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OCCUPIED CHILDHOODS

**DISCOURSES AND POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD AND THEIR PLACE IN
PALESTINIAN AND PAN-ARAB SCREEN CONTENT FOR CHILDREN**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER FOR THE DEGREE OF
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FOR MY MOTHER

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores changing discourses of childhood and the ways in which power relations intersect with socio-cultural norms to shape screen-based media for Palestinian children. Situated within the interdisciplinary study of childhood, the research is an institutional and textual analysis that includes discursive and micro-level analysis of the socio-political circumstances within which children consume media in present-day Palestine. The thesis takes a social constructionist view, arguing that ‘childhood’ is not a fixed universal concept and that discourses of childhood are produced at specific historical moments as an effect of power.

The study has a three-part research agenda. The first section uses secondary literature to explore theories and philosophies relating to definitions of childhood in Arab societies. The second employs participant observation and semi-structured interviews to understand the history and politics of children’s media in the West Bank. The final part of the research activity focuses on the impact that definitions of childhood and the politics of children’s media have on broadcasting outcomes through an analysis of (a) discourses on children’s media that circulate in Palestinian society, and (b) local and pan-Arab cultural texts consumed by Palestinian children.

The analysis demonstrates that complex ideological and political factors are at play, which has led to the marginalisation, politicisation and internationalisation of local production for children. Due to the lack of alternatives, local producers often rely on international funding, and are hence forced to negotiate competing definitions of childhood, which while fitting with an international agenda of normalising the Israeli occupation, conflict culturally and politically with local conceptions of childhood and hopes for the Palestinian nation.

While the Palestinian community appreciates the positive potential of local production, discourses and strategies around children’s media show that Palestinian children are constructed as vulnerable, incomplete and in constant need of guidance. Pan-Arab content presents a slightly less didactic approach and in certain cases presents childhood as a dynamic space of empowerment. However, by constructing children as ‘consumer-citizens’, it alienates Arab (and Palestinian) children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as the preferred audience is middle-class children living in oil-rich countries of the Gulf.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Al ‘Awda</i>	The (Right of) Return
<i>Al-Qawmiyya Al-‘Arabiyya</i>	Arab Nation
<i>Al Ummah Islamiyya</i>	Islamic Nation
<i>Atfaal</i>	Children
<i>‘Ammia</i>	Colloquial Arabic
<i>Asdaqaana</i>	Our friends
<i>Bint</i>	Daughter/Girl
<i>Bulugh</i>	Sexual maturation
<i>Fos·ha</i>	Classical Arabic
<i>Haraam</i>	Forbidden in Islam
<i>Intifada</i>	Uprising
<i>Kuttab</i>	Quranic school
<i>Muadab</i>	Polite, well mannered
<i>Muraahiq (m) / Muraahiqa (f)</i>	Adolescent, teenager
<i>Nakba</i>	Catastrophe
<i>Shabab/Shebab</i>	Young adults/youth
<i>Sabiya/Sabaya (p)</i>	Young females
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic Law
<i>Tifl</i>	Child
<i>Tafula</i>	Childhood
<i>Qawm</i>	National Community
<i>Ukht</i>	Sister
<i>Ustaad (m) /Ustaada (f)</i>	Teacher
<i>Watan</i>	Homeland

ACRONYMS

AQTV	Al Quds Educational Television
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DCI	Defence for Children International
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
IMM	Institute of Modern Media
MDC	Media Development Centre
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoC	Ministry of Culture
MoI	Ministry of Information
MoTT	Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
MEMRI	Middle East Media Research Institute
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PEN	Palestinian Education Media Network
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PMRS	Palestine Medical Relief Society
PMW	Palestine Media Watch
PYALARA	Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation
SKN	Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNRWA	United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency
USAID	United States Aid

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This thesis is written in the memory of Ramallah schoolboys, Nadim Siam Nuwara and Muhammad Abu al-Thahir, who were murdered by the Israeli army at a Nakba day protest on 15 May 2014.

DECLARATION

I DECLARE THAT ALL THE MATERIAL CONTAINED IN THIS THESIS IS MY OWN WORK.

Chapter 1: Introduction

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1.1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using children's media as a window into perceptions of childhood, this study of Palestinian childhood combines textual analysis of a selection of Arabic-language programmes for children with a broader analysis of the socio-political, economic and institutional dynamics that characterize Palestinian children's media experiences. Situated in the 'new sociology of childhood' (Jenks, 1996; Stainton Rogers et al., 1995; James and Prout, 1990), this thesis connects a macro analysis of the broader economic and political forces at play, with micro-level analysis of discourses and texts that circulate within Palestinian society.

This thesis examines changing discourses of childhood in Palestine and the ways in which socio-cultural aspects overlap with ideological goals to shape screen-based media¹ for children in the West Bank. The focus is on television, as while Palestinian children consume media on a variety of different platforms (internet, mobile phones, video consoles), television remains the most widely available and important medium. Although the geographical focus is confined to one particular region – the West Bank – the research contributes to theoretical perspectives about the relationship between children and screen-based media in the Arab world, especially in light of the new conflict zones created as a result of the Arab revolutions of 2010-2011.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How is the notion of childhood defined in Arab societies?
2. How do members of the Palestinian 'children's television community' (Bryant, 2007) negotiate differing priorities and contrasting definitions of childhood?
3. How does the portrayal of children in Palestinian screen content compare with the positioning of children on leading pan-Arab children's channels?

¹ The term 'screen-based' media has been used, rather than television, as examples of other platforms will also be considered.

1.2. RESEARCH CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

In the study of children's media, there is no shortage of panic discourses focusing on the negative effects of media on children. They tend to use emotive language such as the death of childhood (Postman, 1993) or the media creating a toxic childhood (Palmer, 2007) or the commodification of childhood (Kline, 1995). The prevalence of these discourses has 'side tracked media studies for decades' (Cricher: 2008: 97). This is even more acute in Palestine and the Arab region, where there is limited research on children's television content that goes beyond looking at the negative effects of the media. While public discourses from outside the region have been preoccupied by children's programmes that advocate violence against the west,² the phenomenon termed 'martyrdom television' (see Warshel, 2009 for an analysis of martyrdom programming in Palestine), research in the Arab world has mainly focused on issues such as 'negative influences', 'psychological dangers', 'impact of advertising' and 'televised violence' (see Tayie, 2008). In public debates this discourse often takes on a religious angle and these fears are linked to worries that foreign content is endangering the unproblematically labelled 'Arab-Islamic culture' (Sakr, 2007: 151). Children are at the centre of such debates due to a growing discourse that there is an indisputable clash between globalised youth culture and Arab-Islamic culture (Kraidy and Khalil, 2008: 341; Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 161). In Palestine, there is an added layer of paternalism due to the existential threat that the Israeli occupation poses to the survival of the Palestinian nation.

Such framing pinpoints that definitions of childhood and the cultural politics surrounding them are key to understanding more about Palestinian society and how power relations intersect with socio-cultural norms to influence broadcasting outcomes. Due to the high population growth in the Arab world, children, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),³ constitute the largest subsection of Arab society. Yet children's media experiences have rarely been the focus of research by scholars based in the Arab world or outside it. Moreover, because of the pre-occupation with media effects, little is known about the children's television ecology in the Arab

² For example the notorious *Rouad Al Ghad* (The Pioneers of Tomorrow) broadcast on Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV. It has been the subject of many news articles in Israel and the west.

³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone under the age of 18.

world, and the people and institutions that create content for children. To address this gap in knowledge, this study uses production studies models (Bryant, 2007; Cottle, 2003) to understand professional practices and norms in the Palestinian children's television ecology and the ways in which relationships between key players influence decisions around broadcasting and commissioning. Rather than studying the production process of one programme, or within one institution, Cottle (2003: 24) suggests the study of a production ecology as a whole allows us to examine the macro forces of the regulatory, political and economic forces as well as the meso-level influences of institution decision-making and corporate cultures, and the micro context of every day relationships that impact production.

This study is the first study of Palestinian children's television ecology. Moreover, there is no research on Arab childhood that considers the implications that definitions of childhood have for television production, leading to further gaps in knowledge that this research seeks to address. Through the analysis of discourses on children's media that circulate in Palestinian society, the thesis uncovers different ideologies and assumptions about Palestinian childhood that are negotiated through producers' practices and the texts they create for the child audience.

Research on Palestinian childhood has been one-dimensional with a focus on the universal developmental needs of children, and children are largely constructed under a western concept of victimhood and personhood, focusing on their physical and psychological vulnerability in the face of conflict and violence. Palestinian children are constructed as passive victims, rather than active agents or political actors (with the exception of Marshall, 2013 and 2014; Habashi, 2008 and 2011; Habashi and Worley, 2009), and they have often been described as 'children without childhood'. This landscape of trauma denies agency and positions children as victims of their circumstances, rather than as meaning makers in their own right (see Marshall, 2013, 2014; Fassin and Rectman, 2009: 211). This 'loss of childhood' debate is both popular in local as well as global narratives of Palestinian childhood as it is not only steeped in a global developmental understanding of what is considered the boundaries of 'normal childhood', but is also utilised in national narratives, linking the loss of childhood to the Palestinian national narrative of the loss of a 'homeland' (Viterbo, 2012: 27).

This study of Palestinian childhood takes a social constructionist view of childhood and places a big importance on the social and cultural context. The key feature of this framework is that childhood is a social construct and a variable of social analysis; that is to say there is no single, universal ‘world view’ of childhood. Moreover, this framework, following on from the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (Jenks 1996; Stainton Rogers et al., 1995; James and Prout, 1990) moves away from an understanding of childhood based on universalism and biological determinism. Social constructionism uses a ‘technique that throws light on why we construct childhood as we do in our time and society’ (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995: 24) to understand children as *beings* in the present rather than *becomings* in the future (Jenks, 2009: 106). Buckingham (2008) proposes a method of studying children and media that is situated within the framework of cultural studies, which he believes provides a strong theoretical framework and methodological orientation, as the focus is on the production of meaning and how it is constructed, negotiated and circulated, rather than on effects.

This study argues that the way that a society views childhood affects the way children’s relationships with the media are considered and in turn affects the media products it creates and distributes. The thesis therefore analyses the ways childhood is constructed in Palestinian and Arab society to understand more about the media experiences offered to Palestinian children. Due to the popularity of Pan-Arab media in Palestine, as well as the booming of international collaborations and projects, the media diet available to young Palestinians has greatly expanded since the early 1990s, prior to which access to the media was extremely limited. Besides the plethora of international channels such as Disney and Nickelodeon, Palestinian children have a number of Arabic-language alternatives to Palestinian television channels. These programmes, while in the Arabic language, offer an array of different dialects, norms and cultural practices that are different from Palestinian children’s local socioeconomic and political experiences. The research therefore looks at both Arabic language texts produced for a local Palestinian audience and texts created for a pan-Arab audience to compare the constructions of childhood and nationhood present in media products available to Palestinian children. This research is important as globalising forces in Palestinian children’s media ecology are liable to expose tensions that surround dominant definitions of childhood and media content that Palestinian children are likely to

encounter.

1.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis has a three-part research agenda. The first uses secondary literature to explore theories and philosophies relating to definitions of childhood and children's media in Arab societies (*chapter 2 and 3*) and the second employs participant observation and semi-structured interviews to understand the history and politics of children's television in Palestine (*chapter 5*). The final part of the research activity focuses on the impact that definitions of childhood and the politics of children's television have for the screen-based media texts available to Palestinian children, through an analysis of **(a)** discourses on children's media that circulate in Palestinian society (*chapter 6*), and **(b)** local and pan-Arab cultural texts Palestinian children are likely to encounter (*chapter 7 and 8*). The methods employed will be explained in greater detail in *chapter 4*. Meanwhile, the following paragraphs briefly introduce the methods used to address each research question.

Q 1. How is the notion of childhood defined in Arab societies?

To answer the first research question, the first section of the thesis uses secondary literature, such as academic and ethnographic studies of childhood and children's culture, including literature, video games and print magazines, in the Arab world to understand more about definitions and representations of childhood in Arab societies (*chapters 2 and 3*). The methods include a literature search to establish the key issues around children's media in Palestine, through a comparative analysis of the changing discourses of childhood in Arab and Western societies and the way in which these discourses are articulated in policy debates and strategies for children's screen media. This secondary analysis is supplemented by empirical data on Palestinian childhood gathered from participant observation and semi-structured interviews in the West Bank (*chapter 6*).

Q 2. How do members of the Palestinian ‘children’s television community’ (Bryant, 2007) negotiate differing priorities and contrasting definitions of childhood?

To address the second question, the research employs participant observation and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the children’s sector in the West Bank⁴ to understand more about the nature of the children’s television community and the discourses of childhood that circulate in Palestinian society. While acknowledging children’s agency and the importance of children’s voices and opinions, this question is based on the idea that children’s television is based on adult ‘interests or fantasies or desires’ (Buckingham, 1995: 37), and hence is concerned with adult (broadcasters, regulators, distributors) attitudes to children’s content. The question is answered by first mapping out key institutions, players and processes in the production ecology and then through the analysis of the meso and micro-level influences on the children’s television community (*chapter 5*). This will supplement perspectives gleaned in *chapter 3* about the macro context of the broadcasting landscape. Children’s media strategies and projects (*chapter 5*) as well as public debates about the function of children’s media (*chapter 6*) are also examined to understand the different definitions of childhood present in society.

Q 3. How does the portrayal of children in Palestinian screen content compare with the positioning of children on leading pan-Arab children’s channels?

To answer the third research question, three children’s programmes have been analysed – one Palestinian and two pan-Arab – to compare the notions of childhood and identity available to a Palestinian child audience. The Palestinian programme, *Bait Byoot*, is the only locally produced text in the West Bank at the time of the research (2013-2015);⁵ and the pan-Arab programmes selected, *Mansour* and *Anbar*, broadcast during a similar time frame, have been chosen for comparative purposes. This question addresses the construction and representation of childhood in Arabic texts for children, using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015, Fairclough et al., 2011; Fairclough, 1993) to

⁴ Heads of Television Channels, Local Producers, Animators, Artists and Writers; Heads of International and Local NGOs, Representatives of Government Agencies – Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture etc and Academics (see *table 3* on pages 97-100 for full list of interviewees).

⁵ This does not include programmes produced in the Gaza Strip.

examine the ways in which children's screen content constructs and addresses the child audience and whether it reproduces or challenges hegemonic definitions of childhood (identified in *chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6*). The textual analysis deals with issues of age, gender, nationhood, family relations, adult-child relations, religion and citizenship. Since pan-Arab television appeals to both Arab and Islamic levels of Palestinian identity, another level of analysis relates to the different identity constructions presented by the local (Palestinian) and regional (pan-Arab) programmes.

Since this study takes a social constructionist view of childhood, to understand childhood in the West Bank one needs to understand the socio-political setting in which Palestinian children live. To help contextualise the experiences of Palestinian children, the following section provides a brief history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, an intractable conflict stretching over decades.

1.4. A BRIEF HISTORY OF PALESTINE

One of the most popular symbols of Palestinian resistance and defiance is the cartoon strip *Handala*, an image of a ten-year-old Palestinian refugee boy. He has his back to the reader and is stuck in time, as he will only start growing up when Palestinians can return to their homeland (pre-1948 Palestine, now Israel).



Image 1: Handala

© Naji Al-Ali

The image was created by Naji Al Ali, a prominent Palestinian cartoonist, who was assassinated in 1987 due to his controversial and powerful cartoons. Naji Al Ali explained:

The child Handala is my signature [...] I drew him as a child who is not beautiful; his hair is like the hair of a hedgehog who uses his thorns as a weapon. Handala is not a fat, happy, relaxed, or pampered child. He is barefooted like the refugee camp children, and he is an icon that protects me from making mistakes. Even though he is rough, he smells of amber. His hands are clasped behind his back as a sign of rejection at a time when solutions are presented to us the American way. 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. The laws of nature do not apply to him. He is unique. Things will become normal again when the homeland returns (Al-Ali, no date).

Handala, the child has come to represent not only Palestinian children, but also the Palestinian nation, stuck in time and lost; a powerful symbol of the Palestinian experience under Israeli occupation. The image can be found on key chains, t-shirts, flags and other such nationalistic merchandising. Children are of great symbolic importance in Palestine and all socialising agents in Palestinian society, whether the family or education or the media, are involved in fostering a child's sense of belonging not only to the national community (*qawm*) but also to 1948 Palestine (now Israel); a specific territorial homeland (*watan*) (Hart, 2000: 104).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the longest on-going conflicts in the contemporary world, was triggered by the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, termed as the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe). The conflict is of global concern due to the country's position in a geo-politically and economically important region. While it has taken a backseat due to the Arab Revolutions, which started in 2010-2011, it remains at the heart of regional politics and remains a conundrum for the West, especially the USA, which has taken on an important role as mediator. The main issues obstructing a permanent agreement are borders, the status of Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees' right to return.

Palestinians have been made refugees a number of times. According to 2015 UNRWA statistics, refugees and their descendants number approximately 5 million today. One-third of registered Palestinian refugees (1.5 million) live in 58 recognised refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (UNRWA, 2015). Approximately 1.7 million Palestinians live in the state of Israel – many of whom were internally displaced in 1948 – and make up almost 21% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

The Palestinian right to return, recognised by UN General Assembly Resolution 194 in 1948, is a political principle asserting that Palestinian refugees have a right to return to the homes that they or their forebears were forced to leave behind in what is now Israel, as a result of the Palestinian exodus caused by both the 1948 creation of the state of Israel, as well as the 1967 Six-Day War. Article 11 of this resolution reads that the General Assembly of the United Nations:

Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

Proponents of the Palestinian right to return argue that Palestinian refugees and their descendants have a right to return to their homes, property, estates and land that were seized in 1948, or to receive compensation if they choose not to return (see Halbrooke, 1981; Rothbard, 1967). Palestinians themselves hold this as an inalienable human right. While successive Israeli governments have ruled out the return of Palestinian refugees, for Palestinians, waiving the right to return is unthinkable (McGeown and Asser, 2003). The right of return (*Al 'Awda*) is a passion that appears in Palestinian print as well as screen media and takes centre stage on *Nakba* day demonstrations as generations after generations retain memories of historic Palestine. The key to homes that Palestinians thought they were temporarily vacating, is passed down through generations, and has become a symbol of Palestinian refugees and their right to return.

However, this return has remained a dream. Several wars have been fought between Israel and its Arab neighbours since the war of 1948. The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 led to Israel unilaterally annexing the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The Oslo Peace Accords of 1993, which marked the end of the First *Intifada* (Uprising) that broke out in the Gaza Strip in December 1987, led to the creation of a quasi-state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as the PLO returned from exile in Tunis. However, the most important issues of borders, Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees' right to return, and Israeli military control over the Palestinian territories, were not tackled and hence, despite the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Oslo Accords did not create an autonomous Palestinian state as all land and sea borders are still under full Israeli control.

Freedom of movement and access within the West Bank is severely limited (West Bank, 2007) due to Israel's strict permit regime. In addition to the Separation Wall (termed the 'Apartheid' Wall by Palestinians and the 'Security Fence' by the Israeli government), the West Bank is littered with checkpoints and roadblocks, which restrict Palestinian travel between different cities and sometimes within their own cities and towns (B'Tselem, 2013). The 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, more commonly known as the Oslo II Accord, further complicated the West Bank by dividing it into three temporary administrative sectors (meant to be temporary until a final status accord which has yet to be established): Areas A, B and C. The PA has full civil and control security over Area A of the West Bank which, in 2014, constituted 18% of the land mass and includes the major cities of Ramallah, Nablus, Tulkarem, Jenin, Bethlehem, Jericho, Qalqilia and 80% of Hebron. Area A is devoid of Israeli settlements (Beinin, 1999). The PA has full civil control, and shares security control with Israel over Area B, which consists of approximately 22% of the West Bank. This constitutes some 440 Palestinian villages as well as surrounding areas and, like Area A, does not have any Israeli settlements. Area C is under full Israeli civil and security control, consisting of 60% of the West Bank, and makes up most of the area around Area A and Area B. An estimated 350, 000 Jewish settlers live in Area C (B'Tselem, 2014) and hence the West Bank has no territorial contiguity (see *map of the West Bank, image 3 on page 23*).



Image 2: Map of the West Bank

Source of data: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013

Events of the Second Intifada, more violent than the first, led to the worsening of conditions for Palestinians. The Second Intifada, also known as the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, erupted in September 2000 when hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon entered the *Al-Haram Al-Sharif* (Temple Mount) with dozens of Israeli soldiers. It was a cause as well as consequence of the breakdown of the Oslo process. Violent demonstrations took place as Palestinians considered this move as a provocation and assault on the third-holiest site for Muslims. As a result of the demonstrations, the Israeli army re-occupied the territory granted to the PA through the Oslo Accords. Moreover, following the unilateral retreat from the Gaza Strip in 2006, Israel went on to seize more land in the West Bank, incorporating the Jewish settlements of *Ma'ale Adumim* and *Har Homa* within the Wall. This move meant that East Jerusalem was effectively included within Israel; and the West Bank would be divided into two parts, both consisting of

fragmented pockets of Palestinian land separated by Area C and settlements (B'Tselem, 2014). Due to the stalled peace process there are no permanent status negotiations and the majority of the West Bank is under direct security control of the Israeli government. (The fieldwork for this research project was conducted in Ramallah and Nablus, which come under Area A and hence under less direct control of the Israeli military)

Since the West Bank and Gaza Strip are geographically separated by Israel, unless special permission is granted, which is an exception rather than the norm, travel between the two is near impossible. Palestinian unity was further tested after the emergence of the Islamic party Hamas in the Gaza Strip. After Hamas swept to power in the elections in 2006, Fatah, the secular party established by Yasser Arafat, refused to participate in any government led by Hamas. Following street fights between the two parties, a victorious Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip expelling Fatah to the West Bank. This led to the creation of two governments in the Palestinian state, with Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip (from which Israel withdrew, but still controls the borders) and Fatah ruling over the West Bank. Reconciliation attempts, led by Arab leaders in vain for many years, finally led to the 2014 Fatah-Hamas Gaza Agreement on 23 April 2014 (Beaumont and Lewis, 2014), less than two months before the outbreak of the third Gaza War. However, mistrust between the two parties remains and the undermining of the truce agreement by both parties has led to continued tensions.

While negotiations are stalled, Palestinian children remain in the unusual situation of having a strong concept of the 'nation' without having a 'state' of their own. Despite being recognised by the United Nations as an independent state (the State of Palestine has 'non-member observer status'), the borders of the country remain undefined. The PA depends on international aid and tax revenues from Israel for economic survival and therefore remains a docile, dependent 'quasi-state'. A September 2010 World Bank report found that, despite being 'well-positioned to establish a state' (World Bank, 2010), unless private sector growth was stimulated, the Palestinian state would remain donor dependant. The most recent analysis of donor dependency, 'Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: the Case of Palestine' (Keating et al., 2005) provides a bleak view and connects poverty with donor dependency. A collection of essays, each presents a different explanation for donor dependency; from the corruption of the Palestinian

Authority, to the controversial policies of international NGOs, and the Israeli avoidance of paying for the military occupation. Most essays take the 1993 Oslo Accords as a turning point for donor dependency, as international donors turned their diplomatic influence towards funding the newly formed institutions of the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, all essays agree that until the Israeli military occupation ends, the Palestinian economy will continue to stagnate despite the aid funnelled through international actors (Ibid).

The next and final section of the introductory chapter presents a chapter breakdown.

1.5. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The data is organized into 9 chapters. The following provides a detailed description of each chapter:

CHAPTER 1 introduces the thesis, explaining the context and significance of the research as well as presenting a brief history of Palestine from 1948 (creation of the state of Israel) to present day.

