper N. 238, February 24, 2014 <https://besacenter.org/truth-behind-palestinian-water-libels/> Accessed June 6, 2021.

Lieberman, Leanne. *The Book of Trees*. Victoria BC: Orca, 2010

Leanne Lieberman's *Book of Trees* tells the story of a North American teenager who spends a summer in Israel at an Orthodox girls' seminary. It is on an excursion with her friends that she learns that Canada Park, a treed recreational area in the outskirts of Jerusalem, was built over an Arab village. It had never occurred to Mia before that Arabs were displaced by Israelis. This triggers a crisis of faith which mirrors Lieberman's own crisis of faith, as outlined in her author's note:

I loved Israel and I wanted to believe Israel had a heroic and honorable history. How could I, a Jew, criticize the state after the centuries of oppression Jews had endured? Eventually, I decided to embrace the Jewish tradition of fighting for social justice and write this book. I believe Israel will be a stronger, more peaceful country when it follows international law and protects the human rights of all peoples within its borders. I pray for peace, but I believe it will only come when the occupation is ended.

Lack of knowledge has not deterred Canadian author Leanne Lieberman from falsely accusing Israel of many sins: violating international law, appropriating the Palestinian homeland, and killing innocent bystanders. Asked in an interview whether she had consulted any experts in international law in the course of her research, Lieberman replied, "I wouldn't have spoken to anyone, like, from a legal perspective. . . . I did a lot of reading at the time. . . . One of my friends here in Kingston is a film prof. [who made a film about houses in Katamon owned by Arabs until '48] . . . I remember reading Sandy Tolan's *The Olive Tree* (sic: The correct title is *The Lemon Tree*)." <sup>76</sup>

Lieberman begins her anti-Israel polemic by getting the date of the UN vote to partition Palestine wrong; it was 1947, not 1948. And it was not a vote "to make Israel into two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian"; it was a vote to partition the Palestine Mandate.

When Mia justifies the Palestinians' refusal to accept the partition, she comments, "I guess they were determined to keep their homeland." Is she arguing that Palestine was exclusively the "homeland" of the Arabs, and not of the Jews? Does she agree with Palestinian terrorist Yassir Arafat that no Jewish history happened in Palestine before the twentieth century brought European interlopers? Is she aware that the robust economy these Jewish settlers generated in Palestine attracted a wave of in-migration to Palestine by non-indigenous peoples – Druse, Maghrebian Numidians, Syrian Hauranese, Abyssinians, and Arabs from Syria, Arabia, Egypt, and Transjordan? Maybe some residents of this "homeland" didn't have roots that went back much farther in the past than many of the Jewish residents.

While Lieberman has her character, Mia, exclaim, "Where had the Arab people who used to live here gone? Were they killed or did they just move somewhere else?" she herself seems to lack any curiosity about the conflicts of '48 and '67. Canada Park, which she believes is built on

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<sup>76</sup> Telephone interview with Leanne Lieberman, June 4, 2018. Recorded with permission.



stolen land, is situated in the Latrun area, overlooking the Ayalon Valley and north of the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, and is indeed situated on the sites of former Arab villages. During the 1948-49 War of Independence, this area “played an active and strategic role in blocking the route to Jerusalem and in attacking and bombarding both Jerusalem itself and convoys driving to and from Jerusalem,” according to Alan Baker, former Israeli Ambassador to Canada and expert in international law. It was never part of a Palestinian state because no such entity existed, and following the 1949 Jordanian-Israeli armistice agreement, it was simply designated as no-man’s-land, a demilitarized zone. Israel gained control of it after the *defensive* 1967 war. Given its strategic location on the road to Jerusalem, Israel declared it “a closed military area under strict military control.” The Arab villagers fled or were expelled, and were not allowed to return. Under the terms of the Oslo accords, Canada Park is within Area C, over which Israel has full control.<sup>77</sup> For the Arabs who lost their homes in ’67, this was a catastrophic event, but given the security issues Israel has faced from that strategic location, it is understandable that she prefers it remain uninhabited.

But terms like “security” and “strategic location” don’t resonate with Lieberman, who seems more comfortable with racial slurs. Mia’s boyfriend is Andrew, a cool, guitar-toting musician the reader is expected to like. Involved with a so-called “human rights” NGO, Andrew claims that “the Israeli army kills innocent bystanders or imprisons innocent people as precautions, or surrounds a community and cuts people off from the supplies they need to survive.”<sup>78</sup> Sometimes, his villains aren’t even the IDF. “Seems to me the Jews are always killing for their land,”<sup>79</sup> he claims. He offers no sources for these wild accusations. Even if the (Jewish) Lieberman had no intention of putting antisemitic words in her character’s mouth, that is what these words are. There is a real danger that a thirteen-year-old reader’s take-away from this book will be exactly what Andrew said: “The Jews are always killing for their land.”

*[See the discussion of the defensive nature of the 1967 (Six-Day) War in the entry on Ibtisam Barakat’s Tasting the Sky. An excellent source on the defensive nature of that war is Michael Oren’s Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East: Ballantine, 2002/2003.]*

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<sup>77</sup> Alan Baker, “Canada Park Wasn’t Stolen from the Palestinians,” Canadian Jewish News, September 24, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Lieberman, p. 152.

<sup>79</sup> Lieberman, pp. 84-85.

## Morpurgo, Michael. *The Kites Are Flying!* London: Walker, 2009

Michael Morpurgo is the author of the acclaimed *War Horse*, and of the poignant *Waiting for Anya*, about a Jewish child in hiding in France during World War II. He is now Sir Michael Morpurgo, so a book by him which (however naively) attacks Israel carries some weight.

Morpurgo is also a friend of BBC journalist Jeremy Bowen, who wrote the Afterword of *The Kites Are Flying!* and was the model for its main character Max, a film maker who goes to make a film in the West Bank. (It is noteworthy that two complaints for bias were upheld against Bowen by the BBC Trust in 2009.)

The book is a story of children on both sides of the separation barrier (which Morpurgo calls a “wall,” though it is primarily an electronic security fence). In the course of telling his story, he features children on both sides of the “wall” flying kites labelled “shalom” and “salaam”. The message here? All the children want is peace, so why can’t the adults give it to them?

