

The day Israel came for the booksellers

Tuesday 11 February 2025, by [ZIV Oren](#) (Date first published: 11 February 2025).

With a Palestinian coloring book as proof of 'incitement,' Israeli police raided East Jerusalem's world-famous Educational Bookshop and arrested its owners.



Mahmoud and Ahmed Muna appear in court after their arrest during an Israeli police raid of their Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem, Feb. 10, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

If at any point over the past year and a half you might have thought the Israeli authorities had already crossed every possible threshold when it comes to [curtailing Palestinians' freedom of expression](#), you would have been mistaken. Because yesterday, Israeli police raided two branches of a world-famous Palestinian bookstore in occupied East Jerusalem, arrested the owner and his nephew, and seized a selection of books — including a children's coloring book.

During the hearing held today at the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court, the police representative Sgt. Maj. Ortal Malka said they had identified eight books in the Educational Bookshop that met the criteria for "incitement," but did not specify which ones. She also refused to address the fact that most of the books are not even written in Arabic and that the store's clientele is primarily international.

Since an arrest on suspicion of incitement requires prior approval from the State Prosecutor's Office, the shop's owner, Mahmoud Muna, and his nephew, Ahmad Muna, who works alongside him, were arrested on suspicion of "disturbing public order" — a common practice in cases related to freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the police claimed in a statement that the store was selling books containing "inciting content and support for terrorism," and the search warrant that the police used to raid the two branches of the store cited "expressing solidarity with a terrorist organization" as the suspected offense.

The two were held overnight at the Russian Compound, an interrogation center and prison in West Jerusalem, and brought before a judge on Monday afternoon for a hearing on extending their detention. Outside the courtroom, dozens of activists and diplomats gathered for a protest in support of the detainees, while their family members and friends crowded the area, trying to enter. The judge ruled to extend their detention until Tuesday morning, after which he recommended their release. [Update: Mahmoud and Ahmad were released on Tuesday to five days' house arrest and banned from their shop for 20 days.]

When their attorney, Nasser Odeh, asked why the Munas were accused of disturbing public order,

Malka responded: “The Israel Police believes that, especially during this period, and especially in Jerusalem, selling books that contain what we suspect them of justifies [considering the men] a danger.”

Regarding the number of books taken — Odeh noted that the police had left the store carrying several boxes — Malka replied: “Thirty, maybe forty, I don’t know how many of them we will ultimately classify as incitement. We seized at least eight books [that we suspected of incitement], maybe more, but it’s not certain that they will all be classified as such. The officers took everything they thought matched the criteria.”



A sign at the Educational Bookshop, after the Munas’ arrest, in East Jerusalem, Feb. 10, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

When Odeh requested to know the titles of the seized books and the names of their authors, Malka responded: “I cannot answer. We will confront [the Munas] with the books when I receive authorization ... It will take time to go through them, which is why we are here requesting a several-day extension of the [Munas’] detention ... Most of the books are in Arabic, some are in English, and some in German. I can’t go through them one by one.”

Based on [an image](#) of some of the confiscated books that were later returned, the titles included works by Noam Chomsky, Ilan Pappé, and Banksy, along with books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, student revolutions, and art. Among those seized, according to a statement the police published after the raid, was a children’s coloring book titled “[From the River to the Sea](#)” by South African illustrator Nathi Ngubane.

Between the lines

The two branches of the Educational Bookshop are located across the street from each other on Salah Al-Din Street, the main commercial thoroughfare in East Jerusalem, adjacent to the Old City’s Damascus Gate. Established in 1984, the institution is now considered one of the leading booksellers in the Middle East, frequented by journalists, researchers, diplomats, and tourists for their extensive collection of books about the politics and history of Israel-Palestine in English, Arabic, and other languages. They also regularly host public events such as book launches.

In addition to running the stores, Mahmoud Muna is the co-editor of an anthology of stories by writers in Gaza, titled “[Daybreak in Gaza: Stories of Palestinian Lives and Culture,](#)” which was compiled against the backdrop of Israel’s onslaught on Gaza to “preserve the heritage of the people of Gaza through literature, music, stories, and memories.”

While the stores are famous among an international audience, and located within a close proximity to the Magistrate’s Court, they are almost unknown in Israel. The court officials, police officers, and guards were surprised by the amount of interest from the media and diplomats — and as the hearing took place on Monday afternoon, the stores were open and dozens of left-wing Israelis and internationals came to buy books and show solidarity.

Murad Muna, Mahmoud's brother and Ahmad's uncle, described the raid and arrests to +972, as recounted to him by a third brother who witnessed the events. "At 3 p.m., the Israeli police came to the two branches of the bookshop, searching for books with the Palestinian flag," he said. Although most of the books they confiscated were in English, "they didn't know how to read English, so they used Google Translate to understand what the books were about."



A crowd gathered at the Educational Bookshop, after the Munas' arrest, in East Jerusalem, Feb. 10, 2025. (Oren Ziv)

Mai, the wife of Mahmoud, told +972 that their 11-year old daughter was present during the police raid. "Unfortunately, Laila was in the bookshop. She saw everything and was really shocked. But we talked to her and told her that her father is strong and she doesn't need to worry. She didn't understand why they were taking the books or what they wanted." Mai noted that she had feared that such a moment would come. "I always told Mahmoud that I was worried something like this would happen — I saw this coming."

According to Murad, "This is a political issue. The books we sell are available online — you can buy them anywhere. They deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have many books written by Israeli professors and academics. I don't think there's any logic or reason to arrest them." Welling up, he added, "It's not easy as a family. We hope that they will be free today."

During the hearing, Odeh tried to explain to the court that the stores' customers are mostly foreign — diplomats, journalists, and tourists — to undercut the prosecution's claim of incitement. The police representative replied, "I don't know [who the customers are], and it really doesn't matter. The important thing is that there is an audience, and the court should understand that."

"From the moment I heard about the arrests," Odeh went on, "I was reminded of two dramatic raids. In 1258, when the Mongols invaded Baghdad, they entered libraries, confiscated and burned books, and threw some into the river in an attempt to control [public] knowledge — out of revenge, nothing more. The second case was in 1933 in Germany, when the Jewish community was persecuted. I'm not making a comparison, [but] writers and authors were arrested out of concern that their art was a critique of the regime's atrocities."

In a statement on Monday, the police spokesperson said: "A search was conducted in two bookstores in East Jerusalem that were suspected of selling books containing inciting content. The suspects who sold the books were arrested by police detectives. As part of the investigation, detectives ... were exposed to numerous books containing various inciting materials of a Palestinian nationalist nature, including a children's coloring book titled 'From the River to the Sea.' The suspects, in their 30s, were arrested by detectives and taken for questioning."

"Today, the two will be brought before the court as police request to extend their detention to complete the investigation. The Israel Police will continue its efforts to prevent incitement and support for terrorism, utilizing all available resources, including advanced technological capabilities. This includes locating and arresting those involved in offenses aimed at harming the security of Israeli citizens, wherever they may be."

P.S.

- +972 Magazine. February 11, 2025:

<https://www.972mag.com/educational-bookshop-east-jerusalem-raid-arrests/>

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on Local Call. Read it [here](#).

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- Oren Ziv's articles in +972 Magazine:
<https://www.972mag.com/writer/orenziv/>
- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war - the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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