CHAPTER 2 explores theories and philosophies relating to definitions of childhood in Arab societies, using secondary literature to compare and contrast with definitions in other parts of the world. Divided into three sections, the first section explores western conceptions of childhood, and the different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology that have informed the study of childhood and children's media. The second section takes a policy perspective on contemporary childhood and analyses the problematic nature of universal definitions of childhood present in global legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which are particularly relevant with regards to age-based definitions. The third section explores theories of growing up in the Arab world, using the family and religion as the basis for analysis. This section also explores anthropological research on Arab childhood, by looking at literature on education and gender in Arab societies.

CHAPTER 3, also divided into three sections, presents both theoretical literature and empirical data on media in the Arab world to explain the context within which screen-based media for Palestinian children are located. Using production studies models, the first two sections describe the impact that the macro forces of regulation, technology and competition have on micro sites of production in the Arab world, with the first section analysing the constraints and influences on the Arab children's television community (Bryant, 2007) and the second section looking specifically at the broadcasting landscape in Palestine. In the third section, the attention is turned to cultural texts produced for children, analyzing the ways in which Arab producers construct the child audience. This section utilizes Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of an 'imagined community' and Robertson's (1995) 'glocalisation' theory to analyse trends in texts produced for Arab children. In the absence of research dealing with children's television, perspectives on pan-Arab texts will be gleaned from analyzing trends in generalist channels, as well as research on regional print magazines and video games for children.

CHAPTER 4 is divided into two sub sections, with the first section detailing the methods chosen to investigate the research topic, and the second section presenting a personal monograph of experiences in the field. This section allows the researcher to explain the reflexive and personal nature of the methods chosen, providing a reference point for researchers interested in engaging in developmental fieldwork in the West Bank. The next four chapters present an examination and analysis of empirical data, gathered through participant observation and interviews in the West Bank, as well as textual analyses of selected programmes.

CHAPTER 5 presents an analysis of empirical findings relating to the children's television ecology in Palestine. It contains an analysis of children's television culture and identifies key issues affecting children's media in Palestine. While taking a bottom up approach and focusing on the (elusive) meso and micro-factors that hinder the flourishing of the 'children's television community' (Bryant, 2007), the analysis also looks at the macro-context of regulation, policy, the Israeli occupation, and Palestinian Authority (PA) interference to understand more about the current state of children's media in Palestine. As media products funded by international aid are commonplace in

the West Bank, this chapter looks at the internationalization of ‘local production’ and the role external players play in the children’s television ecology. To explore the history and politics of children’s television in Palestine, *Shara’a Simsim* and PANWAPA, two examples from the Sesame Workshop, have been used as case studies to explain the politicization and internationalization of screen-content. This chapter ultimately questions the nature of local production in a context dominated by international co-productions and foreign aid.

CHAPTER 6 maps out discourses on children’s media that circulate in Palestinian society and the ways in which these ideas about the special nature of the child audience translate into broadcasting decisions. The chapter looks at local views on indigenous productions, co-productions and imports to understand the role ascribed to children’s television. Linking the function of children’s television and the importance of indigenous content to the politics of childhood, this chapter looks at claims that local production is the best option for children, even though children vote with their remotes and often choose foreign content. Using concrete examples of local screen-based projects, it analyses the implicit constructions of childhood present in local initiatives, especially in terms of children’s agency and participation. This chapter is organised around four themes, which encapsulate the data: children’s needs versus children’s wants; positive and negative regulation, and the last two interconnected themes of children as (universal) consumers, and children as citizens.

CHAPTER 7 AND 8 present data gathered from the textual analysis, comparing identity formation and constructions of childhood present in local (*Bait Byoot*) and regional texts (*Anbar* and *Mansour*) Palestinian children are likely to encounter. Critical discourse analysis forms the backbone of the two chapters, looking at the ways in which texts construct narratives of childhood and whether they reproduce or challenge hegemonic definitions of childhood. *Chapter 7* analyses the language used to address the child audience and the ways in which adult-child relations are constructed and depicted in the different texts, to explore whether there are common assumptions and idealisations or do they differ depending on the source. Behavioural traits assigned to boys and girls and the representation of gender will also be examined. *Chapter 8* compares the three texts to explore whether children’s programmes create geographies

based on a local, regional or a global sense of time and space. Since satellite television and the internet can be an important tool for the development of a ‘public sphere’ and belonging to the nation, enabling a shared imagination of not only the *qawm* (national community) and the *watan* (homeland) but also the wider regional community based on linguistic and cultural similarity (Arab world) and religious belonging (the Islamic nation) this chapter charts how successful the programmes are in creating a sense of what Paddy Scannell termed that ‘we feeling’ (1991: 277).

CHAPTER 9 concludes the thesis, offering a narrative based on the conclusions drawn and detailing the contribution to knowledge. Limitations of the study and future research ideas will also be discussed.

1.6. CONCLUSION

This study is designed to explore the discourses of childhood that circulate in Palestinian society and the impact these have on screen-based media that children are likely to encounter. This study of Palestinian childhood is an integrated production and cultural studies examination, that while paying attention to the wider political, economic and social context, places importance on the micro-level of children’s television and definitions of childhood. Contrary to childhood studies that assume a universal nature of childhood, the research takes a socio constructionist view and locates Palestinian childhood at a specific moment of time – in particular in relation to definitions and representations. Moving away from the politics of the Israeli occupation that has the paradoxical effect of de-politicizing Palestinian childhood, this research views children as political actors and as citizens. In short, the study puts children’s media under a lens to analyse discourses and practices of ‘childhood’ available to children living in the West Bank.

The next chapter (*chapter 2*) explores studies of childhood in the Arab world as well as in Western societies.

Chapter 2: Comparing Theoretical Constructions of Childhood across time and place

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2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to glean key issues around screen-based media for Palestinian children through a comparative analysis of the changing discourses of childhood in Arab and Western societies, and the ways in which these discourses are articulated in policy debates. The idea of the social construction of childhood, based on Philippe Ariès' (1962) seminal work on the history of childhood, has long been accepted as axiomatic. The term 'social construction' is used by social scientists to explain that childhood is not a static and universal idea; rather, the way children are treated and the expectations placed on them are both spatial and temporal in nature. Assuming that 'childhood' is not a fixed universal concept but a social construction, historical and cultural differences in the way it is constructed will produce variations in children's media around the world, reflecting 'the social, moral and political preoccupations of a particular time and place' (Messenger Davies, 2010: 7).

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores western conceptions of childhood, which have informed discussions about childhood and the media in the west. This section will trace the development of the study of childhood from one dominated by the fields of psychology and education to the flourishing interdisciplinary and international field it is today. It will also analyse the impact different philosophies and histories of childhood have had, not only on the way media consumption is studied, but also on the ways in which the media define and represent childhood. Thus it will also look at how these discourses of childhood are utilized in debates on the role of the media in children's lives and will consider how different ideas of childhood have been used during specific periods in history to rationalize public policy; for example the establishment of compulsory schooling or the banning of junk food advertising. The second section takes a policy perspective on contemporary childhood, and analyses the problematic nature of universal definitions of childhood utilised in global legal instruments. This section also looks at children's news, in relation to political citizenship. The third and final section explores theories of growing up in the Arab world by looking at anthropological research on Arab childhood, focusing on the Arab family and religion. This section will also consider ethnographic literature on education and gender in Arab societies.

2.2. WESTERN PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD

Western definitions of childhood and children as a distinct social group are complex and recent in origin (Buckingham, 1995: 17), but they are also specific to western experience, rarely taking into account more ‘diverse global and diverse local experiences of childhood’ (Woodhead, 2009: 17). However, since international co-productions and formats make up a big percentage of screen-based media available to Palestinian children, western conceptions of childhood have a significant impact on screen-based media for children, and therefore are vital for any analysis of Palestinian children’s media.

One way of understanding issues in western debates about children’s media is to consider western accounts of the history of childhood.⁶ In western academia, the conceptualisation of childhood as a social construct is one of the most important developments in the study of the history of childhood. Work by the French historian Philippe Ariès’ (1962) has greatly influenced historical perspectives of childhood as he recognised childhood as a social construction rather than a biological given, tracing how childhood as a distinct stage entered cultural discourse in the West towards the end of the 16th century. Noting ‘in the tenth century, artists were unable to depict a child except as a man on a smaller scale’, he asks, ‘how did we come from that ignorance of childhood to the centring of the family around the child in the nineteenth century?’ (Ariès, 1962: 8). Ariès argued that the modern western idea of childhood, as distinct from adulthood, only began to develop due to the increasingly important role the clergy played in social affairs. The clergy’s emphasis on moral education, Ariès explained, led to the expansion of education and therefore the valuing of children for emotional rather than economic reasons. Children were then viewed as distinct from adults, and not simply as ‘mini-adults’ as they were in the past (see, for more detailed analysis, Messenger Davies, 2010; Walkerdine, 2009; Havens, 2007; Cunningham, 1995: 11).

While accepting the importance of Ariès’ work, there is criticism levelled at his theory on many fronts. There are some historians (e.g. Orme, 2001; Shahar, 1981) who reject

⁶ While there is a large corpus of research on the history of childhood in the West (see, for example Cunningham, 1994; Ozment: 2001; Gittins, 2009, Hendrick, 2009), despite the recent interest, there is limited scholarship on the global experiences of childhood (Stearns, 2005: 3).

Ariès' idea of the absence of the concept of childhood in medieval times, as well as family historians (e.g. Pollock, 1983) who argue 'if children were regarded differently in the past, this does not mean that they were not regarded as children' (Ibid: 263). There are also some methodological concerns with Ariès' work as it is argued that he focused too narrowly on medieval religious art, ignoring other aspects of medieval culture, such as non-religious art that might point to a different conclusion. Moreover, Messenger Davies (2010: 23) notes that the story is incomplete, as women, who had the primary responsibility over children, could not write, and hence no record was left by those who had first-hand experience with children.

Most historians however tend to agree with Ariès that there has been a major change in attitudes towards children and the treatment of childhood (e.g. Cunningham, 1995; De Mause, 1976; Shorter, 1975). They suggest that by the early 1900s, a 'modern notion of childhood' was legally, politically, socially, psychologically and medically established and institutionalised (Hendrick, 2009) opening up a theoretical space to understand children's lives, and enabling more empirical work on childhood and children (James and Prout, 1990: 9). The historical definition of constructed childhood also connects with sociological approaches that emphasise the development of children as a social and cultural process. This approach is important for the study of contemporary childhood in a global context, as it acknowledges that the history underpinning accounts of childhood is always changing, reflecting shifting views on gender, class and ethnicity (Cunningham, 1995) as well as shifts in children's relationships with culture and the media.

The ways in which this 'modern notion of childhood' is constituted can also be understood through the lens of what Foucault (1972) termed power/knowledge. According to Foucault, knowledge is discursive and discourse is full of power. He defines discourse as the 'general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (1972: 80). Walkerdine (2009) argues that power/knowledge is central to social order and hence central to determining what constitutes childhood at a particular time as discourses are 'produced at a specific historical moment as an effect of power' (p. 115). For example, in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, different philosophies of childhood came to influence Western European perceptions of childhood, and these can also inform the ways in which children's relationship with the media are understood today. In 1693, John Locke published 'Some thoughts concerning Childhood', establishing the tabula rasa discourse, which views children as being born as blank slates. The legacy of Locke's theory of child development constructs the child as an unformed person who can be trained and educated into becoming a civilised and rational adult. These ideas were used to establish compulsory schooling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Heywood, 2001; Hendrick, 1997; Cunningham, 1995), and are also utilised in modern debates about media literacy and the importance of public service broadcasting for children (Whitaker, 2011: 45-6). By contrast, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762) presented the concept of the innocent, pure, spontaneous child, arguing that children are in need of protection from the hostile environment fashioned by man. This notion of natural childhood innocence liberated from adult rules persists as a strong ideal in Western culture, echoed in initiatives to protect children from negative media influences associated with commercialisation, sexualisation and violence (Bettelheim, 1999). Western conceptions of childhood have also been greatly impacted by Christian doctrines that defined children as inherently evil and wicked and hence in need of punishment (see Gittins, 2009: 41-42; Jenks, 2009). According to Whitaker (2011: 44) this construction of a child naturally predisposed toward excess and self-gratification is manifested in contemporary debates about 'junk' food and 'junk' television (see also Buckingham et al., 1999: 53). The tension between romantic notions of childhood, based on Rousseau's philosophy, and Christian notions of childhood is evident in children's literature in 19th century Europe as the idea of the 'child as being inherently evil and needing to be firmly controlled was in contention with the 'romantic' idea of the child as pure, free and close to God' (Hunt, 2009:48).

More recently the romantic construction of childhood as a protected and innocent zone has come into the forefront of academic and public debate in the West as well as the Arab world, due to concerns about the harmful effects of media consumption. The romantic construction of the child combined with the notion of the child as a consumer gives 'childhood in late modernity a unique character' (Kehily, 2009b: 206), as echoed in paternalistic discourses that claim children are in dire need of protection from the

negative influences of commercial media. While by no means new, the debates surrounding the negative ‘effects’ discourse intensified in light of new digital technologies and children’s exposure to commercialisation. The media are charged with destroying the ‘secret garden of childhood’ (Kline, 1993) and these ‘end of childhood’ debates have dominated historical studies of childhood (see Cunningham, 1995). American media theorist Neil Postman pointed the finger at television for causing the ‘disappearance of childhood’ in his contentious, but influential 1983 book. Sue Palmer, a British schoolteacher also garnered significant international media attention for her book that criticized technology for creating a ‘toxic childhood’ (2007). These panic discourses have been so prevalent in academic and public debate on childhood and the media, that research on children’s media has mostly concentrated on ‘regulation, effects, ideological contamination, commodification and bad examples’ (Messenger Davies, 2008a: 94) side-tracking media studies for decades (Cricher, 2008: 97).

Since the effects model has been so influential in both Western and Arab understanding of children’s relationship with the media, it is important to understand the historical reasons behind the influence of panic discourses. For Cricher (2008: 102) the panic is stirred by a struggle to uphold a particular construction of childhood and Drotner (1999: 613) explains that since ‘upbringing is seen as the locus of character formation, and childhood is defined in terms of development’, the media therefore cannot be trusted. Therefore, one can look at the prominence of developmental psychology in the study of childhood to understand the dominance of the media effects discourse in both academic and journalistic debates about children’s relationship with the media.

Considered to be the most influential developmental researcher of the twentieth century, Jean Piaget’s (1977) work on child development firmly established developmental psychology as the main discipline for the study of childhood. The developmental approach is an evolutionary model that regards childhood as a special stage in development, marked by immaturity and irrationality. It is based on the notion that childhood is natural, universal and timeless, and a period of waiting until development and constructive change is attained through ‘growth’. The study of children’s media was, until at least the late 1970s, analysed under the classical behaviour psychology models and the focus was on the vulnerability of children and protecting them from

media ills. These debates are recounted by academics (see Caronia and Caron, 2008; Buckingham, 2007; Messenger Davies, 2005 for analysis of the debate) who note that traditional media approaches constructed children as passive victims lacking agency. Piaget's (1977) stage theory which emphasises the distinctive stages in a child's cognitive development influenced not just educators but also those involved in producing educational and entertainment media (Messenger Davies, 2010: 44; Steemers, 2010; Lesser, 1974) as well as toys and games which are marketed as age appropriate, as well as for those who market their television programmes globally based on the notion of 'universal' tastes of children (Havens, 2007). Sociologists (Jenks, 2009: 97-98; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; James and Prout, 1997) have disputed the universalism of psychological approaches, arguing that this system is deeply seated in western reason, and therefore not adequate for analysing children's experiences in different cultures, as development based on chronological age is not consistent around the globe.

Due to such criticism, in the latter half of the twentieth century there was a shift in the study of childhood, and sociological approaches, looking at children's socialisation into society, became more prominent. However, like developmental psychology, the socialisation theory also constructs childhood as being universal and has been criticized for viewing children as passive (Jenks, 2009) and for ignoring the temporality of childhood. The theory of socialisation, Prout (2008) argues, constructs 'children as passive and not as actors with the potential for agency. It focuses on adulthood as the goal and ignores the process of growing up' (p.29). Like developmental psychology, the theory of socialisation has been criticised for viewing children as 'becomings' in the future, rather than 'beings' in the present (Jenks, 2009; Prout, 2008).

However, despite the criticism levelled against both developmental psychology and socialisation theories, James and Prout (1990, 1997) concede that due to both frameworks' ability to build strong foundations and create solid knowledge, the theories still persist in the study of childhood, and should not be discarded completely. However, they contend 'the focus should be on children as beings in the present, rather than just in a transitional state towards future adults. What is important is to learn more about the

process of socialisation, rather than just the product of socialisations i.e. the relationship between present childhood and future adulthood' (1990: 232).

More recent scholarship on the sociology of childhood (for example James and Prout, 1990) has seen a move from the socialisation theory, to a more anthropological study of children's lived lives, taking into account the culturally relative and plural nature of childhood, as well as children's activity and agency. Charlotte Hardman's (1975) anthropological study of children in which she compared her study of children's lives to the study of women as 'muted groups' (1973:85), was instrumental in awakening a need for the study of children's agency and activity. Hardman viewed children as active social agents and put the focus on studying their relationships, perspectives and experiences, allowing for children's own voices to be heard. Hardman's research is hailed by many sociologists (Woodhead, 2009; James and Prout, 1990) as giving the study of childhood a new critical edge as it advocated for children to be studied in their own right. This inspired James' and Prout's 1990 book on childhood studies, which developed the framework entitled a 'new sociology of childhood', calling on academics and professionals to further develop this paradigm through ethnography and empirical studies to look at children as valuable subjects in their own rights. This version of childhood studies insists on the historical and temporal study of childhood, posing the question 'why we construct childhood as we do in our time and society' (Stainton Rogers et al., 1995: 24). The key feature of this framework is that childhood is a social construct and a variable of social analysis (as argued by Ariès in 1962); that is to say there is no single, universal 'world view' of childhood (James and Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996; Stainton Rogers et al., 1995), hence providing a fertile ground for the study of childhood and children's relationship with the media in different cultural contexts.

This section shows that there are different definitions of childhood in Western countries, and these have changed over time as an effect of power. While the values underpinning western constructions may not suit other parts of the world, the different discourses of childhood can be instrumental in analysing children's screen-media in Palestine, which is often produced, directed and regulated by western funding. Moreover, these discourses are also important for understanding global policy issues

relating to children and their use of the media, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.3. POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Childhood can also be understood from a policy perspective whereby children's needs and rights are identified as necessitating a policy response. This section looks at the employment of universal definitions of childhood in children's rights instruments as well as international welfare programmes. Universal definitions of childhood are particularly problematic when applied in the Arab world, where religious and traditional norms refer to parents' obligations, rather than inherent rights of the child (Esack, 2012: 109).

It has been argued that international policy perspectives, which focus on promoting children's rights or meeting their specific needs, are underpinned by western-based definitions of childhood. For Stainton Rogers (2009: 148) the needs discourse reflects the distinctive status of western children, based on western values that prioritise individual autonomy. This approach fits awkwardly into other societies, including those with a stronger religious orientation, where a different type of adulthood may be aspired to. Moreover, the needs discourse, which dominated child protection and welfare policies of the twentieth century (Kehily, 2009a: 5), relied on Western romantic notions as well as psychological studies of childhood, defining children as 'objects of charity' (Holscheiter, 2010) – powerless and lacking agency. Christensen (1999) argues that in fact there is an affinity between the concept of 'victim' and 'child' as both draw on the romantic notion of innocence and passivity.

The needs discourse has dominated studies of Palestinian childhood, as the resilience of children in the face of adversity is under theorised, and most studies of Palestinian childhood have focused on the victim status of children (see Johnson and Abu Nahleh, 2004: 315). The First Intifada (Uprising), which broke out in December 1987, generated a mass of interest and research on Palestinian children (for example: Baker and Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999; Qouta et.al, 1997; Qouta et.al, 1995; Rouhanna, 1989).

However, Palestinian children have largely been considered outside the realm of politics, as vulnerable victims of traumatic episodes (with the exception of Marshall, 2014 and 2013; Habashi, 2011 and 2008; Habashi and Worley, 2009). This landscape of trauma denies agency, and leaves little room for the study of Palestinian children as active meaning-makers in their own right (see Marshall, 2013 and 2014; Fassin and Rectman, 2009: 211). This concept of the child as a victim is linked to psychological ideas of child development, and some theorists (for example Boyden, 1990) have raised concerns about the use of western concepts of child-development not only in research but also in social welfare programmes in the developing world.

In terms of social welfare programmes, Marshall (2013) explains that Palestinian children are popular with international donors because they 'are considered safe, politically neutral targets for intervention' (p.54) and that the language of trauma sanitizes 'any perceived political content of work with children and youth, providing instead a sterilised medical discourse that reassures foreign donors' (p.60). Palestine's youngest are victims of the conflict, but also active participants. Children played a very central role in the first Intifada (1987-1993), and while images of unarmed children throwing stones circulated around the world, their voices remained 'muted' leading to a limited understanding of the ways in which meanings are created and established by Palestinian children. Even when Palestinian children are constructed as 'resisters' of the occupation, research is framed within the effects discourse, rather than children's own construction of meaning in challenging situations (for example Baker and Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999).

The needs discourse, based on developmental studies of childhood, leaves little room for children to be constructed as active citizens. Some alternative policy discourses focus on promoting children's rights, taking account of their views. The International Year of the Child was celebrated in 1979 and as the century advanced, human rights events developed and refined their understanding of the 'rights' of the child as opposed to simply their 'needs'. While there had been a declaration on the rights of the Child by the League of Nations in 1924 and later by the United Nations in 1959, it was not until November 1989 that legally binding principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child (CRC), placed child welfare as an issue of legal concern for the first time (Hamelink, 2008).

Defining the child as a person below the age of 18 (Article 1) the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by all countries except for the USA, Somalia and South Sudan, is one of the most important events in the legal construction of childhood. States that ratify the convention become State Parties and impose on themselves an obligation to comply with the Convention and submit regular reports to the Committee of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (initially two years after acceding to the Convention and thereafter every five years). The legally binding principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child construct children as social actors and citizens with their own rights; undermining developmental psychology's view of the child as natural and incomplete, and shifting the focus towards children's own voices as Article 12 asserts that children have the right to express their views on matters affecting them and for these views to be taken seriously (United Nations, 1989).

However, the universal aspects of the rights discourse can also be problematic because of diverse constructions and experiences of childhood in different parts of the world. For example, it is argued that the CRC's emphasis on chronological age (the age of adulthood is set at 18) and allegedly Western ideals of childhood do not always suit in non-western environments. Some academics (Tomas, 2012; Boyden, 2009; Stainton Rogers, 2009) have criticized the instrument for biological determinism and it has been defined by some academics as a 'text without a context' (Tomas, 2012). Moreover, critical voices have been raised by African and Arab countries, pointing out the hegemonic and western spirit of the document claiming that some of the Articles of the CRC do not take into consideration local traditions and beliefs (Ibid).

As the category of childhood is socially constructed, age-based definitions are not consistent across the board. In some communities, a child could still legally be a child (under 18) but a parent at the same time, with roles and responsibilities far outreaching those expected of a child in a different context. Some countries have felt unable to give their full approval to the provisions of the CRC and have entered reservations on the grounds that some principles are not consistent with the cultural context or domestic

legislation already in force (Tomas, 2012). All 22 Arab states, including Palestine have adopted the CRC, but some countries have inserted exceptions, albeit vague ones, to certain Articles such as Article 21 on Adoption, on the grounds that it conflicts with Islamic Sharia (religious law derived from scripture and tradition) (Moosa, 2012: 293). While the Quran places great importance on looking after orphans and treating them with kindness and their property with justice, there are significant differences in the legal aspects of adoption in Islamic and Western child rights discourses. For example, in Sharia law, a family cannot provide an adopted child with the family name and legal identity (Esack, 2012: 113).