This is naïve and ill-informed. It has been documented by the monitoring NGO UN Watch that many of the teachers in West Bank schools run by UNRWA (the UN special agency devoted exclusively to Palestinian refugees) are radicals<sup>80</sup>, and by IMPACT-se (the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education) that the curriculum and textbooks in these UN-run schools glorify martyrdom.<sup>81</sup> Children in the West Bank are being educated for war, not peace; they won’t be flying kites with the word “salaam” on them!

Moreover, when it comes to kites, Israelis living on the border with Gaza know more than Michael Morpurgo. The kites sent to them by Palestinians don’t say “salaam.” They burn Israeli crops and deliver explosives over the separation barrier.

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<sup>80</sup> See UN Watch February 2, 2017 report to US Congress House Foreign Affairs Committee, “Poisoning Palestinian Children,” on UNRWA Teachers’ Incitement to jihadist terrorism: <https://unwatch.org/130-page-report-unrwa-teachers-incite-terrorism-antisemitism/> Accessed June 6, 2021.

<sup>81</sup> See IMPACT-se website at <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/UNRWA-Produced-Study-Materials-in-the-Palestinian-Territories.pdf> for their January, 2021 document, “Review of UNRWA-Produced Study Materials in the Palestinian Territories” Accessed June 6, 2021.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *The Tiny Journalist: Poems*. Rochester: BOA Editions, 2019; *Everything Comes Next: Collected & New Poems*. New York: Greenwillow, 2020.

Naomi Shihab Nye is an American poet and novelist of some renown. She won the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children’s Literature in recognition of her entire body of work in 2013, placing her on a plane with eminent children’s writers Vera Williams and Katherine Paterson.<sup>82</sup> She was named Young People’s Poet Laureate for 2019-2021 by the Poetry Foundation. One of her most anti-Israel poems, “A Palestinian Might Say,” highlighted on her Poetry Foundation page, reflects her bitterness against Israeli *olim* (immigrants) whose difficulties adjusting to Israel she juxtaposes against Palestinians’ sense of comfort in their homeland.

Palestinian on her father’s side (her mother is American), Nye credits a visit to her grandmother in a West Bank village for its impact on her political perspective. Running through her poems about “Palestine” is her conviction that her homeland was stolen by the Zionists.

Nye would certainly not have garnered the recognition she did without striking the pose of a fair-minded and humane campaigner for human rights, a Palestinian with Israeli and Jewish friends. And indeed, some of her best friends are Jewish:

Thus in the poem “Before You Can,” she proclaims the shared humanity of Jew and Arab:

My Jewish friends are kind and gentle.  
Not one of them would harm another person  
even if they didn’t know that person.  
My Arab friends are kind and gentle.  
Not one of them would harm another person  
even if they didn’t know that person. (*Everything Comes Next*, p. 74)

Both *Haaretz* journalist Bradley Burston, who has accused Israel of apartheid practices, and poet Yehudah Amichai, who told her “I would never have taken your father’s home!/I could never have lived in a stolen Arab home!” (“Double Peace,” *Everything Comes Next*, 103), have been vocal critics of Israel. Nye employs them as Jewish fig leaves to mask her deep resentment of the Jewish state.

### Constructed Image vs. Anti-Semitic Tropes

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<sup>82</sup> In her nominating statement for Nye, Palestinian-American children’s author Ibtisam Barakat praised Nye’s “incandescent humanity and voice [that] can change the world.” But Barakat herself is a biased critic; her memoir of her family’s experience of the Six-Day War, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (2007), distorts history, accusing the Israelis of initiating that conflict, and her memoir essay about that event, “Marked for Destruction,” falsely accuses the Israelis of aiming at “mass destruction” of the Palestinian communities in the course of that short war, which is not substantiated by the facts. See entries on Ibtisam Barakat for details.

Nye presents herself as tolerant, philosemitic, and opposed to violence, employing the dishonest argument that “[s]ince Palestinians are also Semites, being pro-justice for Palestinians is never an anti-Semitic position, no matter what anybody says.” (*The Tiny Journalist*, Author’s Note).

The term “antisemitism” was coined by German anti-Semite Wilhelm Marr in his book *The Victory of Germanicism over Judaism* (12<sup>th</sup> edition, 1879) expressly to distinguish his racial antisemitism, which he argued was based on “science,” from the German term “Judenhaus,” which had religious overtones. Marr didn’t want to be accused of old-fashioned religious bigotry. His coinage, which has been widely accepted, had nothing to do with Arabs, and to argue that it is “never anti-Semitic” to criticize Israel because you decide to redefine the term to take the Jew out of anti-Semitism is pure sophistry.

From the days of medieval blood libels, which accused Jews of killing Christian children for the blood from which they baked their matzah, the child victim has been a staple of anti-Semitic accusations. That is what makes the deceptive gimmick of Naomi Shihab Nye’s *The Tiny Journalist: Poems* so nefarious. Nye admits in her Author’s Note that the poems in this book are hers, but claims to have based their content at least in part on the Facebook postings of Janna Jihad Ayyad, a girl living in the village of Nabi Saleh on the West Bank. (Her father’s family’s home was nearby). So the victim of the Israeli “abuses” catalogued in so many of these poems is presented as an innocent child, a “tiny journalist.”

### **The Company Nye Keeps**

Nye’s real political bias is revealed not in the benign image she paints of herself, but in the company she keeps. *The Tiny Journalist* is dedicated to “Janna Jihad Ayyad and her cousin Ahed Tamimi – all young people devoted to justice and sharing their voices.”

But who is Ahed Tamimi?

In December, 2015, sixteen-year-old Ahed Tamimi deliberately provoked a confrontation with an Israeli soldier outside her West Bank home by slapping and kicking him; he chose not to fight back. Tamimi comes from a family notorious for supporting terrorism. Her aunt, Ahlam Tamimi, murdered fifteen Israelis, half of them children, in the suicide attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in 2001. Her mother used social media to instruct would-be terrorists on the best places to knife Israeli victims. Two years before the 2015 incident, Ahed Tamimi was photographed biting a soldier who tried to arrest her brother. She revealed her true colors in late 2015, when she addressed a conference of the GCRP (Global Campaign to Return to Palestine) in Beirut – a conference of terrorist leaders. Attending were Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah Sheikh Naeem Qasim, Vice-President of Islamic Jihad (now President) Ziyad-Al-Nakhalah and Hamas’s representative in Lebanon Ali Baraka. So this is the company Tamimi keeps – Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas -- yet Nye admires Tamimi as “devoted to justice”.

