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The Next Great Threat to Israel's National Security: An Educational Bookshop

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Feb 11, 2025 3:19 pm IST

Shocking as it was, the Sunday afternoon Israel Police raid on the Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem, together with the court-warranted arrest of two of its owners, Mahmoud and Ahmad Muna, came as little surprise. The two have since been released.

The members of the Muna family have long been both local and international heroes – proud Palestinians, open to the world, and to all who cross their thresholds in peace – and the two small but jam-packed storefronts that they've run for years, opposite each other on busy Salah al-Din Street, represent all the ingenuity, hope, creativity, initiative, and cultural pride that the current Israeli regime has designated For Jews and Jews Alone.

We speak as (Jewish) readers, writers, translators, editors, teachers, book-shoppers, publishers, browsers, frequent bringers-of-foreign guests, regular audience members at bookstore events, sometimes participants in bookstore events, now and then sitters and sippers of tea and coffee on the [warmly welcoming second floor of the newer of the twin shops](#).

We speak in admiration (for the Munas), we speak in anger (at the judge, at the police), we speak in sadness (for us all): *This* is what the People of the Book have come to? *This* is what the people whose books have so often been burned are now doing to other people, to other books? Well, yes.

It's actually quite logical. While the [Educational Bookshop is prized for its very well-curated stock of publications](#) that relate to the Middle East in general, and to Palestine, and the Palestine–Israel question in particular, with books, journals, and magazines in English, Arabic, French, and other languages, the Munas' business has never really been "just" about books, or about shopping for that matter.

Education, of course, has also always figured centrally. In part that has meant making available the hands-on staples of any, and one would hope every, child's education: the school supplies that fill their backpacks – notebooks and pencils, post-it notes and highlighters. It has also meant creating a very adult oasis for the exchange of challenging literary, political, and cultural ideas.



Palestinian bookseller Ahmad Muna is escorted by Israeli police in Jerusalem on February 10, 2025.Credit: AFP / John Wessels

This, the Munas have managed to build, bit by bit, book by book, between the brimming shelves and coffee cups. And this is the great threat – the "violation of public order" (later updated to incitement) – that prompted the police's aggressive raid on one of the most non-violent places we know in an all-too-violent city.

Against multiple odds, and with remarkable calm and generosity, the Munas have striven to teach both locals and foreigners about Palestine and Palestinian dignity, Palestinian lives. We ourselves, both local and foreign, in our way, have, over the years, learned a great

deal from books we've bought there, conversations we've had there, readings and talks we've attended there, or under the bookshop's gentle auspices.

A few particularly meaningful purchases: at least one copy of the classic Hans Wehr 'Dictionary of Modern Arabic,' at least two copies of Moin Haloun's textbook of spoken Palestinian Arabic, the Nablus-born poet Fadwa Tuqan's memoir, 'A Mountainous Journey,' [Mahmoud Darwish's](#) poetry collection, 'Limadha tarakta al-hisan wahidan ?' [Why did you leave the horse alone?], Christiane Dabdoub Nasser's 'Classic Palestinian Cookery,' Walid Khalidi's monumental chronicle of the 418 villages that Israel erased in 1948, 'All That Remains.

All that remains indeed. Among other things that remain in our minds is the memory of one especially stirring Jerusalem evening nearly a decade and a half ago, when a group of international writers gathered in a garden behind one of the East's old-world cultural institutes, to read from recently published work about the place, its charged past and present. We can no longer recall if it was the Alliance Francaise or the British Council – but the smell of the jasmine and murmur of the crowd are still vivid. The Educational Bookshop was one the sponsors of this event: Mahmoud and several other Munas had arrayed piles of books beneath a tree, and as one reader after another rose to take part, the audience listened quietly.



Booksellers Ahmad, left, and Mahmoud Muna appear in court after their arrest during an Israeli police raid of their long-established Palestinian-owned Educational Bookshop, Jerusalem, February 10, 2025.Credit: Mahmoud Illean, AP

Toward the end of the evening, a British editor mounted the small stage and announced that he'd be reading a brief excerpt from a book by a former Israeli soldier, written shortly after 1948, about the expulsion by the army of Palestinians from their village. The air tightened slightly. The passage, by S. Yizhar, who would go on to become one of modern Hebrew's most distinguished writers, as well as professor of education at the Hebrew University, describes in unflinching detail his horror at what he, and his comrades, had become part of.

"What in God's name," Yizhar asks, "are we doing in this place?"

Essayist and biographer Adina Hoffman's books include 'My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness: A Poet's Life in the Palestinian Century' and 'Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architects of a New City.'

Poet and translator Peter Cole's forthcoming books include 'Requiem and Other Poems' by Aharon Shabtai.