Moving beyond meeting children's needs or offering them certain rights as individuals, another policy approach is based on the 'quality of life' concept, which takes a micro-approach seeking out children's own views about how to improve their lives (Stainton Rogers, 2009: 153). Utilised successfully in healthcare settings, this discourse takes into account the context of the family and society in which the rights are to be exercised. Moreover, it sets a positive agenda, as it is more holistic than the other two since it does not look at children as weak and vulnerable, focusing rather on their strength and capabilities, and is more respectful of different cultures, religions and socio-economic settings (Stainton Rogers, 2009: 153). It is, however, the needs and the rights discourses that continue to play a dominant role in global policy as well as welfare programmes for children around the world, including Palestinian children. The rights discourse, rooted in the CRC, is particularly important in terms of the media, as in contrast to the negative effects discourse it looks at the positive potential of the media. Freedom of expression and choice are seen as cornerstones of the CRC, and there are several important provisions relating to children's communication rights (Article 13, 17 and 42). The next section looks at the way in which media industries use rights-based approaches to construct children as consumers and citizens.

2.3.1. CHILDREN AS CITIZENS

The media empowerment discourse, based on rights-based definitions of childhood, tends to focus on children's autonomy and views children as active participants – liberated, empowered and media-savvy (Livingstone and Drotner, 2008: 3; Messenger Davies, 2008b; Buckingham, 2000: 95). This discourse challenges paternalistic definitions of childhood, instead 'positioning children in the vanguard compared with their 'elders and betters'' (Livingstone and Drotner, 2008: 3). It has been noted by some academics (for example Buckingham, 2000; Buckingham, et al., 1999) that this construction of childhood is valuable for those who profit from children's television as commercial companies often use the empowerment discourse as a marketing tactic. They argue that industry professionals have aligned themselves with campaigners of media empowerment, reflecting this child-centred discourse in consumer-oriented ways, as commercialisation is represented as a matter of liberation rather than exploitation.

For Buckingham (2000) the utilisation of this discourse by commercial media has blurred distinctions between the concepts of children as consumers and children as citizens. Furthermore, some academics (for example Carter, 2008) are sceptical about commercial channels' interest in appealing to young children as 'consumer citizens' arguing that 'media producers who appear only to want to appeal to young people as consumer citizens must now accept some responsibility for encouraging political citizenship' (p. 35). This requires engaging with children from a young age as citizens, which in turn 'necessitates rethinking certain assumptions about children's intellectual capacities and their rights, envisaging a more active political role for them in the public sphere' (Mendes et al., 2010: 457).

Attitudes towards children's news programmes can reveal how a society defines childhood and the kind of intellectual attributes children are credited with. Children's news programmes have come to be seen as an important medium through which children can construct and define themselves as citizens (Carter, 2013: 255; Banet-Weiser, 2004: 218; Buckingham, 2000: 168-169). There is, however, a very small corpus of academic work on children's news, which is not surprising given that a limited number of countries produce news programmes specifically for children, and it

is mostly public service broadcasters, rather than profit-making commercial channels, that produce such content (see Carter, 2009: 34). Hirst (2002) in an article for The Independent laments that there is no financial incentive for commercial channels to create news programmes for children, due to the higher cost and shorter shelf life as compared to animations and dramas, which can be re-sold internationally almost endlessly. By producing ‘Nick News’, Nickelodeon became one of the only commercial channels that attempted to provide a weekly news programmes for children. While ‘Nick News’ received a lot of critical acclaim, including a BAFTA, a decision was made to cancel the programme as ‘part of a move to make Nickelodeon a clearly defined brand [and distinguish it] from the Beeb’ explained Nicky Parson, the then head of Nickelodeon UK (as cited in Hirst, 2002).

Nickelodeon’s decision to focus on entertainment rather than news can also be understood in the context of conventional wisdom that children find reading and watching the news boring.⁷ This lack of interest is either attributed to the idea of a ‘disaffected and cynical generation’ or that children are ‘politically “innocent” and thus unable to make informed decisions’ (Banet-Weiser, 2004: 218). Research conducted by Carter et al. (2009) for the ‘What Do Children Want from the BBC’ project found the opposite. Carter (2008) explains that interviews showed that children appreciated the BBC news programme ‘Newsround’ as it ‘related to young people as citizens, providing news that is understandable, is useful, and engages them with the world’ (p. 35). The BBC’s ‘Newsround’ resonates with the principles of the CRC, which places children in the public sphere and constructs them as citizens. Ideas gleaned from attitudes towards children’s news programmes can be very illuminating in understanding the ways in which a society defines childhood and constructs the child audience. Palestinian attitudes towards children’s news will be analysed in *chapter 6* to glean perspectives on the ways in which the construction of political citizenship is promoted in a context where discourses on childhood are so apolitical.

The next section looks at constructions of childhood in Arab societies. Using family and religion as variables, this section looks at historical and contemporary constructions of childhood in the Arab world in general, and in Palestine in particular.

⁷ See Carter, 2013; Banet-Weiser, 2004: 218; Hirst, 2002; Buckingham, 2000 for discussion on this conventional wisdom regarding children and news.

2.4. CONSTRUCTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CHILDHOOD IN THE ARAB WORLD

Children, as defined by the CRC, make up a large and growing proportion of the Arab population. According to UNICEF's most recent data, under-18s account for 38 per cent of the population of the Arab world, and under-5s account for 12 per cent of the total (UNICEF, 2015: 71).⁸ Yet surprisingly research on children's media experiences in the Arab world has been limited. Instead, as Martin Woodhead (2009) noted, Western discourses about childhood 'have been exported and become globalised for judging other people's childhoods' (2009: 21) with limited sensitivity about the nature of childhood elsewhere. Woodhead goes on to point out that, whereas age and developmental norms have come to be seen as important childhood milestones in the West, there may be less attention to age in those places where the course of life is based on different expectations about work, gender and the age of maturity (Ibid).

2.4.1. THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM

What marks Arab conceptions of childhood out from Western approaches is the fundamental role that religion plays in Arabic-speaking communities. In general terms Islam, the religion of the majority, is 'ingrained in the everyday structures of Arab societies' and 'permeates many spheres of Arab social and cultural life' (Sabry, 2010: 245).⁹ While Christianity has certainly had a significant role in defining historical perceptions of childhood in the west, Christian religious mores have had less of an impact on contemporary secular Western societies. As with Western constructions of childhood, history affords us some ideas of how childhood has been conceptualised in Arab and Islamic societies. In contrast to Philip Ariès' notion of 'invented childhood', drawing on a wealth of medical and religious writings as well as pedagogical-legal literature, Avner Giladi (2011, 2007, 1989) makes a compelling case for childhood having been accorded a distinct status in pre-modern Arab society. While accepting that it is almost impossible to ascertain the historical details in the texts due to discursive

⁸ Statistics account for 19 of the 22 Arab countries – Algeria; Bahrain; Djibouti; Egypt; Iraq; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Libya; Morocco; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; State of Palestine; Sudan; Syrian Arab Republic; Tunisia; United Arab Emirates; Yemen.

⁹ While Christianity was born in the Arab region, Christians make up less than 5% of the population of the Arab world, and between 1 and 2.5% of the population of the West Bank. According to a 2013 census, there are an estimated 10 to 13 million Christians in the Arab world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015).

conventions of the time, Giladi (1989) argues that the constructions of childhood in these texts were not produced in a vacuum and hence a product of historical circumstance. According to Giladi (2011) ‘urban society on the whole invested in children on all three levels: the intellectual, the emotional, and the economic’ (p. 243).

He traces the importance of paediatrics in the work of 10th century Muslim physicians and the popularity of the *Kuttab*, an elementary educational institution established in the 8th century, to provide evidence for the presence of a conception of childhood, as separate from adulthood (Giladi, 2011). Using the backdrop of infant mortality, he uses examples of special treatises and poems of lamentation compiled for parents grieving over the death of a child to showcase parents’ emotional attachment towards their children, as well as Muslim scholars’ awareness of the uniqueness of children. However, similar to Ariès’ work, one of the important components missing is a direct account from women, as men almost exclusively authored the chronicles and treatises analysed by Giladi. While there are direct testimonies of the father-child relationship, there is no such account from the mother’s point of view (Ibid: 237).

In terms of legal definitions of childhood in Islam, while the Quran is a central source for Muslims, there are three other primary sources of Islamic law and Jurisprudence besides the Quran: (1) *Sunnah (Hadith)* – a collection of narrative stories about the Prophet Muhammad, his sayings and how he lived his life, (2) *Ijma* – consensus by learned Muslim jurists on a particular issue of law and (3) *Qiyas* – analogical reasoning i.e. the use of analogy by jurists to resolve issues not addressed in the Quran and the Sunnah (Esack, 2012: 102; Elahi, 1995). Definitions of childhood in Arab countries are based on religious understandings as well as the socio-political context of contemporary realities in different states. The advent of Islam, however, did provide a new framework of childhood, in stark comparison to the one that existed in pre-Islamic tribal society. Most importantly, the Quran states that the father does not own his children and spiritual convictions are prioritised over familial ties, as the Quran calls for children to be obedient to parents for the sake of God, rather than due to the status of parents. Moreover, children are allowed and encouraged to defy their parents if they are going against their religious obligation to God (Khan and Al-Hilali, 1996: 587).

The Quran uses various rich phrases to describe children and the transition from childhood to adulthood; however there is no real clear distinction between the developmental phases and no precise age when a child becomes an adult (Esack, 2012; Hermansen, 2012; Elahi, 1995: 370). Based on traditional Jurisprudence consensus, Muslims today consider sexual maturation as the beginning of adulthood and the attachment of social responsibilities (Esack, 2012: 102; Elahi, 1995: 370). Sexual maturation, known as *bulugh*, is the production of sperm in the case of boys and menstruation for girls. Deepening of the voice and changing of the body as well as bodily hair is also a marker (Davis and Davis, 1989: 46). This onset of puberty marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, as the category of ‘youth’ does not feature in Islamic law (Hermansen, 2012: 119) and therefore the terms ‘childhood’ and ‘youth’ are often used interchangeably. In some Arab countries with high youth unemployment, the category of ‘waithood’ has been applied to a phase between childhood and adulthood during which young people with no job and mixed feelings about parental dependence are ‘waiting’ to negotiate their identities (Singerman, 2007: 38).

Esack (2012) argues that ‘the inability to develop a legal personhood beyond the categories of ‘child’ (pre-puberty) and ‘adulthood’ (post-puberty) has created difficulties for young people in the Muslim world as religious texts are invoked for a myriad of different reasons and sometimes to justify practices such as child marriage (p. 115). In terms of age-based definitions of childhood, the socio-legal comparison of *Sharia* law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and local traditions demonstrates tensions in the ways in which childhood is defined. For example, most Arab countries have set 18 as the minimum age for marriage, as consistent with the CRC. However, this clashes with religious norms, which loosely set the reaching of puberty as the requirement for marriage. While Palestine is a signatory of the CRC, many villages and families in Palestine, as with other Arab countries, still follow local traditions, based on religious norms, rather than international law (Hermansen, 2012).

2.4.2. THE FAMILY AS A UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Besides the key role that religion plays in Arab societies, another important difference between Western and Arab constructions of childhood is that while Western approaches to childhood focus on the individual child, in the Arab world the family plays a more central role.¹⁰ In the Muslim world, with the bearing of children almost exclusively linked to marriage and family, it is the changing complexities of the relationship between family, religion and gender that sheds light on transforming conceptualisations of childhood. There is a rich ethnographic literature about growing up in the Arab world; however, most of it has looked at children in the context of the family and kin group. Hilma Granqvist's ethnography of the Artas village in Palestine (1947, 1950) is the most extensive research on Arab childhood available in the English language, whilst other ethnographies on the Arab world as a whole (such as Fernea and Fernea, 1997; Fernea, 1995) as well as specific countries such as Egypt (Ammar, 1954) and Syria (Rugh, 1997) are useful for our understanding of the societal and cultural context of growing up in the Arab world.

The concept of childhood in the Arab world, until very recently, was based on accepted assumptions about the structure of society and the functions of all ages within that society (Fernea, 1995: 2). As the family, to a certain extent, still remains the centre of social organisation and socio-economic activity in Arab societies, understanding its inner dynamics and relationships will help better appreciate the different concepts of childhood, past and present. The Arab family has long been described as the most important and unwavering social institution in the Arab world by both those who describe it as a strict, patriarchal and rigid institution (Sharabi, 1988; Barakat, 1985 and 1993) and also by those who have a more nuanced view and question this narrative of male power and argue that the Arab family is not homogenous, fixed and static, but that relationships within it are fluid, complex and cannot simply be reduced to issues of gender and class (e.g. Joseph et al., 2001-2004¹¹; Joseph, 1993a).

¹⁰ So much so that the compliance department at the Al Jazeera Children's Channel found the back grounding of family in Disney programming unsettling (Sakr, 2013).

¹¹ The 'Re-Thinking Arab Family' (Joseph et al., 2001-2004) project consists of research from 15 scholars about family and youth in Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt, who all argue that there needs to be a more critical and feminist reading of the Arab family, moving away from focusing merely on theories of patriarchy.

However, most scholarship on the Arab family has mainly focused on structural aspects and the perceived persistence of patriarchy. The family has been described as a hierarchical and patriarchal institution, whereby children were taught to be obedient and submissive at all times and socialised into dependency and conformity. Arab academics (Sharabi, 1988; Barakat, 1985 and 1993) have argued that vertical relationships exist between older and younger members of the family and due to the awareness of the love and protection provided by the family, children act with loyalty and devotion, even in the face of conflicting interests. Societal norms such as hospitality, respect for adults and honour were taught at an early age with religious and gender socialisation taking place at home, in the mosque, and for boys in Quranic schools (Fernea, 1995: 9). Parents, especially the father, were ultimately responsible for the socialisation of the children, whilst extended family such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and in the case of the upper classes, nannies and servants, also participated in the socialisation of the child. The set of hierarchical relations that exist between family members based on age and gender, it is argued, are in fact mirrored by Arab society as a whole, making the family a 'society in miniature' (Barakat, 1985: 46).

According to Elizabeth Fernea (1995), an ethnographer of the Arab world, who spent time in Iraq, Egypt and Morocco in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, 20th century Arab societies did not view childhood as an important state, rather it was seen as a preparatory stage for adulthood. She backs her observations with an in-depth review of the socialisation literature available in English. Other ethnographers (Dorsky and Stevenson, 1995; Ammar, 1954) agree with Fernea (1995) that children were seen to be without *aql* (rationality) and self-control and only through education and socialisation they could 'become' functioning adults. This resonates with Western Lockean constructions of childhood, as well as developmental psychology and traditional sociological views of childhood.

Fernea (1995) also suggests that in the Arab world there was no such thing as a 'carefree childhood' and while she notes that children only formally became adults when they got married and started families of their own, 'adult economic responsibilities might begin at any age past infancy, an attitude not very different from that depicted by Charles Dickens in the novels of Victorian England' (p. 11). Dorsky

and Stevenson's (1995) examination of the community of Amran, a tribal market town in North Yemen, leads to a similar conclusion that adults' memories of childhood were not of play, but of work. Children were a source of labour both in the family, helping with household chores and looking after younger siblings, as well as in the fields, helping with harvesting and other such tasks. While Dorsky and Stevenson (1995) do not overstate the workload of Arab children as Fernea (1995) does by comparing Arab children with Victorian children, they do, however, claim that children's value to the household economy led to children not enjoying a carefree childhood. Ammar (1954) in his important work about the coming of age in Silwa, Egypt, describes the process of growing up:

Envisaged as a way of disciplining the child to conform to the adults' standards, and to comply with what their elders expect them to do, thus acquiring the qualities of being polite; 'muadab'. In adult eyes, the period of childhood is a nuisance, and childhood activities, especially play, are a waste of time. The 'giving of adab' to children is the guarantee of survival of the social structure, with its patrilineal bias and respect relationships, especially filial piety, which is sanctioned by the Koranic injunctions (p. 126).

Gender also plays an important role in this socialisation process, as it is argued that families and societies have different expectations and hopes for boys and girls and the divisions can often be very stark as ethnographic literature points to contrasting experiences of childhood, at the onset of puberty (Davis and Davis, 1995; Dorsky and Stevenson, 1995; Fernea, 1995). Traditional Muslim societies have tended to separate male and female domains. In the traditional agrarian family of the past, socialisation based on gender and the division of a child's labour according to gender began at a very early age. The freedom that girls enjoyed before hitting puberty, such as playing in the streets, was greatly curbed once they come of age, and their movement outside the house was greatly restricted. On the other hand when boys reached this stage of maturity they were given extra freedom, autonomy and responsibilities (Dorsky and Stevenson, 1995: 312). Girls were confined to the home and the immediate neighbourhood, spending time with the women of the family, and were expected to look after younger brothers and sisters, whereas boys were encouraged to venture outside the house and expected to run errands (Fernea, 1995; Davis and Davis, 1995; Dorsky and Stevenson, 1995). A study of 9,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 19 in the late 1990s, in villages in Upper Egypt showed that whilst some girls were proud of

attaining this new status of womanhood, others were nostalgic for what they saw as a sudden loss of childhood (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 170).

The changing dynamics in the relationship between family, gender and religion can also shed light on transformations in the conceptions of childhood. Under colonial rule and after national independence (that took place in Arab countries between 1932 and 1962), formal education as well as the mass media started to play an important role in the socialisation process, challenging traditional gender roles, and providing new sites for the maintenance and negotiation of childhood. European colonial invasion towards the end of the 18th century greatly shook the foundation of Arab society. Modernisation of the economy and introduction of a formal education led to rapid and dramatic transformations of social hierarchies, leading to the family being 'overwhelmed' by colonisation due to the profound changes to the goals of the family, as well as its form and function, all coming from above, rather than from within (Belarbi, 1995: 231). In the 19th century with the spread of compulsory and free schooling across most of the Muslim world, colonial institutions became responsible for the education of Arab children, hence providing secular education, in contrast to the education provided by the family and religious institutions (Karimi and Gruber, 2012: 276). Schools were seen as an important way of controlling children (Armbrust, 2005) and can be viewed as 'society in miniature' similarly to Barakat's definition of the family (1985). Mitchell (1988) describes the function of the colonial school system as one of order and obedience (1988: 71) whereby schools became an important area for socialising and controlling the youth 'in addition or in opposition to families' (Johnson et al., 2004: 65). However, on the contrary, Fernea (1995) suggests that while Western colonialism changed society tremendously, family law and religious affairs remained within the realm of the family, and it was only after independence that the state began usurping some of the family's traditional responsibility for the socialisation of the child, through nationalised economies as well as educational and welfare programmes (p.4). She argues that in the face of intrusive Western colonialism, childrearing became the 'last relatively independent refuge' of people in the Arab world and therefore, 'colonialism intensified traditional family patterns' (Fernea, 1995: 12) and hence the institution of the family remained at the core of the national liberation movements across the Arab world (Ibid, 13). Rosemary Sayigh (1981), a prominent scholar of Palestinian history,

backs this argument by explaining that in Palestinian communities, the institution of the family regained strength as a response to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

While the family remained at the 'centre of resistance' in the movements for national liberation in the post-colonial Arab world, there were however voices calling for changes in family law and modernization of the family, especially in relation to equality between the genders (Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 69; Fernea, 1995: 13). On their return to the Arab world in the 1990s, Elizabeth Fernea and her anthropologist husband Robert Fernea (1997) noted a great transformation in the family, suggesting the foundations of patriarchy had greatly weakened due to shifting gender relations caused by women gaining higher education and entering the workforce. Due to economic pressures on the family towards the close of the twentieth century, women earners became essential to the material security of the family, and changed the concept of womanhood in the Arab world. Elizabeth and Robert Fernea (Ibid) viewed this new middle-class capitalism as a defining aspect of the contemporary Arab family of the late twentieth century. While restricted to the emergent middle class in a few Arab countries, Abu-Lughod (2005: 142) documents that changes in the concepts of motherhood and wifehood were in fact taking place as far back as the early twentieth century.

More recent ethnographic literature on Arab families has focused on the role of the media in Arab households. It is argued that television in the Arab world created a 'public space' that addressed not only the demographic targeted by the written media (old, educated male), but reached out to women, the young, urban dwellers as well as uneducated people (Sreberny, 2001: 114-5), hence providing a new space where constructions of childhood, womanhood and the family could be contested. Observing adolescents in Zawiya, a semi-rural town of 12,000 inhabitants, Davis and Davis (1995) found that while young people were reconciling western images imported to them on their television screens with their traditional sense of being Muslim, Moroccan and Arab; the gender roles, while not as rigid as they once were, were still in place (Ibid: 94-97). More recent arguments have focused on the impact of the penetration of global media through satellite television and the internet in Arab homes, and the role this has played in re-modelling family structures and gender relations, as well as exposing

children to a variety of different roles, as the young formed alternative peer networks alongside the more hierarchical relationships that exist within the family (Karimi and Gruber, 2012: 291).

Recent memoirs and autobiographies of Arab scholars and intellectuals paint a picture of yearning to escape from patriarchal family structures (Fernea, 2003; Rooke, 2000: 22; Martinez, 2000). Youth rebellion literature shows an Arab world characterised by unemployment, violence and growing estrangement from the family (Martinez, 2000). Luis Martinez (2000) argues that the conflict between the Islamists and the state in 1990s Algeria led to a breakdown in family structures as disenfranchised youth lost faith with the state as well as connections with their families (p.83). Gary Gregg (2005) in his study of the cultural psychology of the Arab world paints a picture of:

Adolescents coming of age in a crossfire of cultural conflict, their aspirations raised by education and global media but dashed by economic underdevelopment and political despotism, their imagination fired alternatively by the calling to usher in the modern and by the calling to conserve the authenticity of their traditions. Youths put themselves on the front lines of nationalist movements in the 1920s through the 1950s, of leftists and prodemocracy protests in the 1960s and 1970s, and of Islamic movements in the 1980s and 1990s. They have done much of the fighting in the civil wars in Lebanon and Algeria, the Iranian Revolution, the Palestinian Intifada (p. 25).

Bucaille's (2006) ethnographic account of three young males growing up during the first Intifada (1987-1993) demonstrates a tough choice the young men have to make between joining the struggle against Israel on the one hand, and building a family life on the other. Robert Fernea (2003) attests to the alienation from the family that began to take place during the Al-Aqsa Intifada (Second Uprising), which erupted in September 2000. He views Palestinian youth's involvement in the violent uprising as an individualistic act that widened the gap between parents and children. Suicide bombings are one such example he gives, as families had no prior knowledge and were often left surprised by their children's involvement in these violent acts. It has been argued that living under military occupation has led to a substantial erosion of traditional family structures, since parents are no longer able to guarantee security for their children. Johnson and Kuttub (2001) use the term 'paternity crisis' to explain this loss of paternal ability to provide and protect due to the political conditions of the Al Aqsa Intifada.

They use this term to explain the crisis of actual fathers in families as well as the capacity of the state – the Palestinian Authority – to protect its children. Ghassan Kanafani's (1984) short stories about Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation published in 1984 tell a similar story. However, others such as Bryan Barber (1999) argue that the family remains a binding factor in the lives of Palestinian youth due to the 'deep historical and cultural value placed on family life in Palestinian culture' (p. 210). Using statistics from the Palestinian Family Survey conducted in 1993, Barber (1999) does not find any major transformations to the family relations during the first Intifada.

Therefore, while the family as an institution changed dramatically due to colonial and post-colonial structures, in the absence of alternative institutions or a strong welfare system to supplant the kin group, the family remains an important driver of personal identity in the Arab world (Martinez, 2000:85; Fernea, 1995: 228). The academic literature on the changing nature of the family is useful for understanding the ways in which Arab societies have constructed childhood in the past. This in turn helps provide a context for the analysis of definitions of childhood in Arab-originated screen-media for children and the ways in which screen-media confirms or challenges dominant representations of childhood.