Similarly, the poem “America Gives Israel Ten Million Dollars a Day” asks the reader to view as unjust the incarceration of West Bank columnist Lama Khater, the mother of a two-year-old. Khater has been detained seven times and is not allowed to write about politics by Israel, a restriction presented by Nye as a violation of Khater’s freedom of speech. But how many of Nye’s young (or adult) readers will recognize that Khater’s platform is a Hamas website, where

she praises the terrorist organization for its evolution “from rock to knife to rifle to explosive vest to rocket and to tunnel.”<sup>83</sup>

In the same poem she points to Salah Hamouri, a French/Palestinian lawyer “detained without charges or trial for more than a year.” Hamouri, too, is no innocent victim; in fact, he served seven years for an attempt to murder former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Ovadia Yosef, and was suspected of belonging to the terrorist PFLP.<sup>84</sup>

## Selective Victimhood

While most of Nye’s Palestine poems resonate with complaints of Palestinian victimhood – of Israeli “apartheid,” of separate roads for Jews and Arabs, of the neglect of Palestinian issues by American news outlets, of Israeli guns “pointed at us all our lives,” of bulldozed homes, of polluted water – she protests, “I’m not interested in who suffered the most./I’m interested in/people getting over it.” (*Everything Comes Next*, 106-108).

But is she? In “Rumor Mill,” she evokes diaspora Palestinians in highly romanticized sketches: I

I heard that far away in other countries,  
Finland and China, ancient Palestinian men and women  
fall asleep with their hands on their hearts and by now  
their hearts are shaped just like old Palestine,  
not the new cut-into-bits pockmarked map of places  
we are allowed to live, but the whole stitchery of towns. . . .  
When they weaken,  
after dreaming like that,  
it is easier for them  
to go on living  
(*The Tiny Journalist*, 110)

And though she says she’s not interested in “who suffered the most,” it’s clear from “Better Vision” that it’s the Israelis who are holding hatchets over Palestinians’ heads:

See close, see far, see how similar we are  
or could be, if the hatchets weren’t hanging over  
half our heads. (*Tiny Journalist*, 110)

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<sup>83</sup> See MEMRI site: <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-marks-its-29th-anniversary-reiterating-its-adherence-armed-struggle-liberate-palestine> Accessed June 6, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> See MEMRI site: <https://www.memri.org/reports/network-french-municipalities-grant-marwan-barghouti-honorary-citizenship>, which cites the Committee for the Support of Palestinian with French citizenship Salah Hamouri. Accessed June 6, 2021.

## Facts and Context

Nye also accepts widely-circulated clichés and libels as fact. “Gaza Is Not Far Away” caricatures Gaza as “the world’s largest open-air prison,” its water shortage and polluted sea caused by Israel, not Hamas’s corruption and distorted priorities. (*Tiny Journalist*, 51)

“For Mohammed Zeid of Gaza, Age 15” (*Everything is Next*, 86-87) opens in outrage: “There is no *stray* bullet, sirs,” implying that the “stray bullet” that Israeli investigators sometimes offer to explain a civilian casualty is never credible. What would Nye say, then, of the report that three Gaza fishermen were killed in a Hamas misfire on March 7, 2021? Did Hamas fire on them deliberately?<sup>85</sup>

## Jewish Chosenness

Running through Nye’s work is resentment of the Jewish belief that Jews are a chosen people. Without researching its theological interpretation, she takes the word “chosen” at face value and gives it a simplistic, almost childish, meaning.

Nye’s discomfort with Jewish chosenness resonates in several poems. In the heavily ironic “A Palestinian Might Say,” (*A Tiny Journalist*, 90) she contrasts the difficulties new *olim* (immigrants) face in adjusting to Israel with their comfort in their former countries, where “you mingled freely. . . appreciated people who weren’t just like you,” rounding on Jewish immigrants with “That’s what ‘chosen’ and ‘unchosen’ will do.” In other words, if Jews didn’t think this was the land chosen for them by God, they’d have remained in their old countries, mingling freely with people who weren’t like them, where they’d be a lot more at home. As though Jews hadn’t tried that for two thousand years.

Again in “Double Peace,” dedicated to Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, she writes:

Not for him and his people alone  
But for all who loved that rocky land  
Everybody everybody Sing it!  
No chosen and unchosen but everybody chosen  
Sing it!” (*Everything Comes Next*, 102-103)

Chosenness in Jewish tradition means only that God chose the Israelites to communicate the idea of God’s oneness to a pagan world. It does not mean that Jews believe they are better than others. To the contrary, according to the Hebrew prophet Amos, it means that God will be particularly stringent with the Jews:

You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth. That is why I call you to account for all your iniquities.<sup>86</sup>

The proof that chosenness has nothing to do with racial superiority is that Jews believe that the Messiah will descend from Ruth, a non-Jew born among the Moabites, the Hebrews’ enemies.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Times of Israel, *Three Gazan fishermen killed in suspected Hamas rocket misfire*, March 7, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Amos 3:2

<sup>87</sup> Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History*. NY: William Morrow, 2001. p. 557.

Nye's misreading of Jewish chosenness repeats an anti-Semitic trope that has underpinned resentment of the Jew throughout history. Her denial of the Jews' unique connection with the land of Israel belies her philo-Semitic posturing.

*[For more discussion of Shihab Nye's criticism of the Jewish idea of chosenness and her other anti-Israel perspectives, see following entry for her novel Habibi. For a more detailed review of Nye's poetry, see my review "Naomi Shihab Nye: Maligning Israel for Young Readers," on the CAMERA website at <https://www.camera.org/article/naomi-shihab-nye-maligning-israel-for-young-readers/>. CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis) is a media-monitoring organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of the Middle East.]*

Marjorie Ganley

## Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Habibi*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997

Naomi Shihab Nye is an American poet and novelist of some renown. She won the NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature in recognition of her entire body of work in 2013, placing her on a plane with eminent children's writers Vera Williams and Katherine Paterson.<sup>88</sup> She was named Young People's Poet Laureate for 2019-2021 by the Poetry Foundation. One of her most anti-Israel poems, "A Palestinian Might Say," highlighted on her Poetry Foundation page, reflects her bitterness against Israeli *olim* (immigrants) whose difficulties adjusting to Israel she juxtaposes against Palestinians' sense of comfort in their homeland.

Palestinian on her father's side (her mother is American), Nye credits a visit to her grandmother in a West Bank village for its impact on her political perspective. Running through her poems about "Palestine" is her conviction that her homeland was stolen by the Zionists.

Nye would certainly not have garnered the recognition she did without striking the pose of a fair-minded and humane campaigner for human rights, a Palestinian with Israeli and Jewish friends. And indeed, two of the three excerpts from poems used as epigraphs for *Habibi* are by Jews who acknowledge the Palestinian narrative, poets Yehuda Amichai and Anndee Hochmann ("We are challah and hummus, eaten together to make a meal.")

Nye's *Habibi* makes an effort to present some elements of the Jewish Israeli perspective on the conflict. Liyana, its protagonist, is a Palestinian-American teenager whose family moves back to her father's ancestral home, near Ramallah on the West Bank, after the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993. To underline her goodwill, Nye, a Palestinian-American poet, has Liyana meet Omer, a Jewish boy.

I mean, (Liyana explains) I understand it mostly from the Arab side because my father's family lost their house and their money in the bank and lots of their community when my father was a boy and the Palestinians were suffering so much, just kicked around till recently as if they were second-class human beings you know they couldn't even show their own flag or have hardly any normal human rights like the Jews did till recently and it's getting better only slowly you know my relatives have to get permits for things all the time and it wasn't that way when my father was little, things were more equal then and of course I know the Jewish people suffered so much themselves, but don't you think it should have made them more sensitive to the sufferings of others, too?" . . .  
"He stared at her quietly. 'I do.'"<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> In her nominating statement for Nye, Palestinian-American children's author Ibtisam Barakat praised Nye's "incandescent humanity and voice [that] can change the world." But Barakat herself is a biased critic; her memoir of her family's experience of the Six-Day War, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (2007), distorts history, accusing the Israelis of initiating that conflict, and her memoir essay about that event, "Marked for Destruction," falsely accuses the Israelis of aiming at "mass destruction" of the Palestinian communities in the course of that short war, which is not substantiated by the facts. See entries on Ibtisam Barakat for details.

<sup>89</sup> Nye, *Habibi*, pp. 165-166.



Omer is the right kind of Israeli: he criticizes his country.<sup>90</sup>

Nye also has her characters voice unease with the Jewish idea of being a “chosen people,” without really understanding the complexities of the trope. Liyana thinks it has to do with a sense of “being ‘chosen’ *over* anybody else” [my italics]. Though she allows Omer to present a different angle on Jewish chosenness -- “Maybe Jews are also chosen to suffer. Or to be better examples” -- in the end she concludes, “It seems like big trouble any way you look at it. I’m sorry, but I don’t like it. Do you *believe* you’re chosen? It sounds like the teacher’s pet.”<sup>91</sup>

*Pace* Liyana, chosenness in the Hebrew Bible means only that God chose the descendants of the patriarch Abraham, who first acknowledged the one God, to communicate the idea of God’s oneness to a pagan world. It does not mean that Jews believe they are better than others (“the teacher’s pet”). To the contrary, according to the Hebrew prophet Amos, it means that God will be particularly stringent with the Jews:

You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth. That is why I call you to account for all your iniquities.<sup>92</sup>

The proof that chosenness has nothing to do with racial superiority is that Jews believe the Messiah will descend from Ruth, a non-Jew born among the Moabites, the Hebrews’ enemies.<sup>93</sup> But perhaps, at bottom, Nye attacks the Jewish idea of chosenness because it underpins the millennia-long Jewish claim that God selected them to live in the land of Israel, a claim that Nye herself cannot accept.

Though *Habibi* is not anti-Semitic in intent, the author’s misreading of Jewish chosenness repeats an anti-Semitic trope that has perpetuated resentment of the Jew throughout history.

The book also presents a litany of uncontextualized criticisms of Israeli regulations and practices related to the occupation of the West Bank. Sitti, the grandmother, complains of “how mean the Jewish soldiers are to us. They don’t even know who we are!” Uncle Daoud is demeaned at a checkpoint. A Jewish man in a yarmulke calls Arabs “animals.” Soldiers searching the home of their cousin Mahmud break plates, smash bathroom fixtures and tear apart comforters. A marketplace bombing by Palestinians isn’t justified (the family condemns it), but Liyana tries to explain it:

“Maybe it was done by the Arab father whose ten-year-old son was shot by Israeli soldiers last week. Maybe it was done by the brothers of the tortured prisoners Poppy met all the time, or the cousin of the mayor who lost both legs when the Israelis blew up his car. Did people who committed acts of violence think their victims and their victims’ relatives would just *forget?*”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> In Randa Abdelfattah’s *Where the Streets Had a Name*, Hayaat, on her trip to Jerusalem to bring its soil back to her grandmother, meets two sympathetic Israeli characters, David and Mali, who call themselves “peace activists” and wear both Israeli and Palestinian flags. After watching his comrades abuse Palestinians in Gaza, David had deserted the IDF and spent some time in jail. It is “good” Israelis like these that figure in books that attack Israel. In this way, the authors hope to clear themselves of the taint of prejudice.

<sup>91</sup>Nye, *Habibi*, pp. 178-179

<sup>92</sup> Amos 3:2

<sup>93</sup> Telushkin, Joseph. *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History*. NY: William Morrow, 2001. p. 557.

<sup>94</sup> Nye, *Habibi*, p. 235

How many of these accusations are verifiable, and how many are based on unsubstantiated hearsay? We can't know. But they pack emotional punch, and create an image of Israelis that will remain with the young reader after he or she finishes the book.

*[For more discussion of Shihab Nye's anti-Israel writings, see preceding entry for Everything Comes Nest: Collected & New Poems, and The Tiny Journalist, her poetry collections.]*

Marjorie Gann

Saba, Wadad. "A Christian Palestinian's Story," in ***Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict***, ed. Laurel Holliday. New York: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, 1999

Publishing a memoir in an anthology imposes a special burden on the editor. Eyewitness testimony to traumatic events can be uniquely compelling, but memoirists can also get things wrong. In *Why Do They Hate Me? Young Lives Caught in War and Conflict*, editor Laurel Holliday presents an account by Wadad Saba of her family's loss of their Jerusalem home in 1948. Saba grossly misrepresents the history of the Jewish presence in the Middle East, erasing the Jews from the region's history:

You see, for centuries there was no country known as Israel. My country was known as the land of Palestine, spoken of so prominently in the Biblical record, and that land clearly belonged to its native inhabitants, the Palestinians."<sup>95</sup>

Of course, there is no "Palestine" in the Bible, where the names Judea and Israel figure large— a fact Saba, as a Palestinian Christian, should have known. After crushing the Jews in the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE, the Romans renamed Judea "Palaestina" (after the ancient Philistines) to extinguish the memory of the Jewish presence there. Holliday should have corrected this elementary historical error. Young readers deserve facts, not propaganda.