2.5. CONCLUSION

Across the world, childhood varies in terms of how long it lasts and the length and degree of dependency on adults. As argued by Ariès (1962) and explored by sociologists James and Prout (1997) in their innovative study, childhood is a social construct, which varies according to socioeconomic and cultural factors. Definitions of childhood vary across time and space as discourses are produced at historically specific moments to rationalize public policy (Walkerdine, 2009: 115). While western concepts and attitudes are influential in understanding global policy perspectives, the values underpinning these constructions do not always suit an Arab context, where family and religious mores play a more central role. While historical approaches point to childhood being a modern concept in the West, academic literature on the Arab world presents a

strong case for the presence of the concept in medieval Arab societies. In the Arab world, childhood has been studied under the framework of the family, and has concentrated on children's socialisation into society – a process often defined as hierarchal and patriarchal, whereby children were expected to conform according to expectations of the extended family, as well as religious and social ideas of gender and 'the values of honour, morality, religiosity, generosity, hospitality, respect for parents (especially the father) and responsibility for their care in old age' (Fernea, 1995: 11). Colonial and post-colonial legacies are also at play whereby the school and mass media presented additional sites for the creation, maintenance and negotiation of childhood.

Among the different disciplines that have looked at childhood, psychology and education focused on the child as an individual, while sociology, anthropology and cultural studies have tended to look at childhood as a social institution characterised by a variety of social practices, discourses and representations (Kehily, 2009a: 1). Applied to media consumption, psychological approaches look at the media's impact on child development, whereas sociological and cultural approaches tend to look at children's media use within the broader socio-political and cultural context, making the latter a more appropriate framework for the study of competing discourses of childhood in Palestinian media. While childhood studies has become a flourishing interdisciplinary field, childhood in Palestine continues to be studied under a developmental psychology framework, and Palestinian children are constructed as passive victims of traumatic episodes, leaving little room for children to be seen as active meaning makers in their own right.

The next chapter provides further context for the study, by looking at media in the Arab world and explaining the need for more serious analysis of children's screen media.

Chapter 3: Contexts and Texts: Literature Review of Children's Media in the Arab World

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3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter on Arab children's media is divided into three sections, with the first two sections providing analysis of the context within which screen-based media for Palestinian children are located, and the third and final section looking at children's cultural texts in the Arab world. Using production studies models, the first two sections will look at the impact that the macro forces of regulation, technology and competition have on micro sites of production in the Arab world, with the first section providing context for children's television in the Arab world, and the second section looking specifically at the broadcasting landscape in Palestine.

In the third section, the attention is turned to cultural texts produced for children, analyzing the ways in which Arab producers construct the child audience. This section will utilize Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community' and Robertson's (1995) 'glocalisation' theory to analyse trends in texts produced for Arab children. It will look specifically at the techniques producers use to construct an Arab child audience, that transcend national boundaries, as well as the ways in which they negotiate the perceived tension between traditional heritage and modernity. In the absence of research dealing with children's television, perspectives on pan-Arab texts will be gleaned from analyzing trends in generalist channels, as well as research on regional print magazines and video games for children.

It is important to note that due to transnational elements present in both Palestinian and pan-Arab productions, the term 'local production' needs to be re-contextualised (see Sakr and Steemers, 2015; Lustyik and Zanker, 2013a and 2013b). In a context where international funding, co-productions and formats are the norm, it is important to question if local production can ever be truly 'local'.¹² Appreciating that the term 'local production' is problematic, in the absence of an alternative, this term has been used in this study. The term is employed in two different ways. Firstly, in a pan-Arab context the term is broadened to refer to 'transnational' Arab production as satellite channels target an imagined 'local' community of Arabic-speaking children, living in different Arab countries. Secondly, the term is also used to analyse local production in a Palestinian context, i.e. productions specifically for a Palestinian child audience. It will

¹² It is important to note that children's television is one of the most globalised forms of screen content (Havens, 2007; Lustyik, 2010, 2013; Steemers, 2010).

become clear through the analysis, that local production in the Palestinian context is also ‘transnational’ in nature due to the role international actors play in funding and monitoring locally originated material.

3.2. CONTEXT: LOCAL PRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN IN THE ARAB WORLD

Pan-Arab satellite channels are very popular in Palestine. However, due to the lack of credible surveys in the Arab world, empirical data on Palestinian children’s viewing habits is extremely limited. Warshel’s (2012) qualitative study of Palestinian children’s consumption habits remains the only non-government survey available. Based on ethnography of 400 Palestinian children (in Palestine and Israel), Warshel (2012) found that children were tuning into pan-Arab channels, which an overwhelming majority had access to, rather than local channels.

Catering to a transnational child audience across 22 Arab countries, as well as the Arab Diaspora, niche satellite channels gave new meaning to children’s entertainment in the Arabic-speaking world. Before Syrian-owned Spacetoon, the first Arabic-language satellite channel for children¹³ appeared in 2000, the only provision for Arab children was from state broadcasters, amounting to about an hour per day (Alouane, 2010). Spacetoon was followed by a number of Arab language satellite channels: Saudi-owned MBC 3 was set up in 2004 followed in 2005 by Doha-based Al Jazeera’s Children’s Channel (JCC), the result of a partnership between the Al Jazeera network and the Qatar Foundation. JCC further expanded with a channel for 3-6 year olds called *Baraem* (Buds) in 2009 and re-branded its inaugural channel in 2013 as Jeem TV for 7-15 year olds. It also launched *Talaam.tv*, the Arab world’s first video-on-demand educational portal, in 2010 (Lustiyk and Zanker, 2013b: 170). There are also a number of religious channels for children such as Saudi-owned *Al-Majd* and Jordanian *Tayoor Al-Jannah* (Birds of Paradise). While these breakthroughs are significant, production of original Arabic-language content for children remains immature. Moreover, much recent

¹³ While ART Teenz, set up in 1998, claims to be the first children’s channel in the Arab world, it is not included in this list as it broadcast from Rome and was not purely a children’s channel, as the channel broadcast children’s content in the morning, and youth content in the evenings. The channel ceased broadcasting in 2008.

expansion in the region has been by non-Arab children's, notably Turner Broadcasting's Cartoon Network Arabic with its preschool channel Boomerang in 2010, and Nickelodeon Arabia (now part of MBC3) in 2012.

The following section borrows models from production studies to research the internal and external constraints that have hindered the development of local production for children.

3.2.1. PRODUCTION STUDY MODELS

As children's television can be viewed as an 'end product of an organisational process' (Bryant, 2007: 36), analytical tools from production studies (Cottle, 2003; Steemers, 2010) can be used to analyse the 'organisational structures and workplace practices' (Cottle, 2003: 4-5) to understand the micro-level discursive practices that shape local production for children. Children's television culture is shaped by a complex production ecology (Steeemers, 2014; Steemers, 2010; Cottle, 2003) comprising broadcasters, financiers, producers and regulators. Steemers (2010) uses Bourdieu's notion of a 'cultural field', to define this ecology as 'a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions and categories that constitute the site of cultural practice, interaction and conflict between different players over resources' (p. 7). Little is known about the children's television ecology in the Arab world. To understand how content finds its way to television in Palestine, production studies tools can be used to analyse how professional practices and relationships between key players in this ecology influence decisions on commissioning and production.

The production ecology comprises a network or community of professionals dedicated to creating content for children. Bryant terms this network the 'children's television community', made up of 'educational content creators, content programmers, toy tie-in companies, advertisers, governmental bodies, advocacy bodies, and philanthropic groups' (Bryant, 2007: 36). Rather than studying the production process of one programme, or within one institution, the study of a production ecology as a whole, Cottle (2003: 23) suggests, allows us to examine the macro forces of the regulatory, political and economic forces as well as the meso-level influences of institution decision-making and corporate cultures, and the micro context of every day

relationships that impact production. Using Cottle's framework in the Palestinian case can help explain the 'smallness of the individual producer in the face of a vast interconnected political world that ultimately has significance on what she can and cannot present in her work' (Sienkiewicz, 2013: 19).

While it is relatively simple to research macro factors such as the regulatory, political, and economic conditions that influence children's content; without access to editorial or planning meetings, the micro context of production sites is difficult to analyse. Without insider knowledge and access, one can miss important conversations that take place around commissioning and creative output (Roscoe, 2014). Sakr and Steemers (2015) argue that since the meso-level of institution decision-making (Cottle, 2003: 20) is so difficult to trace, it is not at all surprising that there are only few studies of children's television production (see also Steemers, 2010; Messenger Davies, 2010). Besides Buckingham et al.'s (1999) study of the BBC and Hendershot's (2004) edited collection which analyses Nickelodeon; there has been little research on 'producers' assumptions and expectations about the child audience (Buckingham, 2008: 225). Production studies of children's television in the Arab world are even more limited since the 'crucial area of development and pre-production is shrouded in commercial secrecy' (Sakr and Steemers, 2015: 240). Participant observation can be a useful method to unearth professional attitudes and practices as it allows the researcher to a certain extent to become a 'knowing member of the community' (Blommaert, 2006: 2) and view the construction of meanings from the standpoint of an insider (Spradley, 1980). *Chapter 4* will look at participant observation as a method in detail. Empirical data on the children's television community (Bryant, 2007) gathered through participant observation in the West Bank will be then be presented in *chapter 5*.¹⁴ The chapter will provide insight into the micro context of television production in Palestine, an under-theorised area, as research has mostly focused on the macro influences on the media landscape. By identifying the main players in the children's television community and exploring the relationships between local players and international collaborators, *chapter 5* will provide an insight into the power relations and cultural dynamics present in local production.

The next section will look at secondary literature available on the economic, regulatory

¹⁴ Since this study deals with the West Bank, the ecology does not refer to developments and players in the Gaza Strip.

and political context of the children's landscape in the Arab world to glean some insights in to the macro constraints placed on the children's television community in Palestine.

3.2.2. CONSTRAINTS ON LOCAL PRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN: COMPETITION AND REGULATION

While years of research have shown that people prefer media in their own language over imports (Tunstall, 2008: 2; Sakr, 2007: 15) imported content for children remains ubiquitous around the world, as purchasing easily available foreign content is cheaper than commissioning local production (Messenger Davies, 2010: 150). At the turn of the century, while some academics (Sreberny, 2001; Boyd-Barrett, 2000) were optimistic about the dependence on western programming dwindling in the satellite era,¹⁵ as more local Arab productions, especially from Egypt and Lebanon became more widespread, Sakr (2007) explains this was not the case. Since producing original content presents a higher risk of failure, Sakr argues that in the early 2000s tried and tested global formats such as game and quiz shows and reality television programmes were being licensed for local production in the Arab world. Opening up 'new avenues of programming' foreign formats became a safe alternative to local production, as demonstrated by the number of local series which were axed midway due to inconvenient political content (Sakr, 2007: 11). Offering the opportunity to localise content whilst combining elements of risk, predictability and innovation, international formats became very popular on Arab satellite channels.

In terms of children's formats, the localised versions of American pre-school programme, Sesame Street are the most widely available children's programme in the Arab world. The Sesame franchise is based on an international co-production model whereby formats are licensed and exported globally. The local team in the country collaborates with the Sesame Workshop in New York to create an educational

¹⁵ While regional co-operations in the 1970s and 1980s led to the development of the Arab Satellite Communications Organisation (commonly known as Arab Sat), a satellite network that covered the region, broadcasting remained largely state-owned until the 1990s. Introduced to the Arab world by Egypt in 1990, by 2000 all Arab countries had satellite television stations. The rapid development of satellite television over the last few decades (Kraidy, 2008; Amin, 2000; Sakr, 1999; Amin and Boyd, 1994) allowed Arab state broadcasters to broadcast across the Arab world and beyond, and also allowed their own citizens access to regional as well as global programmes, creating an audience that transcended borders and hence changed the way producers, broadcasters and national authorities looked at the Arab audience (Kraidy and Khalil, 2009; Ayish, 2003; Kraidy, 2002).

curriculum that is both culturally appropriate as well as ‘true to the spirit of Sesame Street’ (Fisch, 2013: 405). Contributions from local partners, including scripts, are vetted, translated into English and approved in New York (Habib, 2015). As compared to other children’s programmes in the Arab world, the Arab co-productions of Sesame Street have been researched quite extensively in both English (e.g. Fisch, et al., 2010; Cole, 2008; Sartorius Kraidy, 2002) as well as Arabic (e.g. Abu Mualla, 2013; Al-Khayr and Al-Samira’I, 1995).¹⁶

The Sesame project precedes the satellite era. The first programme entitled *Iftah ya Simsim* (Open Sesame) premiered in Kuwait in 1979 and was broadcast in all 22 Arabic-speaking countries. *Iftah ya Simsim*, a co-production between the Joint Program Production Institution (JPPI), a production initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), and CTW (now Sesame Workshop), has recently been re-launched in the Gulf by Bidaya Media, a production company based at TwoFour 54, Abu Dhabi’s media hub.¹⁷ Localised versions of Sesame Street have also been co-produced in Egypt (*‘Alam Simsim*), Jordan (*Hikayat Simsim*) and Palestine (*Shara’a Simsim*) as well as a Hebrew-language version in Israel (*Rechov Sumsum*). Premiering in 1998, ‘*Shara’a Simsim/Rechov Sumsum*’ (the Arabic and Hebrew titles), started off as a joint venture between the Palestinians and Israelis to produce a bilingual and bicultural programme to promote ‘good will’ between the two communities’ (Lampel and Honig, 2006: 256) and to ‘teach mutual respect to preschool children’ living in both countries (Ibid: 244). The Palestinian production was marred by controversy from the very beginning and some have argued (see Lampel and Honig, 2006) that the co-production was rooted in American conceptions of childhood, and based on the idea that childhood is universal and natural and that all children are ‘curious, fun loving, tolerant and open to other peoples and other cultures’ (Ibid: 257). While cultural specificity is an important element of the Sesame format, the end result may be quite different as Daoud Kuttub, one of the producers of the Palestinian co-production explains:

¹⁶ While the Jordanian educational programme *Al Manahil* (The Sources) which was broadcast in a few Arab countries in the late 1980s has also been analysed (e.g. Palmer, 1993; Yahya, unknown date), most research on local production has indeed been about localized versions of Sesame Street.

¹⁷ The new version debuted on television screens across the Arab world on 4 September 2015.

Sesame Street is a copyrighted American product; it is no different than Coca Cola, in the sense that they have produced something that people like. Even though they are non-profit whereas Coca Cola is for profit, they basically go around the world finding people who are interested in their product. They will adapt it to that country's needs, just like Coca Cola will write their sign in Arabic, on its bottle, but in the end, when you drink Coca Cola in Tel Aviv or in Damascus, or New York City it tastes the same. When you see a *Sesame Street* copyrighted program it might sound different, the characters might live in a different environment, but it will have the basic style, which is a magazine style, puppets are the key players, education connected with entertainment, short videos that are colourful, educational, and entertaining. They spend a lot of money and make everybody spend a lot of money to make sure that they stay on that standard (cited in Lampel and Honig, 2006: 257-258).

While formats and international co-productions can be constricting and in the case of Sesame Street cannot be truly representative of local productions (as scripts are vetted in New York), such initiatives did foster elements of children's television communities across the Arab world, equipping media professionals with skills to create high quality screen content for children (Sakr and Steemers, 2015: 240). However, the competition from US-based media conglomerates, such as TimeWarner (Cartoon Network) and Viacom (Nickelodeon), which entered the Arab market from 2010 onwards, presented a new challenge. This challenge is not unique to the Arab world, as children's television in many countries has struggled in the face of global competition (Lustyik and Zanker, 2013a: 181).

Due to these competitive forces, newly formed children's channels like Saudi-owned MBC 3 and Dubai-based Spacetoon 'saw no financial incentive to invest in originations aimed solely at the Arab market, because of the region's low advertising spend and the general lack of government subsidies or support' (Sakr and Steemers, 2015: 240). While Qatar's Al Jazeera's Children Channel (JCC) had declared it would produce 40% of its own programmes; towards the end of 2011, in the face of such competition, it too would change its stance. In September 2011, executive staff at JCC, mostly expats from other parts of the Arab world, were sacked and replaced by Qatari staff. Domestically produced series commissioned by the old management were cancelled, and replaced with highly-rated imports, acquired through licensing deals with Disney and the BBC, implying 'concerns about viewership and the channel's market positioning in relation to its Saudi competitor, MBC 3' (Ibid). Therefore, competition with MBC 3 and

international conglomerates and concerns for profitability overshadowed JCC's declared intention of creating local programming to meet the needs of Arab children (Alouane, 2010).

Moreover, in the Arab world, there are limited mechanisms in place, such as tax incentives or support from the government for children's content, and therefore the regulatory environment does not provide the necessary tools for the community to flourish (Habib, 2015; Alouane, 2010). While censorship and government intervention is widespread, there are few explicit laws or regulations about children's media. At the macro-level (Cottle, 2003) the lack of regulation has had far reaching effects on local production for children. Far from calling for more censorship, regulation can have a positive effect on screen content for children, as Malika Alouane, the previous Director of Programming at JCC explained at a conference on pan-Arab children's television that official regulation would help children's channels 'position themselves better' (Alouane, 2010).¹⁸ Speaking at the same event, Nadine Hassan, then head of MBC3, agreed. Pointing out the effect of weather on viewing patterns, with daytime temperatures of 40-50 degrees in the Gulf creating a physical environment conducive to long hours spent indoors in front of the television, Hassan said broadcasters could not act individually and independently to respond to children's needs without appropriate wider regulation of children's broadcasting in the region (Hassan, 2010) (for a more detailed analysis on the lack of regulation see Awan and Steemers, 2016).

Since children are seen as a 'special' audience they are therefore seen to require special regulation (Buckingham et al., 1999). D'Arma and Steemers (2010: 115) explain the dual nature of regulation, firstly 'negative' regulation to protect children from harmful effects of the media, and secondly more 'positive' regulation that promotes quality in children's content. Lustyik and Zanker (2013b) describe the different mechanisms used by various nations to promote local production. Besides the outright banning of imported content, some nations put quotas in place to limit imports; whereas more positive regulatory mechanisms include direct support for local productions as well as

¹⁸ The conference, entitled Children's Television in the Arab World, was organised by the University of Westminster's Arab Media Centre and took place on 4 June 2010.

setting up local or regional children's channels, such as the case of Qatar Foundation setting up JCC (p.160-161).

The next section looks at the context of Palestinian television and the financial and regulatory constraints on television production, both general content and children's.

3.3. CONTEXT: THE BROADCASTING LANDSCAPE OF PALESTINIAN TELEVISION

3.3.1. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In Palestine, media organisations do not operate within an established regulatory framework. While most Arab countries had state-controlled broadcasting systems by the 1960s (Sreberny, 2001), the Palestinians did not have their own broadcasting system until 1993 as Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) were forbidden by the Israeli government from creating broadcasting stations. In 1993, the Oslo Accords established limited self-rule in the Occupied Territories, triggering the state-building process, and hence allowing Palestinians to create local broadcasting channels. In terms of broadcast laws, a 'Tripartite Ministerial Commission', comprising of the Ministry of Technology and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Culture, was established to co-ordinate media issues. Currently, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology is responsible for managing licences. The Ministry of Information monitors content and the Ministry of Culture is responsible for raising funds for cultural and historical programmes (Abed, 2014).

In 1995, the Palestinian Authority tried to implement serious changes to the regulation system through a draft Audio Visual Law that aimed to introduce the Higher Media Council, an independent body, instead of the Ministry of Information, as a regulatory body (Abu Arqoub, 2012: 7). The law was never passed and the Tripartite Ministerial Commission 'often gets bogged down in disagreements about media regulations' (Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 11) and because of the lack of statutory broadcasting regulations,

the industry is 'regulated' on a case-by-case basis, as if in a permanent 'state of emergency' (Ibid: 11). The Deputy Minister of Information explained to Tawil-Souri in an interview in 2005 that a sustainable regulatory system is unfeasible due to the challenges presented by the Israeli occupation (Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 13).¹⁹

While there is a transmission quota for local production, the gap between the regulatory framework in principle and actual practices is very wide. For example, in 2005 in a bid to implement special regulations to spur the professionalization and growth of local production, the Ministry of Information of the Palestinian Authority increased the minimum requirement of home grown content (general content) from 25% to 40% (Adlan, 2014; Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 21). While this 40% local programme quota is in place for all channels broadcasting from Palestine (with an exception for global stations such as Tele Monte Carlo and BBC World) implementation is a different matter. Firstly, the problem is that the term 'local production' is not clear. Batrawi (2001), a Palestinian media professional and academic argues that the rule should refer to high quality and diverse programming, rather than cheaply produced live political talk shows that make up a big percentage of broadcasting schedules. Secondly, the Ministry of Information does not monitor television content and even if there is blatant violation of the rules, the policy requirement is not enforced, and according to Osama Abed, a Senior Engineer at the Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology, broadcasters get away with a 'slap on the wrist' from the Ministry of Information (Abed, 2014).

Furthermore, despite the regulation of frequencies, licenses are often not regulated and in fact channels often broadcast even before receiving a licence from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology (Ali, 2013: 36). Daoud Kuttab, the founder of Al Quds Educational Television, a not-for-profit channel based in Ramallah, describes the Palestinian Authority's laissez faire attitude to licencing as a deliberate policy of 'creating facts in the air', in the way that Israel creates 'facts on the ground' by building and occupying settlements on Palestinian land (as cited in Sakr, 2007: 25). This policy led to an abundance of broadcasting channels and one television executive explained to Tawil-Souri in an interview in 2002 that 'any idiot with five hundred dollars, a VCR and a satellite hook-up [could] start his own TV station' (Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 9). A

¹⁹ The Media Development Centre of Birzeit University has been commissioned to develop a national strategy on the media, which is to include development of regulation for broadcasting, and will be delivered to the government in full in 2016.

large percentage of programming on local channels comprises illegal re-broadcasts of content from pan-Arab channels (Ibid),²⁰ further side-lining the voices of local communities.

The Palestinian television industry hence operates in a chaotic landscape, littered with small and unprofessional channels competing with each other for very small audiences. Due to the use of analogue transmitters, television channels barely reach the outskirts of the cities they broadcast from, undermining the role of national broadcasting in creating national cohesion and manufacturing what Paddy Scannell (1991: 277) calls the 'we feeling'.²¹ Tawil-Souri (2007a) argues that the broadcasting landscape in the West Bank mirrors the social, territorial and political fragmentation of the Palestinian nation, due to the Israeli policy of 'bantustanisation', which separates Palestinian communities from each other by physical obstacles such as the Wall, military checkpoints, roadblocks and a strict permit regime.

Besides the external obstacles placed by the Israeli occupation, Palestinian media also face internal obstacles, as there is a lack of editorial independence in the media, which is either controlled by Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank or the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. The next section takes a brief look at the implications of the tight censorship and control of the Palestinian Authority for the media landscape in the West Bank. The section also analyses the role that international aid plays in the development of media in Palestine.

3.3.2. MODELS OF CONTROL

The authoritarian models of control in Palestinian media are similar to post-colonial Arab governments, which used state-owned television as a way to control and socialise people into becoming loyal and proud citizens of the newly independent states (Galal, 2006; Abu-Lughod, 2005; Ayish, 2003; Hafez, 2001). It is argued that in the pre-

²⁰ More than half of the programming between 1998 and 2003, and a quarter of the content, was from pirated video tapes (Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 19).

²¹ Recognising that broadcasting can create national cohesion, *Ma'an* Network, a local terrestrial channel in Bethlehem moved to satellite in order to, the network explained, 'provide an authentic and diverse media channel which could create a sense of unity across the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian population living in Israel and the diaspora. The outcome is profoundly political: when people watch the same news reports, laugh at the same sit-com characters, and cheer for the same sports teams they form bonds with people that they never see, but whose existence is crucial to their sense of identity, building the foundations for a common future' (Ma'an Network, 2011).

satellite era,²² Arab governments maintained full control over the media, either in the name of national security (Ayish, 2003) or under the guise of protecting the ‘nation’ from sectarian violence (Hafez, 2001). Ayish (2003) explains that while ‘funding sources, communication policies, programming agendas, and technological sophistication and communication policies’ in Arab countries may have varied, they all ‘shared common features like strong government control, dull local programming, high dependency on foreign imports, and limited coverage areas (and hence limited impact)’ (p. 7).