*[Holliday's anthology also includes a memoir by Ibtisam Barakat, "Marked for Destruction," which is covered in this bibliography, and which distorts the goals of Israel in the Six-Day War and overlooks the exterminationist motives of its Arab enemies.]*

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<sup>95</sup> This is the party line of the Palestinian Authority, reflected in the outrageous October 13, 2016 vote of UNESCO denying the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. and repeated on many occasions by Palestinian leaders Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas.

Sokolower, Jody. *Determined to Stay: Palestinian Youth Fight for Their Village*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press (an imprint of Interlink Publishing), 2021.

Jody Sokolower wants schools to “teach Palestine.” The website of her Teach Palestine project never explains why schools shouldn’t “teach Tibet” (which China has occupied since 1949), “teach Cyprus” (half occupied by Turkey since 1974), or “teach Crimea or Hong Kong,” both arguably of greater relevance today. No -- Palestine is her focus, and she’s written a book to make it easier for teachers to do this.

*Determined to Stay: Palestinian Youth Fight to Save Their Village* is a work of propaganda based on visits Jody Sokolower and her daughter Ericka made to Israel and the West Bank between 2012 and 2019 to “research” the situation of Arabs in East Jerusalem. They spent most of their time in the community of Silwan (Siloam), a quarter of East Jerusalem southwest of the Old City, inhabited by Arabs and a small number of Jews. Relying on conversations with residents and activists, *Determined to Stay* accuses Israel of aggressively driving out the Arabs by expanding the City of David National Park, damaging and demolishing Arab homes, arbitrarily arresting young people, and making life so miserable for the Arab population that families will leave.

The book is prominently featured on the website of Teach Palestine<sup>96</sup>, where it is offered as a free curricular resource to teachers. Presenting itself as an example of “anti-racist” education “grounded in an ethnic studies framework,” in reality it is anti-Israel propaganda designed to teach naïve, ill-informed students to demonize and hate Israel.

*Determined to Stay* is as much about Sokolower and her daughter as it is about Silwan. The author announces that she is a “white, Jewish high school social studies teacher.” She quotes her daughter’s distress at seeing Israeli soldiers on the train to Jerusalem: “If I grew up in Israel, told from elementary school that I needed to defend my country from Palestinian ‘terrorists,’ would that be me with an Uzi on my shoulder?” (Note the scare quotes around the word “terrorists.”) Encountering Sokolov Street in Jerusalem, she draws a parallel between herself as a “white settler on land stolen from the Ohlone” (a West Coast Indigenous tribe) and putative Sokolov relatives “living in a house stolen from Palestinians.” (p. 186)

Sokolower is free to feel whatever guilt she chooses over the color of her skin. Whether she and the Teach Palestine team have the right to impose their guilt on American teenagers in public schools is another question.

### **Research or Prejudice?**

Though Sokolower makes passing reference to an earlier time when she introduced her students to both sides of the conflict, she is explicit about her intentions this time around:

Ericka and I agreed that our interviews and research would be based in Palestinian reality. We weren’t going to pretend to be “even-handed” about

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<sup>96</sup> <https://teachpalestine.org/> Accessed May 19, 2022.

what was happening in Silwan—we both felt strongly that the Palestinians were fighting against a clear injustice. (p. 33)

In other words, they set off on this “research” trip with their minds made up.

Tellingly, she opted to work with the Middle East Children’s Alliance (MECA), a radical pro-Palestinian organization. In 2009 MECA raised \$75,000 for British MP George Galloway’s “Viva Palestina” convoy following what the notorious Galloway labelled the “massacre in Gaza.” It was shut down by the UK Charity Commission in 2012 over its financial management. At Teach Palestine, Sokolower works with MECA Executive Director Zeiad Abbas Shamrouh, who has claimed that “Zionists have never abandoned their plan to get rid of Palestinian [sic] completely and to confiscate all Palestinian land. . . . Palestinians in East Jerusalem face ethnic cleansing every day.”<sup>97</sup>

Sokolower’s anti-Israel prejudice was on full display her first morning in Silwan, when she set out to find a pharmacy. The Palestinian one near Jaffa Gate was closed, but a passerby pointed her towards “a fancy, underground Israeli mall, a sanitized, upscale version of the Old City, with wide stone sidewalks, carefully pruned trees and flowers in pots, and an international array of stores: Abercrombie & Fitch, Tommy Hilfiger, North Face, Swarovski, and a supermarket-sized drugstore. No Palestinians anywhere. . . . It was astonishing how easy Israel made it to opt for convenience and familiarity. Next time, I told myself, I would wait for the Palestinian pharmacy to open.” (p. 37)

Anything Israel does, even building an attractive modern mall whose stores are open at convenient hours, is a sin against Palestinians. Perhaps on her next trip Sokolower should visit Hadar Mall in West Jerusalem’s Talpiot district, where you can’t walk two feet without crossing paths with chic young Arab women in tight pants and headscarves. Or she could go to Lacasa Mall over the green line in Ramallah, whose website proudly proclaims, “LACASA MALL is a first-of-its-kind destination that features hundreds of new shops and services to explore.” It features an Aeropostale, a Toys ‘R’ Us, a Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut. Apparently the people of Ramallah enjoy a “sanitized, upscale version of the Old City” as well.

### **Intersectionality**

Underpinning Sokolower’s argument is intersectionality, the left-wing dogma that all social structures reflect a power differential between oppressed groups (read: people of color) and oppressors (read: white people). With her sympathies exclusively engaged by Palestinians (Sokolower never acknowledges that Jews have been victims in the Middle East), she constructs fanciful parallels between Palestinians and Black and Indigenous Americans.

Enter Nick Estes, “a citizen [sic] of the Lower Brulé Sioux Tribe and cofounder of Red Nation, an Indigenous resistance organization,” to write the book’s introduction.

“It would have helped me so much to learn about Palestine, to be able to see the connections between what has happened to my people and what is happening to the people of Palestine,” he asserts.

Really? Exactly how could learning about “Palestine” help a Lower Brulé Sioux understand his situation better than the evidence before his eyes in South Dakota? Indeed, Estes

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<sup>97</sup> [https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/middle\\_east\\_children\\_s\\_alliance\\_meca/](https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/middle_east_children_s_alliance_meca/) Accessed May 1, 2022.

admits that he never actually got to Silwan, the focus of Sokolower's research, during his visit to Jerusalem. (p. 3)

How "intersectionality" plays out between Palestinians and American Blacks is equally fuzzy. Areen, a sixteen-year-old girl from Silwan, complains, "The police stop us all the time"; an African American boy echoes the sentiment: "I feel like I have a bullseye on my back. Every man in my family has spent time in prison. Some days I think no matter how hard I work in school, how careful I am in the street, I'm going to end up there, too."

"That's how children in Silwan feel, too," agrees Sokolower. It's a clever strategy -- piggybacking on high-profile American causes to gain progressive sympathy for the Palestinian "underdog."

### **Misinformation: The Map that Lies**

To contrive a dubious parallel with Indigenous Americans, Sokolower interviews Corrina Gould, a Chochenyo/Karkin Ohlone, about her campaign to re-surface the West Berkeley Shellmound, an ancient site currently covered by a parking lot. Two map graphics posit intersecting narratives of oppression: "U.S. Colonization of North American Indigenous Lands" and "Zionist Colonization of Palestinian Lands." (p. 125) Each contains four maps, with gray representing the land before extensive colonization (1784 in the United States, 1917 in pre-mandate Palestine), and three successive maps using black to indicate colonial encroachment upon uncolonized territory. The fourth map in each graphic is almost a solid black mass, representing "colonized" land.

As outlined in an analysis of similar anti-Israel maps (there are many variants in circulation) in *The Tower*<sup>98</sup>, maps like these fail to differentiate between private property and sovereign land. Sokolower labels land on which Arabs lived "Palestinian," which is deceptive, because "none of pre-1948 Palestine was under the political authority of Arabs or Jews." It was a British Mandate, and indeed "was the first time a discrete political entity called 'Palestine' [not Arab-controlled] existed in modern history." Equally deceptive is labeling "every single patch of land not owned by the JNF as Arab or Palestinian"; in fact, much of it was desert, not owned by anyone.

Looking at the shrinking gray area in Sokolower's maps, the naïve student can only conclude that, starting in 1917, Israel grabbed more and more "Palestinian land" in successive imperialist wars until there's almost nothing left in Arab hands today.

### **Misinformation: The Six-Day War**

Sokolower's version of Israeli history rests on hearsay, not reliable sources. She quotes her colleague Zeiad Abbas Shamrouch to explain the onset of the Six-Day War: "From 1948 to 1967, the West Bank, including Jerusalem, was under Jordanian rule. . . In 1967, Israel attacked Egypt and started a war between Israel on one side and Egypt, Syria and Jordan on the other." (p. 101)

In fact, Israel went to war in 1967, striking Egypt pre-emptively, because Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled UN peacekeeping troops from Sinai, engineered a

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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.thetower.org/article/the-mendacious-maps-of-palestinian-loss/> Accessed May 2, 2022. There are various versions of these "Palestinian Land Loss" maps in circulation.

buildup of Egyptian troops on the border, and blockaded the Straits of Tiran, in and of itself a *casus belli*. This was a defensive war against four enemy nations whose leaders openly declared their genocidal intentions:

“Our basic objective will be to destroy Israel,” declared Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, May 26, 1967

“In the event of a conflagration, no Jews whatsoever will survive,” bragged Ahmed Shukeiri, future chairman of the PLO)<sup>99</sup>

Israel’s defensive action was entirely legal.

### **Misinformation: The Al-Aqsa Mosque**

It has long been a staple of anti-Israel propaganda that Israel intends to take over the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and Sokolower quotes Sara, a fourteen-year-old girl from Silwan, to echo that unfounded accusation:

“It’s hard to be a young woman here. Because the settlers are trying to take over al-Aqsa Mosque, we women and girls have been demonstrating—occupying the mosque to keep it safe. (p. 61)

Sara’s slur has been a feature of Arab incitement for almost a century. In 1929, it was Mufti of Jerusalem (and Nazi collaborator) al-Amin Husseini’s claim that Jews were attempting to “usurp” Al-Aqsa that incited an anti-Jewish pogrom, culminating in the deaths of 133 Jews. In 2022, stirred up by accusations that the Israelis were about to storm Al-Aqsa, Arab youths hurled stones from the mosque onto Jews worshipping at the Western Wall.

What is the truth? When the Israelis won back Jerusalem in 1967, they recaptured the Temple Mount, where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is situated. General Motta Gur raised the Israeli flag above it, but General Moshe Dayan, watching this through his binoculars from Mount Scopus, radioed Gur to take it down, with the words, “Do you want to set the Middle East on fire?” After the war, Dayan met with the Muslim Waqf, the body that governs the Muslim site, formally returning it to their governance. This was a gesture of unprecedented magnanimity. Under the agreement with the Waqf, Jews may visit their holiest site, but are not allowed to pray there. Despite numerous Arab claims to the contrary, Israel under both right-wing and left-wing governments has not sought to change this status quo. They have never tried to storm Al-Aqsa.