Palestine TV, the national broadcaster, which works under the umbrella of the state-owned Palestine Broadcasting Corporation, is under the direct control of the Palestinian Authority (Batravi, 2001). While the mushrooming of private television stations in the West Bank and Gaza in the late 1990s created the possibility for social and political diversity in the media landscape, these channels came under continuous attack from the Palestinian security forces and were unable to ‘pose a serious challenge to the region’s dominant model of television as government mouthpiece’ (Sakr, 2001: 109). The Palestinian Authority’s hostile reception to private media stations led to constant interference and censorship, and hence greatly weakened the local media sector.²³

Most academic scholarship and international media monitoring reports on Palestinian media have focused on the implications that obstacles placed by the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority have for the development of an independent and plural broadcasting landscape (Tawil-Souri, 2007a; Sienkiewicz, 2010, 2013).²⁴ Sienkiewicz (2010, 2013) observes that surprisingly little attention has been given to the role of international pressures and NGO-driven media products in Palestine. International aid has been pivotal in developing the broadcasting landscape in Palestine and television

²² The rise of Pan-Arab satellite channels, owned by a host of public and private broadcasters across the region sparked new hope for political liberalisation in an Arab world where censorship and control was rife (Lynch, 2005; Amin, 2003). Due to satellite channels operating outside the realm of national jurisdictions, there was optimism that satellite television would increase media freedom by bypassing intervention from Arab governments (Lynch, 2005; Amin, 2003). Downing (2001) uses examples from former Soviet bloc dictatorships to explain the success of transnational production and distribution in sidestepping local censors.

²³ In the late 1990s local private channels such as Al-Watan TV, Nawras TV and Al-Nasr TV were forced to temporarily close down. Moreover, broadcasts from Al Quds Educational Channel (AQTV) were blocked by the Palestinian Authority in early 1997 when the channel started broadcasting sessions of the Palestinian Legislative Council (Sakr, 2001: 109).

²⁴ The focus has been on the inability of Palestinian media to play a role in shaping the public sphere (e.g. Tawil-Souri, 2007a; Jamal, 2000: 504; Batravi, 2001) due to constraints placed on the media by macro factors such as the Palestinian Authority (PA) censorship and interference, disruption caused by the Israeli occupation (e.g. Jamal, 2000; Batravi, 2001; Tawil-Souri, 2007a; Abuzanouna, 2012; Reporters Sans Frontieres, 2009); and on the technical limitations caused by Israeli control over the physical space of frequencies and airspace (Tawil-Souri, 2007a). More recent research has also looked at the impact of faction-ridden politics and partisan media creating divisions rather than unity (Abuzanouna, 2012).

programmes funded through international sources – by foreign governments (such as USA and Sweden) as well as international NGOs – have significantly increased over the last 10 years (Ali, 2013: 40; Sienkiewicz, 2013 and 2010). Using the term ‘transnational censorscape’, Sienkiewicz (2013: 19) argues that international aid has multiplied the number of unofficial censors, exposing productions to the interventions of NGOs and foreign governments, with differing political agendas, further complicating an already delicate political situation.

The state-building project in Palestine has depended significantly on international aid, and the Palestinian Authority and its institutions remain heavily reliant on foreign aid, making the country one of the leading *per capita* recipients of foreign aid worldwide (Zanotti, 2014). While there is a growing discourse in Palestinian civil society that international aid ‘may have been part of the problem, rather than part of the solution’ (Keating et al., 2005: 2), in the absence of government subsidy or commercial investment producers are forced to depend on international funding. In the past few years international funding for local programming has become widely available due to donor interest, at a time when digital technologies have dramatically reduced production costs (Sienkiewicz, 2013: 20-33). Therefore, international co-productions and transnational media, especially edutainment programmes, form a large percentage of ‘home-grown’ content. For this reason, the ‘[...] contemporary media landscape in the West Bank requires a new, additional focus, one that takes into account the direct role that international figures and institutions play in the negotiation over what ideas, stories and images are produced and disseminated’ (Ibid: 33).

In the light of donor-funded programmes, as well as the popularity of international co-productions such as local versions of *Sesame Street*, it is important to question just how ‘local’ the ‘local production’ in Palestine and the Arab world is. The next section looks at the blurred lines between local, national, regional and global by looking at texts produced for Arab children. This third and final section focuses on texts produced for Arab children, looking at the ways in which Arab media balance local culture and the profit opportunities present in global youth culture. In the absence of research on children’s television programmes, the ways in which producers construct Arab children

will be gleaned from research on regional print magazines and video games for children.

3.4. TEXTS: CHILDREN'S CULTURAL TEXTS IN THE ARAB WORLD

3.4.1. REGIONAL MAGAZINES FOR ARAB CHILDREN

Since pan-Arab satellite channels for children are a relatively new phenomenon, there is limited research on the ways in which producers construct and position the child audience. By using Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of an 'imagined community', other pan-Arab media texts for children, such as regional print magazines can be analysed to gather perspectives on the 'modes of address' that producers and distributors of children's content use to appeal to an audience of children that transcends national borders. Anderson (1983) argued that nations are socially constructed and imagined by people who perceive themselves to be part of that group. This concept is relevant in the debate about the potential that satellite television has in creating a community of Arabs, who while living in 22 different countries, perceive themselves as belonging to a single Arab nation. The concept of Arab nationalism was at its height in the 1950s and 1960s, as Arab nations gained independence from European colonial powers. However, the concept lost traction in the late 1980s due to the aftereffects of the defeats that Arab countries faced in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, as well as the revival of political Islam in the 1990s, which was hostile to the concept of nationalism. Rinnawi (2006) explains that the concept once again became important, as in the post 9/11 world, satellite television, most importantly, Qatar-based Al Jazeera, revived the idea of Arab unity (p. 90-91).²⁵

This concept of Arab nationalism and pride could be viewed as important for children's channels as Sreberny (2001: 110) suggests that focus on commonalities of language and religion is a common media strategy to make media content work across national borders. Similarly, in order to maximise sales, regional print magazines for children

²⁵ In a context where people in the Arab world felt uneasy with George W. Bush's self-righteous frame of 'you are either for us or against us'.

have long tried to construct a community of young readers across the Arab world by focusing on the commonalities of the Arab world, rather than representing national or ethnic symbols (Karimi and Gruber, 2012; Peterson, 2005; Douglas and Malti-Douglas, 1994). Fatima Seif, Editor of *Majid*, the most widely circulated regional magazine for children, explains in an interview with *The National* newspaper in Abu Dhabi that the editors try ‘to keep the stories as general as possible so it can relate to children from the UAE, to those in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunis’ (Saeed, 2013). *Majid* enjoys distribution in most of the Arab world, as well as in diasporic communities in the UK, France and US, and is a good example of the construction of an ‘imagined community’ of Arab children.

Published by the Emirates Media Group, *Majid* is the most widely read and distributed children’s periodical in the Arab world and had a circulation of 175,000 until 2005 (Saeed, 2013; Karimi and Gruber, 2012). In 2013, the magazine celebrated 35 years of circulation, having moved online, as well as still enjoying ‘good circulation’ in most Arab countries (Gabai, 2013). Cartoon strips take up approximately one-third of its 70-80 pages, featuring recurring characters such as the eponymous *Majid*, as well as other original characters *Kaslaan Jiddan* (Very Lazy) and *Zakiya Al Dakiya* (Zakiya, the Bright one). The magazine also contains foreign cartoon strips, such as the United Features Syndicate’s ‘Nany and Sluggo’ (named ‘Loveble Muzah’ and ‘Terrible Rushdu’ in their Arabic versions) (Peterson, 2005: 186). Additionally, the pages are full of editorials, stories about history and news from around the world, as well as articles about science and technology. Interactive features such as readers’ photos, letters, pen-pals and email pals are also mixed in with the comics and articles, inviting children from different Arab countries to interact with each other (Karimi and Gruber, 2012; Peterson, 2005; Douglas and Malti-Douglas, 1994). This production tactic is similar to the one of pan-Arab children’s channels such as Al Jazeera’s Jeem TV, which encourages children to encounter each other. Either by joining the ‘Club Jeem TV’ on its bi-lingual website and sharing photos and comments with each other, or by taking part in interactive games and competitions (Lutsyik and Zanker, 2013b: 170), Arab children are invited to encounter and imagine each other.

While there is no research available on whether pan-Arab children's channels use political rhetoric of pan-Arab solidarity, content analysis of *Majid* (Peterson, 2005; Douglas and Malti-Douglas, 1994) as well as Peterson's (2005) textual analysis of three other regional magazines (*Alaa Eldin*, *Al Arabi Alsaghir*, *Bolbol*) shows that the magazines not only contain strong educational content with references to Islamic and Arab heritage, but also fierce political and ideological messages. Karimi and Gruber (2012) argue that *Majid* aims to instil 'a sense of pan-Arab nationalism in their young readers' and 'awaken the young Muslim child's religious and historic imagination' (p. 284-285). While the shared Islamic history garners a lot of inches in these children's magazines, the Israeli occupation of Palestine is also seen as another binding factor. The occupation of Palestine is presented in a child-friendly way, to send out similar messages that Arab media produce for adults, 'relating adult politics to the realities of children's lives' (Douglas and Malti-Douglas, 1994: 151-156). The representations mainly focus on the plight of Palestinian children as they engage in battle with Israeli soldiers. For example:

The regional news section of *Al Arabi Alsaghir* frequently carries news of the Al-Aqsa intifada. A January 2001 issue carried a large photograph of the Dome of the Rock inset with two smaller photos: one of a young boy hurling a rock, another of a stretcher carrying the now wounded boy away from the mosque. The brief accompanying story reminds children of the cruelty of Israel to children. Here, as in most representations of Palestine in the region's children's magazines, the emphasis is on the children in the conflict – especially the contrast between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian children. In one cartoon strip in *Alaa Eldin*, Morgan the jinn complains about the ubiquity of bad news about Palestine in his newspaper and on television. As he grows angrier and angrier, *Alaa Eldin* reminds him of the Palestinian fathers mourning their slain sons, and of baby brothers who must grow up watched over by their older brothers as angels rather than living siblings. Morgan's anger quickly turns to tears (Peterson, 2005: 190).

While the analysis demonstrates that these magazines are fiercely political and use populist rhetoric found in adult programming, Abu Dhabi Media Group, the official media group of the Abu Dhabi government, and producer of the magazine *Majid*, make it clear that the magazine has commercial, rather than political goals. The Abu Dhabi Media Group categorise its 22 brands into two categories: 'brands that serve the UAE through a defined public service role; and brands that target the wider Arab world with clear commercial objectives' (Abu Dhabi Media Group, 2015). Therefore, according to

the producers, *Majid*, targeted at the Arab world, has commercial rather than educational goals.

While commercial priorities may shape the constructions of childhood, multifarious identities are presented to the young, as the focus on Islamic heritage, pan-Arab belonging and the occupation of Palestine fit neatly with the commercial objectives of making content viable across the region. Peterson (2005) argues that by linking regional history and religion with international popular culture and consumer goods, these magazines present both messages in a single text, rather than choosing one set of codes over the other and therefore provide Arab children with tools to create hybrid identities as ‘simultaneously Muslim and modern, Arab and cosmopolitan, child and consumer’ (p. 177).

Analysing middle-class Egyptian children’s consumption of popular regional magazines, Peterson (2005) presents an ethnographic account of how Egyptian children are invited to enter an imagined community of children, living not only in the Arab world, but also outside of it, playing and consuming like themselves. By creating an ‘imagined community of transnational kids’, children are being encouraged not only to encounter Arab children of different nationalities through a sense of shared reading experience, but also encounter children all over the world, through the knowledge and consumption of global products. The Arab child is hence constructed as a global consumer, encouraged not only to consume the text, but also the world created by the texts. ‘Consumption is embedded in the stories’ (Peterson, 2005: 190) as the regional print magazines as well as pan-Arab children’s channels (such as MBC 3 and Jeem TV) keep children up-to-date on the latest products, by profiling electronic products such as IBM computers, Harry Potter books and other global products. The ideal viewer and reader hence are affluent, with knowledge of the products profiled in the texts. Kraidy and Khalil (2008) claim that commercial television in the satellite era targets the urban middle and upper classes in the Arab world, ignoring the poorer viewers, and the preferred audience are residents of oil-rich Gulf countries, who are desirable targets of advertisers. This, they suggest has completely re-shaped ‘production and programming decisions.’ (p. 340).

Since there is limited research on the ways in which hybrid identities are presented in Arab children's channels, the next section will glean insights from generalist channels in the Arab world to help explain hybrid television cultures that children are likely to encounter. Examples from children's texts, such as videogames and television programmes will also be used.

3.4.2. HYBRID TELEVISION CULTURES

As noted in earlier sections, despite the developments in pan-Arab satellite television for children, local content production remains immature and underdeveloped. Arab television channels, including Palestinian channels, are saturated with imported programming. The distribution of foreign children's programmes takes place through global conglomerates like Disney and Nickelodeon, but also through Pan-Arab networks such as the Saudi-owned MBC and Qatari Al Jazeera Children's Channel, as well as national channels like Palestine TV, that make large amounts of foreign content available through dubbing and subtitling.

Lemish et al. (1998) argue that this hybrid culture is about combining both the local and the global, and hence globalisation and localisation should not be seen as a matter of oppositions.

That is, we should not view this phenomenon via dichotomies such as globalisation versus localisation, international versus national or universal versus particular. Rather, globalisation involves the linking by children of their own locales to the wider world. At the same time localisation already incorporates trends of globalisation (p. 552-3).

Using Robertson's (1995) concept of 'glocalisation', Ayish (2003) explains that the co-option of imported global programming on state-run as well as commercial television is an indication of the willingness of Arab societies to adopt global products as long as Islamic cultural heritage is preserved as well (Ayish, 2003: 66-69). This approach comes from an understanding that culture is not unilateral, rather it is a concept that evolves continuously and needs to interact with other cultures to survive and remain strong, in what Sabry (2010) calls a 'cosmos of *interactions*' (p.2).

The Arabic franchise 'The 99', which started out as a comic book series, and is now an animation series (produced through a multi-million dollar deal with Endemol), with its own Disney style theme park in Kuwait, is a good example of this hybrid television culture. Named by Forbes magazine as 'one of the top 20 trends sweeping the globe', The 99, aired in both English and Arabic, and is now also broadcast in non-Arab countries such as South Africa, Pakistan and Indonesia (Teshkeel, 2013). Created by Kuwaiti company Teshkeel Media Group (TMG), The 99 is an international team of 99 young superheroes. While resembling Marvel superheroes, each character is based on a unique attribute of *Allah* (The Arabic word for God).²⁶ The blurring of lines between the global, national and local is reflected in such initiatives as 'Arab media plays a balancing act, between traditional heritage and the profit opportunities in global youth culture' (Kraidy and Khalil, 2008: 341).

However, 'in an area where discourses are obsessed with a quest for authentic identity' (Ibid), such hybrid television culture is not without its problems. Public and academic debates about preserving Arab and Islamic culture in the face of globalised and western culture have become ubiquitous in the Arab world. Children are at the centre of such debates due to a growing discourse that there is an indisputable clash between globalised youth culture and Arab-Islamic culture (Kraidy and Khalil, 2008: 341; Ibrahim and Wassef, 2000: 161). A plethora of Islamic channels for children have emerged due to concerns about the changing nature of childhood as the future of children is a moral discourse that permeates Muslim society, especially when these 'discourses attempt to articulate the meaning of childhood in a rapidly changing world' (Peterson, 2005: 170). The rise of Islamic satellite channels, both generalist as well as niche ones catering for children, such as ART's *Iqraa Channel*, Saudi Arabia's Channel One, UAE's Sharjah TV and the Hamas-run *Al-Aqsa TV*, points to the construction of an imagined community of Arab children, based on purely religious beliefs. Galal's (2006) analysis of children's programmes broadcast on Saudi owned channels *Al-Majd* (children's channel) and *Iqra* (generalist channel) demonstrates that Islamic channels construct the child as defined solely by religious behaviour. There is no room for alternative constructions, as religious behaviour governs all aspects of life and there is

²⁶ The creator Dr Naif Al-Mutawaa, a Kuwaiti child psychologist, claims that even though the story lines are 'inspired by Islam', they are completely secular and he 'makes it clear at the outset of the series that the superheroes will seek to regain the legacy of their glorious ancestors...also highlighting the importance of the Arab contribution to knowledge' (Deeb, 2011: 397).

no space for non-Muslims and foreigners in this public sphere presented to children (Galal, 2006). Broadcasting schedules of these channels are made up of educational rather than entertainment programmes as broadcasting schedules are made up of religious songs, Quranic recitations from children, stories from the Quran and quiz shows based on questions about Islam (Sakr, 2007: 153). For Ayish (2003) these channels fit in a purely *localist* pattern of broadcasting and cater to a more conservative side of society.

While, according to certain academics (Galal, 2006; Ayish, 2003), Islamic programming for children follows a purely localist trend, it has been argued by others (Sisler, 2013; Sisler, 2008; Tawil-Souri, 2007b) that Islamic video games fall into the *glocalist* category as videogame developers are exploiting modern and western technology to ‘re-institutionalise’ traditional and Islamic beliefs. Islamic video games emerged as a reaction to what Sisler (2008: 206) termed ‘orientalism in the digital age’, i.e. the negative representation of Arabs and Muslims in global video games (Sisler, 2013; Sisler, 2008; Tawil-Souri, 2007b). There are two kinds of videogames in the Arab world; the first that aims to reverse the stereotypes by constructing local heroes that gamers can identify with; and the second based on educating children on their Islamic history and tradition, and thereby restoring ‘digital dignity’ (Sisler, 2008: 206). Tawil-Souri (2007b) argues that these games:

Exploit the very tools of modern society to strengthen and re-institutionalise the fundamental core of their Islamic faith and political objectives. Religion can no longer be seen simply as a set of traditional beliefs, impervious to change and irrelevant to modernisation. The task therefore becomes one of reconciling anachronistic values with time-honoured assumptions about content, nature, and direction of modernising change and the role of technology therein (p. 549).

By analysing the trends in Arab television, as well as the identity constructions present in children’s cultural texts, this section provided a foundation for analysis of texts that Palestinian children are likely to encounter on their television screens.

3.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a context within which analysis of children's television programmes can be located. Production studies models afforded an analysis of the regulatory, economic and political framework within which Arab satellite channels for children operate. The constraints and influence on the children's television community (Bryant, 2007) from external forces, such as competition from US-based conglomerates as well as internal forces, such as the lack of positive regulation, explained the dearth of local production for children. In the Palestinian context, a brief history of broadcasting in Palestine points to the various obstacles placed by the Israeli occupation, Palestinian Authority, as well as international funders that hinder any kind of production. Since there is limited information available on the Palestinian children's television ecology, *chapter 5* will trace the key players in the children's television community to explain the role that social structures play in shaping what is produced for children.

The chapter also discussed market-oriented cultural production and the strategies that commercial media producers use in order to make texts viable across the region. In the absence of analysis of children's screen-content, the chapter looked at the ways in which Arab print magazines employed commonalities of language and Islamic tradition to appeal to an audience of Arab children that transcends national boundaries. While these magazines serve commercial purposes rather than purely ideological ones, they use sentimental language and play on notions of Islamic and pan-Arab belonging, as well as the occupation of Palestine, that bind Arab people together. These perspectives, along with the exploration of glocalist and localist trends in Arab television, provide a basis for analysing whether Palestinian and pan-Arab children's television programmes call on a global, regional, religious or local sense of time.

The next chapter will look at the methods used to answer the research questions, going into more detail about the challenges and opportunities faced while undertaking qualitative research in Palestine. Issues of gender and pan-Arab solidarity will be raised to explain not only issues around negotiating access, but also the self-reflexive nature of the methods chosen.

Chapter 4: Fieldwork and Methods

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4.1. INTRODUCTION

The methods chapter is divided into two sections, with the first section detailing the methods chosen to answer the research questions and the second section providing a reflexive analysis of fieldwork in the West Bank. The first section explains the methods – participant observation, semi-structured interviews and textual analysis – used for this research project, and details the way children’s television has been studied in the past. The second section of the chapter sheds light on the opportunities and challenges presented by fieldwork in the West Bank, providing a reference point for researchers hoping to engage in developmental fieldwork in Palestine. The position of the researcher as a ‘friendly outsider’ will be investigated to reflect upon the strategies I used to position myself. This discussion will be framed by methodological and ethical issues, in the context of gender and discourses of Pan-Arab solidarity.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

As noted in *chapter 1*, the research questions are as follows:

1. How is the notion of childhood defined in Arab societies?
2. How do members of the Palestinian ‘children’s television community’ (Bryant, 2007) negotiate differing priorities and contrasting definitions of childhood?
3. How does the portrayal of children in Palestinian screen content compare with the positioning of children on leading pan-Arab children’s channels?

The next two sub-sections provide an overview of the methods chosen to answer the research questions. Section 4.2.1 explains the methods chosen to answer research question 2 and section 4.2.2 describes the methods used to answer research question 3. Furthermore, primary data gathered from methods described in both sections supplement secondary analysis presented in chapters 2 and 3, to address research question 1.

4.2.1. CONTEXTS: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

I spent April and May 2014 in the West Bank, observing and interviewing stakeholders in the children's cultural sector, from government officials to non-governmental organisations and individuals involved in producing cultural texts for children, learning more about their intentions, motives, beliefs and values in regards to media products for children. To learn more about the children's television community and the discourses of childhood and media that circulate in Palestinian society I also spent a few days each week participating in the activities of Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA), a youth-media NGO in Ramallah. Furthermore, I observed the making of *Bait Byoot*, a local programme for children, textual analysis of which is a significant element of this study (in *chapters 7 and 8*).

My fieldwork combined a variety of data collection methods allowing for both the collection of a rich data set, and the ability to triangulate the data gathered by comparing the results obtained from one collection method against those of another (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:184). This included participatory methods, involving gathering data through observing activities, informal and casual conversations as well as more structured and formal peer interviews. The mix of methods afforded me important insights into social processes and activities in the local community. For instance, the lines of questioning for the semi-structured interviews were not just shaped by the literature review, but also by some initial observations I made during my time with Palestine TV and PYALARA. Besides the initial interviews I conducted with these two institutions; passing comments, observations in the office and studio, significant events I witnessed as well as informal interaction with staff members, allowed for the analysis of the meso-level of institution decision-making and corporate cultures, and the micro context of every day relationships that impact production.

Spradley (1980: 58) suggests there are five levels of participation observation – complete, active, moderate, passive and non-participation. While I took on a more active role at PYALARA, my observations at Palestine TV can be categorised as purely observatory in nature. I was more involved at PYALARA, and became somewhat like a staff member during my time there, as I attended internal as well as external meetings, training sessions and field visits. Being directly involved with drafting project plans as

well as accompanying the team on fieldtrips and training sessions helped me understand the challenges and constraints, as well as opportunities available to organisations producing media texts for young Palestinians. The observations (as well as interviews) helped identify the main players in the children’s television community and learn more about key relations, as well as unspoken rules and norms which guide broadcasting decisions. The observations made through these activities were cross-referenced with published as well as unpublished documents such as newsletters, presentations, corporate records, business plans and strategy reports. The observations at Palestine TV were of a more limited nature and consisted of four separate visits to the studio, for interviews as well as to observe the making of *Bait Byoot*. Due to the limited number of organisations working in children’s television, deciding on the informants for my research was a simple and organic process. The level of participant observation undertaken at both organisations is detailed in the following table:

Table 1

PYALARA Youth Media NGO	Active Participation	Assisted with writing strategy report; attended high-level meetings with consultants and donors; observed off-site fieldwork; participated in training sessions.
Palestine TV	Passive Participation	Observed programme recordings

Participant observation is a critical part of fieldwork as it allows the researcher to a certain extent become a ‘knowing member of the community’ (Blommaert, 2006: 2) and view the construction of meanings from the standpoint of an insider (Spradley, 1980). Due to the uncertainties in which organisations in Palestine function, the open and flexible nature of the method chosen allowed me to alter my participation, reacting quickly to the situation and the specific circumstances of different organisations. The method ‘involves a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied is constantly subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation’ (Jorgensen, 1989: 23). The everyday work habits, as well as conversations in the corridor, hold important information about emotions, beliefs and convictions that involve a particular construction of childhood and the way the role of the media in the life of children is conceptualised.