### **Misinformation about Water, Roads and Schools**

Accusations that Israel discriminates against West Bank Palestinians in water allocation and access to roads are another anti-Israel libel that Sokolower’s daughter buys into:

“For Palestinians, water is rationed and very expensive. You can always spot a Palestinian house by the water storage tank on the roof. Israelis, even

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*. New York: Harper Collins, 2016, p. 270

those living right next door to Palestinians. have unlimited water. . . Some of them shoot holes in the Palestinians' water tanks for target practice." (p. 20)

Perhaps Ericka didn't look closely at the roofs of Israeli houses. There is a water tank on each of these as well, and they don't represent a shortage of water. They hold water to be heated by solar panels, an energy-efficient system in a country with a lot of sunlight. Israeli homes generally have white tanks and solar panels; Palestinian tanks are usually black, which retains the heat. Nor does the accusation that Israel denies water to the Palestinians withstand scrutiny. Under the Oslo accords, it is the Palestinian Authority, not Israel, that is responsible for water management and that fails to use the funds it receives through international aid to repair burst pipes and maintain water quality.<sup>100</sup>

Ericka also claims that "there are separate roads for Israelis and tourists that Palestinians can't use; they even have different license plates." (p. 20) There is a reason for this: Some roads in the West Bank were closed to West Bank Arabs after the eruption of the Second Intifada, when suicide bombers used them to infiltrate Israel, but these roads are open to *all* Israeli citizens—Muslims, Christians, Jews, Circassians.<sup>101</sup> Nor is it surprising that they have distinct license plates, since West Bank Arabs live under the Palestinian Authority, not Israeli authority. Israelis are not allowed to drive on many West Bank roads under Palestinian Authority control.

Ericka also complains that "the schools are separate; Palestinians don't have the same legal rights as Israelis; everything is segregated." (p. 20) Is Ericka aware that the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA run their own schools and set their own curriculum? Or perhaps she is confusing West Bank schools with Israeli schools, which, like schools in many parts of bilingual Canada and Belgium, serve each population in its own language. This has nothing to do with "segregation"; it reflects respect for each community's heritage.

### **Misinformation about Home Demolitions:**

The book offers several anecdotal accounts of home demolitions in Silwan. The same Sara who alleged that the Israelis are trying to take over Al-Aqsa reported on the demolition of her family home when she was eight years old:

"They were standing in front of the door of our home. I went to see, but the house was surrounded by police and their dogs. I asked my older sister what was going on. She told me to stop talking. I asked her why. 'They have come to bulldoze our house,' she said. 'If you don't stop talking, they will hit you.'

"They locked us in a room downstairs, and we could hear them tearing our house apart over our heads."

"Did they give you a reason?" I asked.

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<sup>100</sup> <https://besacenter.org/truth-behind-palestinian-water-libels/> Accessed January 10, 2022. According to this February 24, 2014 report, "The Palestinians refuse to build water treatment plants, despite their obligation to do so under the Oslo agreement. Sewage flows out of Palestinian towns and villages directly into local streams, thereby polluting the environments and the aquifer and causing the spread of disease."

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.commentary.org/michael-totten/the-myth-of-jewish-only-roads/> Accessed January 10, 2022



“We were adding onto the house without a building permit. If you are Palestinian, they will not give you a permit even to add on one room. Then if you do it anyway, they use it as an excuse to demolish your whole house. That’s what happened to us.” (p. 60)

There is another side to the issue of home demolitions. In 2003, Justus Reid Weiner published *Illegal Construction in Jerusalem*,<sup>102</sup> in which he summarizes the accusations by Arab Jerusalemites:

According to the narrative, they have no choice but to build illegally, and, as a consequence, they run the risk of being snared by the Municipal inspectors. Those caught by the inspectors face economic catastrophe, not to mention psychological trauma, if city bulldozers demolish their unlicensed houses. The argument continues to the effect that Arab Jerusalemites (Arab residents of the city who reject Israeli citizenship), many of whom are poor, are discriminated against in the delivery of public services and amenities. All of the aforementioned discriminatory treatment, so the argument goes, is premeditated - aimed at Judaizing Jerusalem. Thus, the municipality stands accused of using the artifice of the planning law to force the Arab residents of Jerusalem, and their growing families, to abandon the city.<sup>103</sup>

Weiner takes these on point by point:

- The wait time for building permits was virtually the same (four to six weeks at the time he wrote the report) for Arab and Jewish residents. (Executive Summary, p. 9)
- Rather than “Judaizing” Jerusalem, from 1967 to 2000, Arab construction outpaced Jewish. (Executive Summary, p. 4)
- Contrary to the claims of NGOs, the media, and the foreign press, home demolitions are not arbitrary, but governed by “[p]recise and demanding procedures . . . in all parts of the city.” Chaotic, unplanned construction harms Jew and Arab; because it “vitiates the possibility of later providing proper infrastructure” (like sidewalks and room for two-way traffic). Buildings not built to code may collapse through structural weakness or earthquake. (Executive Summary, p. 14)

Had Sokolower been interested in learning the other side of the story, she could have done what this reviewer did – googled “illegal construction in Jerusalem.”

### **Misinformation: Arbitrary Arrests of Young People**

The Arabs Sokolower met repeatedly accuse Israel of arresting and mistreating young people.

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<sup>102</sup> The book is out of print. For an excellent executive summary, see <https://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/illegal-construction.pdf>. Accessed May 19, 2022. Highlights of the book are available at <https://www.jcpa.org/jlmbldg.htm>. Accessed May 19, 2022.

<sup>103</sup> From Executive Summary of *Illegal Construction in Jerusalem: A Variation on an Alarming Global Phenomenon*, by Justus Reid Weiner, 2003. <https://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/illegal-construction.pdf>. Accessed May 19, 2022.

Sahar Abbasi, deputy director of Madaa (an organization that provides psychological and other assistance to arrested children and their families) claimed that her organization “heard terrible stories about what was happening to children in Room #4 at the Russian Compound . . . where the Israelis interrogate and torture people they have arrested. The children were denied food, water, and access to the bathroom. Even young children had their hands and legs zip-tied for hours. They were humiliated and threatened.” (pp. 41-42) The word “torture” is used but not defined, and none of these accusations is substantiated.

Stories of cruelty to children will make a powerful impression on sensitive young readers, who can’t distinguish between hearsay and evidence. Had Sokolower intended to be fair, she might have presented NGO Monitor’s analysis of similar accusations made by UNICEF in their 2013 report, “Children in Israeli Military Detention”.<sup>104</sup>

NGO Monitor notes that “older minors are often involved in the most serious and heinous offenses,” among them the “brutal 2011 murder of five members of the Fogel family, including killing a baby in her crib” by Hakim Awad, age 17. These reports also ignore the reality that “Palestinian minors commit violent crimes due to incitement by the Palestinian Authority,” and that the PA provides a “monthly salary” to the families of detained minors. NGO Monitor also points out that UNICEF’s investigators relied on reports from biased, anti-Israel NGOs and did not perform independent investigations of their allegations.