The observations also allowed me to identify and interview individuals and institutions involved in the children's cultural sector in the West Bank. Semi-structured peer interviews were conducted with members of the children's television community, such as distributors, script-writers, directors, producers, head of television channels, independent producers, voice-over artists and presenters; as well as members of the wider production ecology such as funders, regulators, lobbyist and advocacy groups. A total of 44 people were interviewed for this study (see *table 3, on pages 97-100*, for full list of interviewees). Some of the interviews were used to corroborate the views that I had formulated from initial analysis of *Bait Byoot*. Two questions were explored in the interviews, based on Buckingham et al.'s (1999:147) research:

1. The different ways people understood the needs and interests of the child audience; and
2. The impact these ideas have on the kind of media products available for children (local production, international co-productions and imports)

Interviews, like any other form of human interaction, always have a meta-level, and the body language, rapport, as well as what is not said in the interview needs as much attention as what is said (Briggs, 1986). The interviews were for the most part conducted face-to-face, with a few conducted over Skype and over the telephone, and follow-up questions asked over emails to clarify inconsistencies. While some interviews were conducted purely in Arabic, most were conducted in a mix of Arabic and English, as I always gave the interviewee the option to use Arabic or English, making it clear that my preference would be English. All conventions expected from ethical and rigorous research practice were followed; including gaining recorded consent, anonymising names when requested, and excluding off-the record conversations. Moreover, in certain instances, I have anonymised names (especially in *chapter 5*) when I personally judged the information to be sensitive.

The findings from these interviews form a major plank of this research and provide a context for the textual analysis. While the interviews offer 'evidence of a common area of language use [...] whose existence can be determined by persistent resemblances in

linguistic patterns' (Buckingham et al., 1999: 148), when we speak about discourses of childhood present in Palestinian society, it does not mean that views of interviewees fit into neat boxes. Rather it suggests that despite the presence of tensions and contradictions in the worldviews, beliefs and emotions of the interviewees, certain patterns and commonalities appear. Buckingham et al., (1999) argue that identifying discourse is not a scientific process and therefore the:

Multifariousness is given some shape by the play of social interests and the existence of situations that are shared by members of a social group. On the basis of these interests and situations – which are never fully stable – a tendency emerges to 'fix' meanings, and to identify certain topics as central. It is the existence of these processes of fixing and prioritising which allows us to speak of a discourse, even if the fixing of meaning is temporary and the prioritising is contested (p.148).

The in-depth interviews conducted as well as the data gathered from observations were supplemented by a wide-range of human communications, in the form of organizational charts, programme evaluations, impact reports, and promotional reports that I gathered during my stay in the field. I consulted this documentary evidence to crosscheck my impressions from the interviews and observations. For example, I looked at various strategy reports and grant proposals of PYALARA to understand more the kind of language used when describing children's media needs. The data gathered in the field provided an institutional and socio-cultural context for the texts analysed, which will be discussed in the next sub-section.

4.2.2. TEXTS: READING CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

Besides daily face-to-face communication, television is the most ubiquitous source of communication for Arab children. Even though children's consumption of media is not limited to what is specifically produced for them, the analysis of children's media 'provides interesting insights into some of the broader tensions that surround dominant definitions of children' (Buckingham, 2008: 225). Television studies gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, with the emergence of cultural studies, and television began to be seen as an important space for negotiating cultural meaning as well as a site for 'ideological resistance' (Creeber, 2006: 4). David Morley (1992) asserts that in television there is 'no such thing as an "innocent text" – no programme

which is not worthy of serious attention, no programme which can claim to provide only “entertainment” rather than messages about society’ (p. 82). About the British television programme *Nationwide*, Morley argues that while the programme may not be of the same political value as the more serious and controversial *Newsnight*, it might in fact be of more cultural importance as by using ‘human life’ stories the former transmits ‘implicit messages about basic attitudes and social values’ (Ibid: 81). Similarly we can find out more about the ‘base-line’ assumptions about childhood and tensions in culture from children’s entertainment programmes, which at first glance might look trivial as compared to more serious programming (Ibid).

4.2.2.1. SAMPLE

Palestinian children have a number of Arabic-language alternatives to Palestine TV. These programmes while in the Arabic language, offer an array of different dialects, norms and cultural practices that are different from their own local socioeconomic, as well as cultural and linguistic experiences. While Palestinian programmes are created with Palestinian children in mind; some academics (e.g. Kraidy and Khalil, 2008: 340) argue that commercial Arab media tend to focus on children in oil-rich Gulf countries due to their monetary appeal to advertisers. As this study focuses on identity constructions and representations of childhood present in media products Palestinian children are likely to encounter, I chose to analyse one programme locally produced in Palestine, and two programmes produced for a pan-Arab audience, with the aim of comparing the modes of address (Morley, 1992: 84) and constructions of childhood and nationhood present in local and transnational productions, to investigate whether there are common assumptions and idealisations present in Arabic language texts.

The programmes chosen are presented in Table 2 on the next page (*page 83*). All episodes were broadcast during a seven-month time frame (November 2013-June 2014).

Table 2

Programme	<i>Bait Byoot</i>	<i>Anbar</i>	<i>Mansour</i>
Description	A live magazine with studio guests (children) and live phone-ins	A live magazine with expert studio guests (adults) and phone-in competitions	Animation about a young Emirati boy with big dreams
Format	Magazine	Magazine	Animation
Duration	5 episodes x 55 mins (275 mins)	5 episodes x 55 mins (275 mins)	26 episodes x 11 mins (286 mins)
Producer	Palestine Broadcasting Corporation	Jeem TV	Mubadala Communications
Broadcaster	Palestine TV	Jeem TV	Cartoon Network Arabic Abu Dhabi TV
Country	Palestine	Qatar	United Arab Emirates

Bait Byoot is the only locally produced programme currently broadcast in the West Bank and hence the decision to analyse this programme was straightforward. Five episodes, one in each month from February till June 2014 were analysed (28 February, 21 March, 4 April, 16 May, 13 June) to coincide with time spent in the field. Choice was also limited since not all episodes broadcast are available online. (The episodes analysed are available online on the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation website).²⁷ I was present for the filming of the 4 April and 16 May episodes, and while the latter coincided with *Nakba* day (day of catastrophe) commemorations, this was a mere coincidence. In terms of Palestinian screen-content, I will also draw examples from older productions such as *Shara'a Simsim* and *Katakeet* where appropriate. These programmes were not analysed, as, while they are both currently being re-broadcast, they were produced 4 and 7 years ago respectively.

The selection process for the Pan-Arab programmes was slightly more complex, despite the choice being quite limited, due to the dearth of local Arabic-language productions for children. Since the programmes were chosen for comparative purposes, I wanted to select Arabic-language programmes on channels that are popular with Palestinian children. From conversations with locals, both friends and interviewees, I found that Palestinian children are mostly watching US-originated material on MBC3 as well as *Tayoor Al Jannah*, a Jordanian-owned Islamic channel for children. Since the focus of this study is not on religious programming or dubbed content, I turned to Qatar-based Jeem TV, which is also popular with children in the West Bank, has some local productions to choose from and broadcasts in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the

²⁷ <http://www.pbc.ps/atemplate.php?id=9790>

standardised and literary variety of Arabic.²⁸ I selected *Anbar*, one of the longest running magazine programmes, which is Jeem TV's flagship local programme and the only local programme with its own online games.²⁹ At the time of writing (2016), the programme is in its fourth series, with each season containing 210 episodes. Similar to *Bait Byoot*, five episodes were chosen (14 November 2013, 10 December 2013, 5 January 2014, 6 February 2014, 10 March 2014). All episodes are available online on the Jeem television website³⁰ and I was careful to avoid special religious events such as Eid and Ramadan.

At the same time, I selected the first season of *Mansour*, a high-profile animation produced for Abu Dhabi TV, and available to Palestinian children through Cartoon Network Arabic.³¹ It provided the opportunity to analyse a national programme broadcast in another dialect of Arabic (Gulf/Emirati). I was also attracted by the stated goals of the animation to both 'preserve the Emirati way of life' as well as 'preserve the Arabic language, culture and identity' (Al Harmoodi, 2012) as it makes the text highly local as well as regional. As the only animation chosen, I decided to analyse the series in its entirety (26 episodes, 11 minutes each) to get a more holistic understanding of the narrative, which was not necessary for the two magazine programmes. The next section looks at the methods chosen to analyse these three texts, and also gives a brief description of the ways in which children's television has been studied in the past.

4.2.2.2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Children's texts contain important messages about social values and attitudes and are very rich in meaning and cultural value and hence require complex and detailed readings (Stemmers, 2010; Messenger Davies, 2010; Morley, 1992; Hodge and Tripp, 1986). However, unlike other forms of children's media, such as literature, music and film, the creative potential in children's television has been largely ignored (see Messenger Davies, 2010: 147). In the limited analysis of children's texts in Western

²⁸ The use of language was, however, not the decisive factor in choosing texts.

²⁹ Main characters *Anbar* and *Lahloul* feature in adventure game entitled 'Marathon' and a football game related to Jeem TV's football tournament, 'Cup Jeem' The latest game 'Anbar's Adventures' (available on iPlayer and Google Play, not the website) sees both characters touring the Arab world.

³⁰ http://www.jeemtv.net/en/shows/anbar?utm_source=shows_ajax_list_homepage&utm_medium=content-tile&utm_campaign=content-tile

³¹ The first season of *Mansour* was first aired on Abu Dhabi and Sama TV in November 2013, and later purchased by Cartoon Network Arabic and broadcast in 2014. The episodes are all available on YouTube as well as the Cartoon Network Arabic website. <http://www.cartoonnetworkarabic.com/show/mansour/>

scholarship, methods such as semiotics and post-modern theory have been utilized, and Buckingham (2008: 225) notes that some of the most interesting work has been on cartoons and animations, where qualitative, instead of quantitative methods, have been used. For example Hodge and Tripp's (1986) seminal study of children's television was based on deep semiotic analysis of a single twenty-minute episode of *Fangface*.³² While semiotic analysis has been criticised for ignoring the production and reception process (Seiter, 1992: 49), recent developments in the method have moved semiological analysis away from the notion that producers are successful in positioning their audience, or that the message is being sent to an audience that is already positioned.³³

Meanings are relative and undergo continuous change in relation to social and historical changes. Therefore messages are polysemic and always 'capable of producing more than one meaning, or interpretation, and can never be reduced to one "ultimate" or "real" meaning' (Morley, 1992: 83). While there is no one meaning in a certain text (White, 1992: 190), and dominant ideologies can only be 'preferred', production strategies are concerned with effective and clear messages. While not assuming that these strategies are successful, Morley (1992) suggests that when analyzing texts:

[...] We must attend to the way in which the broadcasters, constrained as they are by their desire to communicate 'effectively', are bound to attempt to provide 'direction' or 'closures' within the structure of the message, which attempt to establish one of the several possible readings as the 'preferred or dominant reading' (p.83-84).

To unmask the 'dominant reading' present in texts produced for children, I employed critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Fairclough, et al., 2011; Fairclough, 1993) for this study. As opposed to content analysis, a quantitative technique, where context is not given much importance, textual analysis methods such as critical discourse analysis gives importance to the socio-political context within which the text is located. Critical discourse analysis addresses questions about knowledge/power (Foucault, 1972), either through conducting textual analysis, which looks at the formation of discourse, or by analysing non-textual social practices that produce discourse. This study is interested in

³² Bignell's (2005) and Briggs' (2006) ethnographic studies of *Teletubbies* are important studies of children's television.

³³ For example, David Morley's (1992) analysis of *Nationwide* combined semiotics with audience research on how audiences decoded the text.

how language is creating social reality as well as being created by social reality. Looking at texts as the realization of discourse, discourse analysis provides an avenue to explore the hidden assumptions in texts and explore the relationship between the text, discursive practices and the wider societal structure.

‘Critical discourse analysis is “critical” in the sense that it aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power’ (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002: 63). It is therefore a critique of existing social reality, which begins with the critique of discourse (Fairclough, 2015: 7; Fairclough and Wodak 2007, 258). It focuses on analysing texts to reveal discursive sources of power and the ways in which these sources are maintained, reproduced and challenged within specific socio-political and historic contexts. Following Fairclough’s (2015, 1993) method of analysis, the research analyses structural features of discursive action (power of discourse) as well as agent-driven discursive practices (power in discourse). For the analysis of the three texts, I looked at the following variables as described by Buckingham (2008: 230), which looked at:

[...] How texts address and construct the child viewer – for example, the various ways in which the viewer is spoken to; how the viewer is or is not invited to be involved; the function of children as actors or participants within the programmes; how adult-child relations are presented or enacted [...]

The different ways in which children are addressed and represented is analysed using Fairclough’s (1993: 145) variables on analysing social actors. Questions are asked about the ways in which children are included in the text, for example – are children actors in the process (the ones who are making things happen) or the affective (the ones affected by the process). These choices are significant for analysing the representation of children’s agency, which is a crucial element of the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (James and Prout, 1997) as gleaned from the literature reviewed in *chapter 2*. The analysis also focuses on connotation and non-representational signs as when we ask the question:

‘What is this programme saying?’, we need also to ask a further question: ‘What is it taking for granted (what ‘doesn’t need saying’) within the programme?.’ This brings into the focus the question of what kind of assumptions are made, what kinds of things are *invisible* in the programme, what kinds of questions *cannot* be raised within the framework of the programme (Morley, 1992: 82).

To understand the connotation and implicit meanings, I looked at the ways in which the child audience is constructed and the kind of value assumptions that are being made. I looked at how the viewer is being positioned, gauging how the ‘modes of address’ construct the audience’s relationship with the content as ‘television discourse not only positions the audience, but it also actively constructs viewing positions’ (Morley, 1992: 84). The concept of ‘modes of address’ helps us consider what is the ‘style’ of the programme and how, through presentation and style, the programme is forming a relationship with the child audience (Ibid: 84-85). The representations of nationhood are also analysed to understand the ways in which the three texts construct and position Arab children, in relation to the world around them.

To provide some socio-political context for the fieldwork undertaken, the next section presents some notes and reflections from the field.

4.3. FIELDWORK CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

4.3.1. PLANNING FIELDWORK: NEGOTIATING ENTRY AND ACCESS

To facilitate my research, prior to travelling to the field, I contacted the Media Development Centre (MDC) at Birzeit University, one of the most prestigious universities in Palestine, and PYALARA, a youth-media NGO, based in Ramallah, who kindly offered to provide information and contacts. Not wanting my fieldwork to be structured around an unequal exchange between the organisations that helped facilitate my research and myself, and in order to work in a more ethically conscious way I decided to ‘reciprocate the collective service rendered’ (Carapico, 2006: 430) by Palestinian colleagues, by volunteering at both organisations. This mostly included

drafting documents in English, translating, as well as providing analysis and feedback on some of their projects.

I was based at the MDC for two days a week and spent the rest of the time at PYALARA, observing activities as well as helping out with their projects. The MDC is at the forefront of media development in Palestine, conducting training programmes for students and professionals, as well as producing national media research. In 2014 the Centre prepared the report ‘Assessment of Media Development in Palestine: Based on UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators’ for UNESCO and is currently working on a National media strategy report, which will be delivered to the Palestinian Authority in full in 2016. I chose the centre as a base due to the central role it plays in Palestinian media development, but also due to my interest in a media literacy project that the MDC designed and distributed to schools in the West Bank in 2009. The decision to observe activities at PYALARA was a simple one due to my desire to learn more about *Katakeet*, one of a handful of locally produced programmes for children broadcast in the West Bank; and also more about their youth programming.

Before departing, I also made some scoping phone calls and sent emails to individuals I wished to interview. While I did receive mostly positive responses, I was mostly told to get back in touch when I arrived. I quickly realised that people are more receptive over the phone, and except for a handful of people I contacted (mostly international NGOs and academics), I did not get responses to my emails. Even though I did not organise interviews before my arrival, I felt confident on arrival due to the Media Development Centre and PYALARA’s offer to assist.

Negotiating entry into Palestine itself is quite challenging and raises ethical considerations. Being Algerian helped in terms of language, communication, and building rapport quickly, but was not very helpful when trying to gain entry into Palestine. All entry points into the West Bank are controlled by Israel. Travellers of Arab and Muslim heritage, as well as travellers who have visited Arab countries such as Lebanon or Syria in the past, face interrogation at the point of entry and entry is often delayed or even refused in some cases. The numerous times that I have travelled to the country, whether through Tel Aviv airport or the Allenby Bridge from Jordan, I have

been stopped for interrogation, lasting anywhere between three to eight hours. While a three-month visa is usually stamped at the airport, officials repeatedly question you about the purpose of the visit and if you plan on visiting the West Bank. From my past experience, I was aware that giving out too much information does you no favours and I was acutely aware that admitting that I am conducting social science research in the West Bank will most definitely get me turned away, and hence I would have to come up with an alternative story, as close to the truth as possible.

4.3.2. SUBJECTIVITY AND REFLEXIVITY

I spent 2008 in Palestine, volunteering for a human rights charity, and worked for a Palestinian NGO in London from 2010-2013. I have visited Palestine almost every year since 2008, and have strong emotional connections with the country as well as its people. Palestine has, for me, become a 'home away from home'. My personal experiences in Palestine as an activist and a human rights volunteer have allowed me to see with my own eyes the injustices depicted in the news. My fieldwork in Ramallah was bookended by two acts of violence against young Palestinians. I arrived at Birzeit University in a very tense environment as the media department had recently lost one of its students, Saji Darwish who had been shot dead by the Israeli army, while out on his farm. The Media Development Centre curated a photo exhibition in Saji's honour, which lasted the entirety of the two months I spent in the country (Media Development Centre, 2014), acting as a constant reminder of the fragility of childhood and youth in Palestine. My last week in Ramallah was marked by the fatal shooting of two teenagers who were participating at the annual *Nakba* day (Day of the Catastrophe) protest in Ramallah, which commemorates the displacement of Palestinians due to the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. This case, unlike many others, received international coverage and the images of Nadim Siam Nuwara and Muhammad Abu al-Thahir, two Ramallah schoolboys, became a symbol of Israeli impunity, as video of the boys being shot in the back with live ammunition was caught on a nearby CCTV and published on YouTube by Defence for Children International – Palestine branch (Defence for Children International-Palestine, 2014).

Every child in Palestine is affected by the occupation in one way or the other, and this would come up in every interview and every activity I was involved in. The highly

emotional nature of my trip led to burn out during my fifth week there, as I could not bear to listen to more stories about the conditions that children face in Palestine. Interviews with Defence for Children was the straw that broke the camel's back for me, and I suffered from severe stress when I returned to London, further intensified by the 50-day war on Gaza that broke out in July 2014, taking the lives of more than 2,200 Palestinians, of whom at least 521 were children (Marszal, 2014).³⁴ In these circumstances, I found it difficult to write about children's media, and to look at children beyond the discourse of trauma, which felt more and more relevant with each death and maiming.

While trying to remain objective, I appreciate that rather than denying personal connection, participant observation as a method allows one to explore the ways one's own personal experiences influence the research (Jorgensen, 1989: 27). While maintaining an objective distance, it is important to recognise the centrality of 'personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy' (Clifford, 1986: 13) to the research process. Researchers, as Elizabeth and Robert Fernea (1997) point out, 'generally stay in their regions of interest with some degree of emotional enthusiasm for the one of their choice' (p. 314). Participant observation constitutes a humanistic methodology (Jorgensen, 1989: 7) hence allowing the researcher to be a co-constructor of meaning, rather than just an observer. Therefore, it is important to define the researcher's role and be aware that the meanings constructed are very much informed by the researcher's biography as well as experiences in the field. Exploring my own thoughts and reactions was a good way of understanding the landscape, and hence going beyond purely methodological and theoretical frameworks. Observations are not scientific and dispassionate as all 'truths are inherently partial' (Clifford, 1986: 7), bound by temporality and spatiality as well as the perspective of the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning.

To counter the accusation of bias due to a close identification with the researched, the researcher does, however, need to find enough difference in order to create an emotional and theoretical distance (Weber, 1991). These issues are discussed in the anthology 'Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society' (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988) a collection of articles based on the experience of six western-educated Arab women. In

³⁴ The names, age, gender and location of the child victims were listed in the Telegraph (Marszal, 2014).

particular Suad Joseph (1988: 25-48), Soraya Altorki (1988: 49-67) and Seteney Shami, (1988: 115-138) stressed the importance of creating distance when they conducted anthropological research in the countries of their origins, with communities in Beirut, Jeddah and rural areas of Egypt respectively. The next section will frame the issues of access in the context of the role of the researcher as both an insider and an outsider.

4.3.3. ISSUES OF ACCESS: INTERVIEWER AS INSIDER AND OUTSIDER

In terms of access, being based at a university was invaluable. The Media Development Centre provided me with a computer and desk space, as well as allowing me open access to their library, online journals and academics – all of which was extremely valuable for my research. I was able to attend training sessions and mingle with media professionals, and also watch filming of a BBC Media Action debate show *Aswaat Min Filasteen* (Voices from Palestine) that was filmed at the Centre's newly funded, modern television studios.

While most of the interviews, especially with NGOs, were arranged in advance, some were purely opportunistic and based on chance. In the West Bank, meeting dates and times are not as rigidly adhered to as in the UK, and I was often 'stood-up' for pre-arranged meetings. However, unlike in London where one cannot usually meet or interview someone without arranging a date, knocking on doors often yielded instant interviews. I was able to meet with high-level staff members of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), the Head of Film at the Ministry of Culture as well as the Head of Childhood Affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, to name a few, by simply knocking on their doors. Colleagues at the Birzeit University who had interviewed ministry officials for national reports warned me to expect resistance from the ministries whereby I would be asked to submit all interview questions in advance, and would not be allowed to record interviews. Abuzanouna (2012: 93-94) echoes my Beirzeit University colleagues when discussing the challenges he faced organising an interview with an official at the Ministry of Information in Gaza. He explains that he was questioned about his background, occupation and research purposes, and asked to submit an application requesting to meet the official. While appreciating that the nature of Abuzanouna's (2012) research was far more political than mine as he was looking into issues of diversity and plurality of the media, it is important to note that I did not

struggle to get access and my experience was the polar opposite to what I had initially expected. Being an outsider with no local political affiliations was very beneficial. Out of all the interviews that I conducted in the West Bank, I was asked for proof of my identity or further details about my research only twice.

One can attribute the relatively simple manner in which access was negotiated to the hospitable and accommodating way Palestinian people deal with foreigners. However, the issue of access can also be understood in a wider context of gender and discourses of pan-Arab solidarity. For me, conducting fieldwork in Palestine was a balancing act between the role of an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’. Firstly I would like to address issues of nationality and the role that belonging to an ‘imagined community’ of Arabs played; and then I will go on to discuss the opportunities available to a young female researcher, as opposed to a male counterpart.