### **Archeology or Politics?**

The opening salvo in *Determined to Stay* is an allegation that on February 1, 2009, a fifth-grade classroom in a girls’ school in Silwan fell into the cellar of the building, injuring some students seriously. A teacher attributed the accident to excavations by Elad, the private organization carrying on the archeological work in City of David National Park, under the supervision of the Israel Antiquities Authority. This was denied by Jerusalem mayor Nir Birkat, who attributed the accident to recent rains. (pp. 13-14)

Given the political bias on both sides, it can be hard to get to the bottom of this story. But Sokolower has picked sides. She relies on statements by Emek Shaveh, an Israeli NGO that claims to be “working to prevent the politicization of archaeology in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite its protestations of neutrality, Emek Shaveh is hardly apolitical. It accuses Elad of using “archaeological sites to dispossess disenfranchised communities.”<sup>106</sup> Its use of the term “settlers”<sup>107</sup> for Jewish residents of Silwan erases the village’s Jewish history: Yemenite Jewish families lived there from 1882, only to be driven out by Arab pogroms in the late 1920s. Channeling Emek Shaveh, Sokolower claims that Elad disregards non-Jewish artifacts in the

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<sup>104</sup> For NGO Monitor’s analysis (“The Origins of ‘No Way to Treat a Child’: Analyzing UNICEF’s Report on Palestinian Minors,”) see <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/origins-no-way-treat-child/> Accessed May 19, 2022. For the UNICEF report, “Children in Israeli Military Detention,” see <https://www.unicef.org/sop/media/216/file/Children%20in%20Israeli%20Military.pdf> Accessed May 19, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> <https://emekshaveh.org/en/haliba/>

<sup>106</sup> <https://emekshaveh.org/en/about-us>

<sup>107</sup> <https://emekshaveh.org/en/haliba/>

course of its excavations; for her part, she disregards the Muslim Waqf's practice of dumping layers of soil from the Temple Mount and President Mahmoud Abbas's denial of the presence of the Jewish Temple on the site.

Sokolower questions the historicity of King David, disparaging biblical archeology in favor of social and feminist history and Marxist class analysis. Emek Shaveh proposes, instead, "a story which is not included in the Bible – one which tells where and how the city dwellers lived, where the ruling elite resided and which were the areas for the poor."<sup>108</sup> The real purpose of the City of David dig is to buttress "the eternal bond between the nation of Israel and Jerusalem," says Sokolower, sardonically quoting a statement from a City of David tour guide. (p. 78) But is it any more surprising that a Jewish state prioritizes Israelite remains than that America prioritizes sites like Boston's Old North Church or the battlefields of Gettysburg?

In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Sokolower cites a claim that "[for the Israelis] there is no room for Canaanite, Palestinian, Phoenician, Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Arab, Muslim, and Christian names. . . . There is room for only a single narrative."<sup>109</sup>

This will come as a surprise to anyone who has visited archeological museums and sites throughout Israel, which highlight multiple strata from the past. Just for starters, Jerusalem's Bible Lands Museum, which runs programming to bring Christian, Muslim and Jewish children together, displays artifacts from the Canaanite, Egyptian and Babylonian past; the Tel Qasile site in the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv showcases twelve layers of settlement, including an excavated Canaanite temple and a reconstructed house from the pre-Israelite era.

In validating Emek Shaveh, Sokolower gives the nod to an NGO whose CEO, Yonathan Mizrahi, has posited moral equivalence between Israeli archeology and Hamas terrorism: "[Elad's] tunnels, like those of Hamas," he stated in 2014, "are being dug under a heavy cloak of secrecy. . . . They are also being dug under the houses of uninvolved civilians, in this case Palestinians. However, while the Hamas tunnels are described as serving terrorist purposes, these tunnels have been authorized by the Supreme Court of Israel, and all the relevant arms of the state have been mobilized in their support."<sup>110</sup>

### **Education or Indoctrination?**

Schools and teachers are in positions of power and trust, but in a liberal democracy parents' rights trump teachers' rights. Parents have the right to expect their children to learn some basics: reading, literature, writing, math, science, geography and history. They also have the right to expect a propaganda-free education for children who spend six hours a day, ten months a year, at school. When schools violate this trust – when they indoctrinate instead of educating – they transgress the boundary between home and school: While parents have the right to inculcate their offspring with their political values, schools do not.

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<sup>108</sup> [https://emekshaveh.org/en/booklet\\_online/](https://emekshaveh.org/en/booklet_online/) Accessed May 19, 2020. According to Emek Shaveh, the famous ancient inscription that commemorates the completion of the Shiloah water tunnel may not have been written by workers under orders from King Hezekiah, but rather "by a collective."

<sup>109</sup> Ibrahim, Nassar. "The Bustan in Silwan: All-Quds Will Lie on Forever and Resist in Its Own Way," *Al Bustan in Silwan*. Alternative Information Center, 2012. Cited by Sokolower on p. 79.

<sup>110</sup> [https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/emek\\_shaveh/](https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/emek_shaveh/) Accessed June 12, 2020.

*Determined to Stay* is integral to the Teach Palestine curriculum. It is designed as a classroom resource, and crosses all the red lines:

- It adopts intersectionality – a controversial theory antithetical to the beliefs of many parents.
- It tars white people as oppressors and Black, Arab and Indigenous people as victims, thus imposing Critical Race Theory on students.
- It eschews balance, explicitly declaring that there are not two sides to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and refusing to explore counter-arguments to any of its accusations.

### **Teach Palestine?**

We are living at a time of unprecedented geopolitical challenges to Western democracies. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's expansionism recall the threats of Nazism, Japanese fascism, and Communism of the last century. If there's anything our students need to study in history, it's the rise of Marxist ideology, the Russian Revolution, World War I, the rise of fascism, and World War II. If there's anything they need to read, it's *1984*, not *Determined to Stay*. Some things come first; teaching "Palestine" – the pet project of a small but very vocal community -- isn't one of them.

*[This review is reprinted from the website of CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis. To read a different version of it online, go to [www.camera.org/article/determined-to-stay-propaganda-in-the-guise-of-childrens-literature/](http://www.camera.org/article/determined-to-stay-propaganda-in-the-guise-of-childrens-literature/). CAMERA is a media-monitoring organization devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of the Middle East. I thank CAMERA for graciously granting permission to reprint it in my bibliography.]*