For me, answering the question of where I come from is an unwelcome one due to the long-winded nature of the answer that would fully explain my identity. I was born in Bahrain to a Pakistani father and an Algerian mother, of mostly Amazigh heritage. I spent most of my childhood in Pakistan and most of my youth and adulthood in the UK. While my identity is very fluid, and I have oscillated between feeling Pakistani, Algerian, and even African; I have only ever felt Arab during my time in Palestine, and this is primarily because it was the first time that I was ‘perceived’ to be Arab by those around me. Being viewed as an Arab, particularly as an Arab from Algeria, opened many doors for me. As soon as I told people that my mother is Algerian, someone would be quick to remark ‘*Al Jazair! Balad Al Million Shaheed*’ (Algeria! the country of a million martyrs) the term used for modern Algeria, in reference to those who perished at the hands of the French during the war of independence between 1954-1962.³⁵

All interviews began with a discussion about the Algerian struggle against the French occupation and the parallels that can be drawn with Palestine. Such conversations warmed interviewees to me and created an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie. A rather guarded interview with a high-level staff member at the Ministry of Information (MoI) changed drastically when the interviewee learnt about my Algerian heritage. He

³⁵ Benfodil (2014) speaks about a similar experience in Arab countries.

recounted travelling on a passport issued by the Algerian government when *Fatah* was a party in exile. After taking me down memory lane, he called up other contacts to arrange interviews for me. Due to this affinity with Algeria, especially amongst older generations, and a sense of pan-Arab solidarity, I was categorised as a ‘friendly outsider’ (Mansour and Sabry, 2016). I was in the privileged position of being viewed as a friendly Arab, not a western Arab or a Palestinian Arab, hence not implicating me in western interventionist politics nor in the inter-factional politics of Palestine. As an Arabic speaker with knowledge and experience of Palestine, I did not have to bridge the cultural gaps that an ‘outsider’ researcher would have to (see Weber, 1991: 186), and also did not face discrimination based on party politics or familial background that an indigenous or ‘insider’ researcher would face. Being different enough allowed me to ask sensitive questions about the authoritarian rule in the West Bank, coming across as naïve, rather than insulting.

However, not all interviews were simple and I experienced being ‘othered’ at Palestine TV, where I was constructed as a western researcher or an ‘outsider’ coming in to spy on Palestinian television. While gaining permission to observe recordings of *Bait Byoot* on Palestine TV was extremely simple and the young producers and directors were very forthcoming with information, the case was not the same with the executives at the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation.³⁶ Establishment of trust with executives of the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation was extremely difficult as I was unable to convince them that I was conducting useful social science research rather than merely spying on them. Whereas most stakeholders, even members of Palestinian Authority ministries, saw me as ‘one of them’, the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation clearly viewed me as British first and Arab second. Being the recipient of a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), a UK research body, further complicated matters. I had emailed and phoned the Director of Programming months in advance of my travel to Ramallah, but the requests were met with outright suspicion. The nature of the research was questioned, with the conclusion that I ‘wanted to paint Palestinians in a negative light.’ In a context where transparency and secrecy is order of the day, I was unable to arrange a meeting with PBC. I did end up interviewing the Director of

³⁶ This had its own challenges, due to the high level of self-censorship I noticed at Palestine TV due to employees not wanting to criticize the source of their livelihood. Employees fed me a lot of misinformation, which I could not corroborate (further details in chapter 5).

Programming as well as the Head of Directors, but this again was a spontaneous meeting that took place since I was in the building to meet with the presenter of *Bait Byoot*, who walked me to the office of the Director of Programming, and a 45-minute interview ensued. The interviewee used diversion techniques to avoid my questions and respond with PR driven answers, remaining in total control over the interview and this ‘power behind discourse’ (Fairclough, 2015) presented significant practical, conceptual and methodological issues (Marshall and Rossmann, 2010; Delaney, 2007). Of the interviews I conducted, this is the only one that I would categorise as an ‘elite interview’, whereby the interviewee used the power at his disposal to create barriers and hence restrict access (Mikecz, 2012). However, the interviews at the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation helped clarify what other interviewees had told me about the institution and allowed me to re-formulate my methods. For example, the idea of a schedule analysis became laughable (see *chapter 5*). After returning from the field and reflecting on the fluidity of television culture in Palestine, I realized that schedules are almost meaningless and hence the method was quickly abandoned. This is in itself an important research finding.

Except for the experience at the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation, negotiating access and gaining trust was relatively simple. As mentioned earlier, I believe that the status of being a ‘woman’ helped the research process and negotiating entry and access. I was often invited to family dinners and celebrations, and many interviewees tried to maintain contact with me after the interview, mostly checking in on me and asking if I needed any help with my stay and research. While male researchers generally have less access in the private sphere of the home and family (Mansour and Sabry, 2016), I would argue, based on my fieldwork experience, that female researchers also have more access in the public sphere. Gender does play an important role in the acquisition of data (see Altorki and El-Solh, 1988) as my interviewees felt protective, rather than threatened, as they might by a male counterpart. Male interviewees would often refer to me (and also treat me) as *bintna* (our daughter) or *ukhtna* (our sister); and female interviewees (especially the ones closer to my age) tried to foster friendships. I did not feel the vulnerability ascribed to the woman in the field and felt that I enjoyed a relative advantage over male researchers.

An ethical challenge that came with becoming overly trusted by interviewees is the question of how to deal with off-the-record and sensitive information. Since this research is not of an overtly political or sensitive nature, this challenge was not one I faced often. However, I was privy to some information about dealings of international NGOs, which while extremely useful for my study, cannot be used since it is strictly off the record. While this is an open and shut case for me, the more challenging question was in regards to certain observations made, that if published, could potentially be detrimental for the reputation of the corresponding individual or organisation. The ethical obligation to provide a full picture can lead to the betrayal of (unofficially granted) trust. While the integrity of the research is paramount, there has to be a degree of flexibility and judgment on the part of the researcher, and hence the ethical implications of publishing certain findings have been considered carefully.

This section documented an Arab female researcher's experiences conducting research in an Arab country, which is not her country of origin. While the reflections on methodological aspects of fieldwork are specific to the biography of the researcher, the insights in the chapter will be useful to researchers interested in conducting fieldwork in the Arab world. Issues raised about gender and pan-Arab solidarity can help researchers, male as well as non-Arab, position themselves in the field, as well as understand more about issues of trust and access.

4.4. CONCLUSION

The study takes a social constructionist view arguing that 'childhood' is not a fixed universal concept but a social construction and that discourses of childhood are produced at specific moments of history as an effect of power. To uncover competing definitions of Palestinian childhood and the ways in which definitions are negotiated through producers' practices, data collection techniques, such as critical discourse analysis of selected television programmes, and multi-site observations and interviews in the West Bank, have been utilised.

Active participation observation allowed for the gathering of invaluable data, and also provided room for me to reflect on the role my own biography and experiences play in

the construction of meaning. Framed in the context of discourses of gender and pan-Arab solidarity, reflections from the field demonstrate the benefits of applying an opportunistic and flexible method of gathering data. The goal is therefore to build an empirically informed argument, and the conclusions are driven from a reflexive place, as the focus is on the production of meaning and the ways in which it is constructed, negotiated and circulated. While accepting that fieldwork is a deeply unique and personal experience, reflections from the field also provide a useful window into the broader social context within which the text is located.

Table 3 on the following pages (*pages 97-100*) provides a comprehensive list of all interviewees, their job titles and the date and location where the interviews were held.

Table 3

Interview List		
Name	Job title	Date / Location
Abdel Hakim Jamous	Director, Educational Media Department, Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE)	21.04.2014 Ramallah
Abeer Badran	Principal, Saffa Secondary School for Girls	06.04.2014 Tel Al-Saffa
Ahmad Barghouti	Head of Media at Palestine Medical Relief Society (PMRS) and Lecturer at Institute of Modern Media (IMM), Al Quds University	15.04. 2014 Ramallah
Ahmad Qatamesh	Project Manager ‘Science Film Festival’, Goethe Institute-Palestine	30.04. 2014 Ramallah
Anonymous	General Manager, Local channel in Ramallah	13.05.2014 Ramallah
Anonmyous	Education Department of UNRWA	April-May 2014 (Email communications)
Ayed Abu Eqtaish	Accountability Programme Director, DCI-Palestine	22.04.2014 Ramallah
Ayman Ashour	General Manager, GAMA TV	19.05.2014 Nablus
Hania Bitar	Director, PYALARA	03.05.2015 13.05.2014 Ramallah
Haroun Abu Arra	Head of Al Quds Educational TV (AQTV)	15.04.2014 Ramallah
Jebreel Hijjeh	Head of Press and Media, Educational Media Department, MoEHE	21.04.2014 Ramallah
Dr. Kawthar Maghrabi	Director of Childhood and Family, Ministry of Social Affairs	21.04.2014 Ramallah

Kholoud Abdullah	Outreach Co-ordinator at AQTV Previously: Scriptwriter for <i>Shara'a Simsim</i>	15.04.2014 13.05.2014 Ramallah
Lina Bokhari	Director of Film, Ministry of Culture	20.04.2014 Ramallah
Lucy Nusseibeh	Director of IMM, Al Quds University	13.05.2015 Ramallah
Maha Sadr	Director, Early Childhood programme, Welfare Association	29.04.2014 Ramallah
Markus Mörchen	Director of Children's News, ZDF Logo!, Germany	June-October 2014 Email correspondence
Mahmoud Abuhashash	Director of Culture and Arts Programme, Al Qattan Foundation	22.04.2014 Ramallah
Mahmoud Amra	Principal of Friends Secondary School, Ramallah	03.05.2014 Ramallah
Mohammad Barghouti,	Director of Programmes, Palestine TV	17.04.2014 Ramallah
Mohammad Hussein Abu Arqoub	Coordinator of the National Strategic Plan for Palestinian Media, Media Development Centre (MDC), Birzeit University Previously: Lead Researcher, Internews Palestine	16.04.2014 Birzeit
Mohammad Farraj	Director and Producer, <i>Bait Byoot</i>	17.04.2014 18.04.2014 Ramallah
Naela Hedayah	Project Manager, PYALARA	10.04. 2014 Ramallah
Nibal Thawabteh	Director of Media Development Centre (MDC), Birzeit University	09.04.2014 Birzeit

Nimr Adlan	General Director of Press and Media Affairs, Ministry of Information	14.05.2014 Ramallah
Omar Abdelatif	Managing Director, Dragon FX Studios	12.10.2014 Skype Interview
Osama Abed	Senior Engineer, Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology	14.05.2014 Ramallah
Raddi Al-Wanni	Director, Youth Without Borders	13.04.2014 Nablus
Rasmiya Masri	Director, Childhood Cultural Centre	06.04.2014 Nablus
Ruba Masri	PR Officer, Childhood Cultural Centre	06.04.2014 Nablus
Rinad Qubbaj	Director, Tamer Institute for Community Education	30.04.2014 Ramallah
Riyad Diyas	Head of TV Unit, MDC, Birzeit University	09.04.2014 Birzeit
Ruba Mimi	Presenter of <i>Katakeet</i>	24.02.2014 Skype Interview
Said Abu Mualla	Media Studies Lecturer at Jenin University Previously: scriptwriter for <i>Id Lal 'Ashra</i>	Email and phone conversation November 2013
Samer Ajjaj	Defence for Children-Palestine-Nablus branch	10.04.2014 Nablus
Sami Batrawi	Director of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Culture Previously: Director of Children's Libraries, Ministry of Culture	20.04.2014 Ramallah
Samir Masri	Head of Directors, Palestine TV	17.04.2014 Ramallah
Simone von Meyenn	Project Manager, Al Quds Educational Television	27.04.2014 Ramallah

Tala Halawa	Children's Voiceover professional, Ramallah	October-November 2014 Email correspondence
Wala'a Battat	Presenter and script writer, <i>Bait Byoot</i>	17.04.2014 and 18.04.2014 Ramallah
Walid Batrawi	Director of Projects, BBC Media Action, Palestine	16.04.2014 Birzeit
Walid Kurdi	Director of Educational Research and Development, Al Qattan Foundation	22.04.2014 Ramallah
Wathiq Ayyoub	Defence for Children International-Palestine, Ramallah Branch	14.04.2014 Ramallah

Chapter 5: The Politics of Children’s Television in Palestine

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5.1. INTRODUCTION

Based on research undertaken in April and May 2014 in the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Nablus, this chapter provides an analysis of children's television culture in the West Bank³⁷ and reflects on the nature of television production and distribution in an unstable environment. It provides an industry context for the textual analysis by identifying key members of the children's television community (Bryant, 2007) and analysing the ways in which members negotiate differing agendas and conceptions of childhood. The children's television culture in Palestine is analysed from the viewpoint of existing infrastructure and individuals as well as collective initiatives aimed at promoting local production for children. It is grounded in mixed methods – semi-structured interviews; participatory activities at PYALARA, observations at Palestine TV, industry analysis (press reports, regulatory reports) as well as an analysis of human communications in the form of grant proposals, project reports, impact reports, organisational charts and so on (see *chapter 4*). In the absence of documentation (written laws, policy documents etc.) that does not exist in Palestine, the chapter relies heavily on interviews, observations and secondary sources.

Building on *chapter 3* and using Cottle's (2003) three levels of analysis, this chapter looks at the constraints and influences that the Palestinian children's television community has to contend with on the macro, meso and micro-levels, and the impact these factors have on what ends up on the small screen for children in Palestine. The chapter inspects the broader tensions in culture by analysing the social dynamics between local, national and international actors. Moving beyond the texts-audiences-institutions framework that ignores the smaller picture, this chapter will take a bottom up approach to analyse the 'skills, practices and attitudes' (Messenger Davies, 2001: 16) of those who produce cultural texts for children to understand the ways in which the children's television community negotiates a global order of discourse 'characterized by

³⁷ To limit the scope of the study, I focused my research mostly in Ramallah, the centre of political, cultural and economic activity in Palestine (I refrain from using the term de-facto capital as the capital for the Palestinians remains East Jerusalem), as well as Nablus, a city a few miles north of Ramallah. Ramallah is the most mixed and culturally vibrant city in the West Bank, as jobseekers from all around the country have settled there over the last few decades. Moreover, a sizeable foreign population that works for international NGOs call Ramallah their home. NGOs are major job providers in Ramallah and hundreds of small and local NGOs run alongside international NGOs, a lot of whom have moved their offices from East Jerusalem to Ramallah due to restrictions of movement placed on Palestinians from the West Bank (see *chapter 1*).

widespread tensions between increasingly international imported practices and local traditions' (Fairclough, 1992: 9).

Since media products funded by international aid and produced through international collaborations are omnipresent in the West Bank, this chapter will look at the internationalization and politicization of 'local production' and the central role that external actors, such as international NGOs, play in Palestinian children's television culture. As the concept of childhood is widely seen as the result of human meaning making, issues of power are very important. To explore how the politics of the Israel-Palestine conflict are played out, the examples of *Shara'a Simsim*, the Palestinian version of Sesame Street, and PANWAPA, also from the Sesame Workshop, will be used to illustrate the nature of international collaborations and the impact that donor dependency has on the local television community.

5.2. THE PRODUCTION ECOLOGY OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

Palestinian viewers have access to a wide range of local, national, regional and global television channels. Besides the children's slot on state broadcaster Palestine TV, children can watch programmes on global channels (Disney, Cartoon Network Arabic and Nickelodeon), pan-Arab channels for children (MBC 3, Jeem TV, Baraem, SpaceToon), as well as the state broadcasting channels of other Arab countries (e.g. Abu Dhabi TV). Unlike local Palestinian channels, these channels provide content on different platforms, extending beyond just television. Jeem TV, for example, has its own bi-lingual interactive website designed to support the broadcast offering. The website consists of a combination of on-demand and live television programmes and additional online-only content (such as games featuring popular Jeem TV characters). The Palestinian state network (Palestine TV) as well as local private channels' response to the popularity of pan-Arab satellite channels has been to co-opt popular programmes from satellite channels in to their own broadcasting schedules, due to the belief that they cannot compete in the increasingly globalised and multi-platform environment they find themselves in (Tawil-Souri, 2007a: 18-19).

According to Ahmad Qatamesh, Palestinian Project Manager at the Ramallah based Goethe-Institut, the competition from outside has big implications for local programming as he explains in an interview:

Arab media is huge. In Palestine a child can watch Arab TV from Sudan or Egypt or Abu Dhabi or Dubai. This means that the urge to produce children's film in Palestine is always less and less [...] there is of course a huge demand, but the production is already in countries who are rich [...] rich with money and media capabilities to make these films (Qatamesh, 2014).

Qatamesh is not alone in arguing that the ubiquity of pan-Arab television for children reduces the incentive to produce children's programmes in Palestine. Saeed Abu Mualla, a lecturer at Jenin University as well as a script writer for youth programme *Id Lal Ashra* (Hold Your Horses), lamented at an educational media conference organised by the Birzeit University (2010) that local production cannot compete with pan-Arab and Western productions, because local producers do not have access to the technology and creative ideas that make content attractive to Palestinian children, a group he goes on to describe as 'cranky' and looking for 'dazzling, attractive, interesting, dramatic, different and unconventional' content (Abu Mualla, 2010).

Some local players have, however, tried to follow a different path. Since 2010, it has been a dream of the Director of Al Quds Educational TV (AQTV), Haroun Abu Arra, to set up a satellite channel for children that can reach young Palestinians all around the world – in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Israel and the diaspora (Abu Arra, 2014). Al Quds Educational TV is a politically independent, educational television channel that operates under the patronage of the Al Quds University's Institute of Modern Media. It depends on the University for its core funding. In 2010, the team at the Institute of Modern Media put together a strong funding proposal for a children's satellite channel and sent it proactively to a number of stakeholders, including different ministries of the Palestinian Authority as well as international companies and funders like the Sesame Workshop, USAID and the EU.

According to Lucy Nusseibeh, the Director of the Institute of Modern Media, prospective funders loved the idea but the 'practicality [was] overwhelming for them'

(Nusseibeh, 2014) and unfortunately the Institute did not succeed in securing funding. There are other anecdotes and stories of failed attempts to secure funding, including the story relayed to the author by a representative of the Ministry of Information, Nimr Adlan, of a high-profile producer in Bethlehem who attempted to create a specialised channel for children but was unable to secure funds (Adlan, 2014). Therefore, besides the various attempts there is no dedicated channel for Palestinian children. Moreover, generalist channels like state-run Palestine TV and local channels do not have dedicated children's departments or units.

The absence of a children's department has far-reaching effects as 'it is only when you have a dedicated children's department that you will have people thinking of what is appropriate for a five-year-old or an eleven-year-old' (former BBC executive cited in Buckingham et al., 1999: 158). According to Lucy Nusseibeh, Al Quds Educational Television is the only television channel to have had a dedicated children's department. However, in 2002, the decision was taken to temporarily close down the children's department due to funding shortfalls created by events on the ground (Nusseibeh, 2014). In 2002 the Israeli defence forces (IDF) entered and occupied the AQTV television station for nineteen days, destroying television equipment, as well as archives and records (Somiry-Batrawi, 2007: 117). Fourteen years later, AQTV is still reeling from this event and the department remains closed, as employees of AQTV and the Institute of Modern Media believe a big budget is needed to re-open and run the department with proper protocol and sensitivities in place (Abdullah, 2014; Abu Arra, 2014; Nusseibeh, 2014). Since the closure of the department, children's programmes are produced on a project-by-project basis and through the main 'adult' department. Referring to the BBC closing down its 'Children's Department' and moving it to the 'Drama and Entertainment' department in 2000, Maire Messenger Davies (2008a: 92) warns that institutional changes of this kind are 'threatening to the concept of 'children's television' as a distinct category' (Ibid). This concept of 'children's television' is at threat at AQTV, as the commissioning of programming is haphazard and based on the success of individual funding proposals rather than a long-term strategy for children's programming as even Lucy Nusseibeh (2014), the Director of the Institute of Modern Media, admits to a lack of attention on the channel's part to children's programming.

During the time of the research (2013-2015), the main content producers for children in the West Bank were:

1. *Palestine TV* – state-owned television channel and producers of *Bait Byoot*;
2. *Al Quds Educational Television (AQTV)* – not-for-profit local terrestrial channel and producers of first few series of *Shara'a Simsim*;
3. *PYALARA* – local youth media NGO and producers of magazine programme *Katakeet* (chicks) for children between the age of 7 and 13 (produced in 2010). The programme was recorded at AQTV studios and broadcast on Palestine TV.³⁸
4. *Dragon FX* - the newest player in the community – an animation studio in Ramallah, which in 2014 branched into animation for children, producing the hugely popular animation *Hokayman and his Friends*, aimed at a pan-Arab audience and broadcast exclusively on Jeem TV in Ramadan 2014.

Other content producers include local charities, which have produced one-off programmes, such as the Palestine Bible Society, a Christian charity, which produced a children's news programme. The news programme entitled *Akhbar Saghaar* (Small News) was broadcast on *Ma'an* channel in 2012, and is now incorporated as a segment in *Bait Byoot*. The Palestine section of Defence for Children, an international human rights organisation produced a 22-minute animation, in co-operation with UNICEF, entitled *Al Hayat Al Ahla* (The Best Life) that sheds light on the rights of the child and is available on DVD.

Palestinian NGOs like the Al-Qattan Foundation, a not-for-profit development organisation working in the field of culture and education; official and semi-official international institutions, such as UNESCO; and international cultural institutions such as the Goethe-Institut and Prix Jeunesse also play a key role in the children's television community, whether through funding or lobbying for children's content.

³⁸ The NGO was also the local partner of UK-based Ragdoll Productions in their 'What Makes Me Happy' project, a series of short films, each based on the experience of a different child, each living in a challenging environment. The Palestinian episode won the 'Golden Butterfly Award' at the International Festival of Film For Children and Young Adults in Iran in 2007, and the 'Golden Statue Award' at the Rosh International Film Festival in 2008 (Gibbs, no date).

The table below (*Table 4*) identifies the key players within the community as well as the wider production ecology, made up of broadcasters, regulators and financiers that have an impact on local content production and distribution. This table is based on data gathered during the research period (2013-2015) in the West Bank.

Table 4

THE PRODUCTION ECOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S TELEVISION IN THE WEST BANK

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION COMMUNITY

Broadcasters:

Local Terrestrial Channels – AQTV, Gama TV, Watan TV
 National Satellite Channels – Palestine TV (PBC), Ma'an TV
 Pan-Arab Satellite Channels for Children – Jeem TV, MBC3, SpaceToon, Tayoor Al Jannah, Baraem
 Global Channels – Disney, Time Warner (Cartoon Network), Viacom (Nickelodeon)

Content creators:

In-House Producers – AQTV, Palestine TV, Ma'an TV
 Independent producers:
 -Local Media NGOs – PYALARA; Palestine Educational Media Network (PEN)
 -Local Children's Welfare Organisations – DCI-Palestine; Palestine Bible Society
 -Independent Animation Studios – Dragon FX Animations

Distributers:

Josoor Radio and Television Affiliate Network
 Ma'an Network
 PBC

Funders/Partners:

Transnational Foundations – Sesame Workshop (US); Goethe-Institut (Germany); Prix Jeunesse (Germany)
 Government Agencies – USAID, EU, Representative of Japanese Government in Ramallah; Government of the Netherlands
 Intra-Governmental Organisations – UNICEF, UNESCO
 International Funders – Heinrich Boll Foundation (Germany); Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (SKN); Righteous Persons Foundation (US)
 Private companies – Pal Tel

Lobbyists for Children's Culture:

Palestinian Civil Society – Tamer Institute for Community Education, Welfare Association, Al Qattan Foundation
 Government – National Plan of Action for Children

PART OF THE WIDER ECOLOGY:

Content Regulators

Ministry of Information, Palestinian Authority
 Palestine Media Watch (PMW)
 Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) TV Project
 USAID

As noted in *chapter 3*, besides the lack of laws to protect the local broadcasting sector, there is also no positive regulation to promote local programming, children's or general content. Ministries of the Palestinian Authority do not provide any funding to local channels and there are limited resources or incentives for channels to produce or distribute local content. Channels are mostly funded through advertising and short-term project funding from international NGOs.

The social dynamics between the various Ministries of the Palestinian Authority is interesting as according to interviewees at government organisations there is constant blame shifting between the different Ministries, which ends up with no one taking responsibility. Ahmad Samhan, PR Officer of the Palestine Government Media Centre, places the blame at the door of the Ministry of Information, who he believes should be responsible for promoting local content for children. The Government Media Centre is part of the office of the Prime Minister, and while a separate entity from the Ministry of Information, is housed in the same building. Samhan explains that the Ministry of Information's 'Children's Media Centre' is failing in its duty to Palestinian children and that while the department runs numerous campaigns publicizing the plight of Palestinian children, it does not create or fund any content for Palestinian children (Samhan, 2014).

According to an interview source close to the Ministry of Culture (Anonymous, 2014), the Ministry of Culture is apparently also prone to blame-shifting as it often accuses the private sector of a lack of funding strategy. This complaint is corroborated by the Ministry of Culture's '2014-2016 Strategic Report for the Culture and Heritage Sector' which states that the cultural sector is suffering due to the private and non-governmental sector's lack of interest in the 'development of the cultural aspect of community development' (Ministry of Culture, 2013: 12). While the Palestinian Ministry of Culture has access to large funds, this report does not implicate the Ministry or any other government organisations in the failure to provide cultural initiatives for children, which it asserts as its main objective (Ibid). The Minister of Culture, Dr. Anwar Abu Eisheh, claims that the success of the *Palestinian Cultural Fund*, worth US \$ 4.5 million, set up by the Ministry of Culture with the support of the Government of Norway, should be evaluated by assessing its impact on children and students (Ibid:

28).³⁹ However, despite these official claims and the size of the funds available, local organisations and artists do not view the Ministry of Culture as a major player. According to Mahmoud Abuhashash, the Director of the Cultural and Art Programme at the Al Qattan Foundation, the largest cultural organisation in Palestine, the Ministry of Culture merely pays lip service to culture for children (Abuhashash, 2014). He explains that despite access to large grants, the Ministry does an inadequate job of advertising the availability of these funds to local producers. He explains his exasperation at the Ministry for not advertising a landmark co-production deal, which the Al Qattan Foundation helped broker with the British Film Institute in 2010 (British Film Institute, 2010). While it is impossible to verify this grievance, another interviewee, a Palestinian filmmaker (Anonymous, 2014) confirms that the Ministry of Culture did not advertise this co-production deal, or for that matter any funds available to local producers. In the absence of any tangible information from the Ministry of Culture with regards to whether these funds have been advertised, it is challenging to corroborate claims of these interviewees, who felt very strongly about the limited role that the Ministry of Culture plays in the children's cultural sector.

While the productivity of the Ministry of Culture is disputed, all interviewees agreed that in contrast to the occupation and politics, children's culture is considered to be marginal by media stakeholders in Palestine. According to some interviewees (e.g. Diyas, 2014; Samhan, 2014; Thawabteh, 2014) the Israeli occupation provides a ready-made and convenient excuse for ignoring children's media. Ahmad Samhan, PR Officer of the Government Media Centre laments that since Palestine is regarded as a 'special situation', the coverage of news and politics is seen as a patriotic duty and hence other genres are marginalised (Samhan, 2014). There is a popular Arab idiom that Riyadh Diyas (2014), filmmaker and Head of the TV Unit at the Birzeit University used in an interview to explain Palestinian media – 'there is no sound louder than the sound of the battle'. Children's programmes get sidelined in favour of the political project as Executive Producer of *Shara'a Simsim*, Daoud Kuttab eloquently explains that the problem is 'that for so long we've been focusing on resistance and we gave up on other things like culture, education and tolerance' (as cited in Reuters, 2009). Explaining this mentality, Lina Bokhari, Director of Film at the Ministry of Culture argues that

³⁹ Originally set up in 2010 for a 3-year period. In November 2013, the fund was renewed by Norway with an additional US\$ 2 million (Representative Office of Norway to the Palestinian Authority, 2013).

entertainment is often seen as low culture and not worthy of funding by Palestinians themselves. She suggests that this is a regional issue as culture is considered a leisure pursuit in the Arab world and not viewed as an inherent right or a tool of empowerment (Bokhari, 2014).

This section described the political and economic climate in the West Bank, reflecting on the macro and meso-level factors such as the lack of regulation and commitment which has led to the marginalisation of children's cultural needs, in a context where the political project is always at the forefront of debates. The next sections will further reflect on the children's television community (listed in *table 5*) to explain the scheduling, commissioning and distribution process. The following sections demonstrate the importance of micro-level understanding of interactions between the children's television community and the wider ecology.

5.3. TELEVISION CULTURE IN THE WEST BANK

As discussed in *chapter 3*, unless one works in an executive position at a media institution, it is very challenging to research the meso-level of institution decision-making (see Sakr and Steemers, 2015), and learn more about important conversations and decisions around commissioning, distributing and scheduling. At the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation this area is kept strictly behind closed doors, and there is not only high levels of secrecy but also contradictions in information revealed. While non-executive employees are very forthcoming and ready to help with information, there is a certain level of self-censorship as people are conscious not to criticize the source of their livelihood. While local channels such as Al Quds Educational Television and Gama TV were more forthcoming with information, it became quickly clear that children's content production and distribution takes place in a fluid environment, where rules and regulations are unwritten and subject to constant negotiation, corroborating Sienkiewicz's (2013) research into local production in the West Bank.

The next two sections analyse the fluidity of the children's television culture by looking at issues around scheduling, commissioning and distributing of children's programmes.

The analysis presented in the following sections is based on interviews as well as participant observation with Palestine TV and PYALRA.

5.3.1. SCHEDULING

TV consists of an ordering of time, and a hierarchization of material, which is normally referred to as the 'schedule'. Scheduling is perhaps the hidden determinant by which all television production and consumption is ultimately constructed. This is the underlying organisation of television into blocks of clock time, providing the bulk of broadcast TV with a number of rhythms (Ellis, 2006: 18).

In Palestine this rhythm is lacking. While schedule analysis is impeded by the lack of access to broadcasting schedules (Al Quds Educational Television was the only channel to share schedules), the conversations around broadcasting schedules that took place with Palestine TV and two other local terrestrial channels are illuminating in terms of understanding more about the scheduling strategy. While state broadcaster Palestine TV has, for the most part, a fixed budget and employs permanent staff, local stations are family-owned and run mostly like family-businesses. Staff members are hired on a short-term basis, when project funding is available (Ashour, 2014; Thawabteh, 2014; Batrawi, 2001). Ayman Ashour (2014), the General Manager at Gama TV, a local channel in Nablus, is honest about the lack of fixed schedules. Ashour explains that he draws up flexible schedules each evening and time slots are easily shifted. Observations at the studio (19 May 2014, Nablus) confirmed just how flexible the schedules are as at one of my meetings with Gama TV, I happened to be in their studios at 2pm, which I was told is 'children's hour' (8am for young children; and 2pm for older children). However, on the television screen at the studio, instead of a programme for children, I found a live screening of a Palestine vs. Kyrgyzstan football game. When questioned, the General Manager explained that children's hour that day was cancelled because of this football game (Ashour, 2014).

While the General Manager of Gama TV was forthcoming with information, the Director of Programming at Palestine TV was very guarded about broadcasting schedules, first promising to share schedules, and then proceeding to give contradictory reasons of why schedules could not be shared. My assumption that Palestine TV uses short-term and flexible rather than fixed schedules was corroborated by an interviewee

at another local station who suggested that Palestine TV, like local stations does not use schedules at all (Anonymous, 2014).

However, regardless of whether schedules exist or not, there is evidence to prove that the scheduling process at Palestine TV is very fluid. For example, the presenter of *Katakeet*, Ruba Mimi explains that her programme was not aired weekly as agreed due to Palestine TV mid-way taking the decision to broadcast episodes of *Shara'a Simsim*. Mimi explains that the programme was not aired in a continuous fashion as latter episodes of *Katakeet* were broadcast much later than agreed causing upset amongst participating children, who had expected to see themselves on television (Mimi, 2014). Besides the shifting of schedules, as noted earlier, there is also a routine marginalisation of non-political programmes in broadcast schedules. Qasem Mansour, the previous Director of Programming of Palestine TV, gives the example of PBC suspending all programming (on Palestine TV as well as Voice of Palestine radio) to broadcast minute-by-minute news of the Hamas take-over of Gaza in 2008, to explain that political events are always the priority in Palestinian broadcasting (Media Development Centre, 2009). Similarly, during the *Al Aqsa Intifada*, local terrestrial stations suspended programming for four months (between October 2000-February 2001) to devote all screen time to rolling news of the uprising (Batrawi, 2001).

Although a comprehensive analysis of the scheduling process is complicated due to issues of access, it is evident from observations and interviews that there are no clear fixed hours or slots and no set rules or conventions about scheduling, genres, or catering for specific audiences. The concept of 'slots' and the positioning of programmes in television schedules are not rigid and last-minute changes in schedules are a regular occurrence as children's programmes get moved if something is deemed to be of more importance.

The commissioning and distributing process, which will be discussed in the next section, is also fluid and has far reaching repercussions on the viability of locally produced content. Since for content to be available to all Palestinians, local producers are constrained to the framework of the state-run Palestine Broadcasting Corporation,

the next section focuses mainly on the unspoken rules and regulations at Palestine TV, and the domino effect this creates on the local production ecology.

5.3.2. COMMISSIONING AND DISTRIBUTING

Unlike in a functioning production ecology where broadcasters and content managers depend on ‘creative entities to take on the risk of creative development’ and smaller producers ‘depend on broadcasters and larger producer-distributors to part-fund their projects through presales, commissions, co-funding and licensing deals’ (Steeimers, 2010: 105), the situation in the West Bank is not quite the same. Local content producers (such as PYALARA and Al Quds Educational TV) consider the state broadcaster – Palestine TV – to be a difficult but necessary partner. While *Ma’an Network*, a distribution network set up in 2002 by ten local terrestrial channels⁴⁰ as an attempt to overcome media fragmentation (Seinkiewicz, 2013: 360; Sakr, 2007: 25), is an important tool for extending the reach of local programming, reach is still limited as the network does not cover the whole of the West Bank or reach Palestinians in Gaza and Israel, hence limiting the impact of local productions. For a programme to be viewed by all Palestinians it has to be broadcast on satellite television and hence local producers have few options but to depend on the state-owned Palestine TV. According to local producers, Palestine TV takes advantage of this position and instead of commissioning and purchasing local production, the channel attempts to sell its airspace i.e. ‘place’ productions on its airwaves for money (Abu Arra, 2014; Bitar, 2014; von Meyenn, 2014). However, there is no official rule that states this policy, nor does the official budget include money obtained from selling airspace (see Ali, 2013 for breakdown of budget). Moreover, as will be explained later, the money charged is arbitrary and always negotiable.⁴¹ Local producers, who already have the burden of raising funds from international sources, have to generate extra funding to pay for satellite airtime. This is a major constraint on independent producers and local channels who may have good ideas but no budget to buy airtime as Haroun Abu Arra, Director of Al Quds Educational Television explains that the cost of satellite airtime is only budgeted for specific programmes (Abu Arra, 2014). Moreover, maintaining

⁴⁰ Ma’an network consists of: Al-Amal TV (Hebron), Amwaj TV (Ramallah), Bethlehem TV, Farah TV (Jenin), Nablus TV, Qalqilia TV, Al-Quds Educational TV (Ramallah), Al-Salam TV (Tulkarem), and Wattan TV (Ramallah). (Ma’an Network, 2013)

⁴¹ While other research on foreign funded projects (for example Sienkewitz, 2013) shows that the PBC does at times purchase local programmes, my fieldwork shows that is not the case in children’s programming.

relationships with the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation has proven to be tricky and the bureaucratic and erratic commissioning process is also putting off producers. The Director of PYALARA, Hania Bitar explains that:

Palestine TV does not understand the importance of networking and partnerships with civil society. They treat NGOs like the private sector [...] Instead of co-operating, they want money. They think NGOs are very rich and have unlimited resources. Even if you show them the budget and contracts, they don't believe it. They don't understand how government and civil society should complement each other (Bitar, 2014).

She complains that Palestine TV prefers to import programmes rather than invest in local production. She uses the example of the magazine programme *Katakeet*, which she considers to have a long shelf life, to explain that the rare times Palestine TV acquires local programmes, it does not repeat them, further limiting the impact of local content (Bitar, 2014). In fact, the process of getting *Katakeet* on air was a challenging one for PYALARA. Funded by *Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland* (SKN), a Dutch NGO, the project budget was a modest US \$20,000 for 16 episodes. According to the Director of PYALARA (Bitar, 2014) as well as the Presenter of *Katakeet* (Mimi, 2014), Palestine TV originally asked PYALARA for US \$1000 each episode to record and air *Katakeet*. After a lot of negotiations and wrangling between PYALARA and Palestine TV, an agreement was reached to pay a fraction of the initial quote to air the programme (Bitar, 2014; Mimi, 2014). However, the studio time was unaffordable for PYALARA and the programme was recorded at the studio of AQTV, a channel with whom PYALARA had co-produced the EU-funded *Id Lal 'Ashara* (Hold Your Horses), a programme about tolerance and non-violence aimed at Palestinian youth (defined as ages 13-17).

A Palestinian producer (Anonymous, 2014) further explains that the real problem is that Palestine TV does not have a set commissioning process and decisions are based on the whims of whosoever happens to be Director of the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation. The source explains that it is impossible to understand the institutional decision-making process at Palestine TV as there is a:

Revolutionary thinking at Palestine TV where the priorities are set by the Heads of the ‘Revolution’ [...] the ‘Political Forum’. The priority is always the politics, the *politics*, the mobilisation of the people, how to focus on the messages of the main political party, which is *Fatah*, how to defend the main party [...] so this mentality I think still prevails until [today] and so it is a one-man-show (Anonymous, 2014).

Palestine Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), the state broadcaster which runs the state television channel Palestine TV and the Voice of Palestine radio station, is considered by some Palestinian media specialists such as Batrawi (2001, 2014) to be a mouthpiece of the government, rather than a public service broadcaster that operates in the public interest. Historically speaking, stalwarts of *Fatah* have dominated PBC since its inception in July 1994. Yasser Arafat, the first President of the Palestinian Authority and chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) installed loyalists to run the PBC and other newly formed government institutions and ministries (Abuzanouna, 2012: 75). The case of *Mataab* (Speedbump), the first Palestinian soap opera,⁴² backs up the anonymised television executive’s argument that decision-making is focused around individuals loyal to the Palestinian Authority, rather than systems or policy. *Mataab*, a ten-episode series produced by the Goethe-Institut in corporation with Al Quds Educational Television, follows the lives of staff at a fictitious non-governmental organisation in Ramallah (a nod to the abundance of NGOs in Ramallah) and was to air on Palestine TV in Ramadan 2008. While the programme was commissioned by the then Director of Programming of Palestine TV and previews were aired, the show was dropped with no official explanation.⁴³ The reasons behind cancellation were vague, and executive staff at Palestine TV and PBC gave contradicting statements to the media.⁴⁴ George Khleifi, the Director of the series, and also one of the producers of *Shara’a Simsim*, explains the real reason for cancellation was that some elements of the establishment perceived the programme to be painting a negative image of the Palestinian people. He explains that after the screening of the first episode, which took place at a cinema in Ramallah, an offended viewer wrote a letter of complaint that reached ‘someone higher than the Director of Programming’ (Khleifi cited in Karmi,

⁴² Funded by the EU (European Commission’s Delegation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

⁴³ The show was picked up by Watan TV, a local channel. It was also streamed online.

⁴⁴ Yahia Barakat, the then director of Programming, who had initially agreed to the showing said it was all a misunderstanding, and he had explained to the Goethe-Institut from the very beginning that since Ramadan programmes need to be 30 days long, this programme might not be suitable as it only has 10 episodes (Karmi, 2008). However, Mahmoud Dahdoudi, another PBC Director contradicts this and says that the programme ‘[...] is being checked. If this is suitable to our traditions and society then very well, we will present it’ (McCarthy, 2008).

2008). The abrupt cancellation of *Mataab* demonstrates not only the fluid nature of the commissioning and distributing process at Palestine TV, but also, as cautioned by the Goethe-Institut in a sternly worded press release ‘has given the Palestinian public and the international media reason to suspect a lack of transparency’ (McCarthy, 2008). Both cases of *Mataab* and *Katakeet* demonstrate that personal relationships and bargaining play a more important role than any hard and fast rules, making the commissioning and purchasing policy at Palestine TV unclear. What is clear though, is that there is a lack of transparency and accountability and that the Director of Programming commissioning a programme is not always enough to see it aired. Disapproval from a single high-ranking individual can negate months and months of work.

Since the commissioning process is so unclear and complicated, it is not surprising that Ramallah-based Dragon FX, the creators of *Hokayman and his Friends*,⁴⁵ a locally-produced animation broadcast on Jeem TV in 2014, chose to pitch their animation idea to pan-Arab channels rather than Palestine TV. The newest member of the children’s television community, Dragon FX specialises in advertising and visual effects, and has recently branched out into children’s animations. Omar Abdelatif, the Founder and Director of Dragon FX explains that his company only collaborates with PBC for simple and low budget projects, such as advertising campaigns, due to the common knowledge that PBC does not have big budgets (Abdelatif, 2014). For this reason *Hokayman and his Friends*, a high quality 3D animation, was created for a wider pan-Arab child audience, rather than a Palestinian one.

Signifying the ability and willingness to produce high quality local animation, the production of *Hokayman and his Friends* is a significant development in the children’s television community. Al Jazeera Children’s Channel’s faith in this programme is demonstrated by its decision to broadcast the animation during Ramadan, the most important month of the broadcasting year, during which Arab channels air their best programmes. The holy month of Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. It is a time of heightened family and communal gatherings and 30-day long programmes, strategically timed to coincide with

⁴⁵ A series of 30 episodes starring a wise turtle who takes his friends; a tiger, giraffe, and monkey on a daily journey to introduce them to new cities.

the breaking of the fast, attract the highest viewers and ratings of the year. Advertisers greatly increase their spending budgets to match the increased audience numbers (Kraidy and Khalil, 2009: 121).⁴⁶ *Hokayman and his Friends* was purchased by Jeem TV on an exclusive contract and is hence the property of the Qatari channel (Abdelatif, 2014).

The cases of *Hokayman and Friends*, *Katakeet* and *Mataab* demonstrate that while there is a willingness to produce local content, competing agendas and priorities have created a real lack of partnerships and trust between the government station, local channels and local NGOs. Technological constraints have led to an environment where local producers have no option but to work within the framework of the national state-owned satellite channel where institutional culture is intertwined with ideological orientations of individuals, rather than any rules and regulations. This has far-reaching implications for children's television as seen in the case of *Katakeet*, which was purchased but not broadcast continuously or repeated (Bitar, 2014; Mimi, 2014); and *Hokayman and his Friends*, which was not even considered for the local market. Therefore programmes for children remain limited in Palestine and apart from *Bait Byoot*; *Shara'a Simsim* the Palestinian version of Sesame Street remains the most popular and readily available 'local' children's programme in the West Bank.

The next section looks at the internationalisation of local production for children, using *Shara'a Simsim* and PANWAPA, another initiative from the Sesame Workshop, as case studies to analyse the tensions between local and international concepts of childhood and how this affects the content Palestinian children are likely to encounter. Before going into the case studies, a brief context will be provided on the history of international aid in Palestine.

⁴⁶ Ramadan TV is a phenomenon unique to the Muslim world. During Ramadan, there is a focus on Arabic-language programmes, rather than Western programmes. Each channel drafts in the most popular writers and directors to produce big-budget series about Arab/Islamic history and traditions, starring the most famous actors.

5.4. INTERNATIONAL FUNDING AND CO-PRODUCTIONS

As discussed in *chapter 3*, in the last ten years programming in Palestine has become more and more transnational, as in the absence of government subsidy and commercial interest producers look to international funding, from both NGOs and foreign governments. International funding plays a very important role in the history and politics of children's television in Palestine, as most initiatives for children have been funded by international aid. The first local production for children, *Shara'a Simsim*, was mostly funded by USAID, the US government's overseas funding agency. Dutch NGO, *Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland* (SKN) funded the production of *Katakeet* and the German Goethe-Institut brought the popular Science Film Festival for children to Palestine in 2013. In addition to these initiatives, local channels often screen short clips about children's health and wellbeing called 'spots', funded by intergovernmental organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO as well as USAID.

These initiatives, however, have been few and far between, and according to Walid Batrawi (2014), Director of BBC Media Action and the author of one of the first academic accounts of post-Oslo media development, the focus of the donor community has mainly been on training, and funding has often been short-term and conditional. Palestinians receive aid as two different entitlements. One is based on the Fourth Geneva Convention, which affirms the rights of civilians to request aid in times of armed conflict; and the second is based on Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986), which states that:

The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (United Nations General Assembly, 1986).

In terms of media development, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1993 (as a consequence of the Oslo Accords) was a landmark for Palestinian broadcasting. Before the Oslo Accords, Israel had controlled all aspects of Palestinian life, including the media (Batrawi, 2001). As a result of the Accords and based on the Right to Development principle, international and transnational organisations such as USAID and the EU made significant funds available to develop Palestinian media. In

the 1990s, with a vibrant media scene slowly developing, the donor community turned its attention to training media practitioners. The first training session called the 'Television Workshop', led by the Jerusalem Film Institute, took place in Jerusalem in 1993, and led to the creation of a group of journalists and reporters who became the heart and soul of the Palestinian broadcasting landscape. Other important training sessions included the MED Media Project, funded by the EU, that took place between 1993 and 1996 and trained journalists from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel.⁴⁷ Training included seminars and workshops as well as media exchange programmes (Batrawi, 2014). Batrawi attended a fair few of these training sessions. He suggests that the training was based on short-term goals and due to the presence of many different players (US, EU, DFID etc.), the training was disjointed, ad-hoc and lacking strategy. He explains in an interview that:

To an extent where we were like fed up by training [...] we were overwhelmed by training. And I think the problem with these trainings, in the beginning it was great, but later on there was a need to develop more approaches towards training. And not only short-term training, 5 days, 6 days, a month, 2 months maximum, when you take people out of the country or bring the trainer here, which was very expensive [...] you work in Holland for example, where there is different legislation, a different atmosphere and so on. I mean to a certain extent there was a need for this kind of exchange but also you need to work in your own environment and use different approaches [...] there was a point when all this training met the needs of the markets but (then) there were trainings that were just, I wouldn't say just for the sake of training, but it was planned by the donor, assuming that it would work (Batrawi, 2014).

During my fieldwork, three separate interviewees (names have been anonymised)⁴⁸ aimed criticism at a US \$6 million USAID-funded project entitled 'Enhancing Palestinian Independent Media Program In West Bank' that lasted from 2010-2013 (USAID, 2010). The aim of the grant was to train community organisations and media outlets in investigative journalism; strengthen independent, local television and radio networks; and develop a media lab/ research institution (Ibid). This project led to the formation of the *Josoor Radio and Television Affiliate Network*, an 11-station (6 TV; 5 radio station) distribution network through which programmes are shared by local

⁴⁷ The EU has recently funded another MED Media Project (2014-2018) entitled 'Towards media sector reform in the Southern Mediterranean region' to develop public service oriented media in 9 Mediterranean countries, including Palestine (2014-2018) (Batrawi, 2014).

⁴⁸ A television producer, an NGO employee and a university academic.

channels. This network consists of *AQTV* and *Watan TV*, both in Ramallah; *Gama TV* in Nablus; *Al Fajr Jedid* in Tulkarem; *Jenin TV* in Jenin; *Nawar Al Khalil* in Hebron and this network is not entirely dissimilar to the *Ma'an Network*, through which programmes were shared as far back as 2002, and which includes the two Ramallah channels that are part of the new network (Ma'an Network, 2013). So in some ways, this new network is merely re-inventing the wheel.

One of the institutional recipients of this USAID grant, who wishes to remain anonymous, claims that most of the funds were wasted on training and the 'end result was nil'. The interviewee added that while the media lab has been established, it is neither equipped nor functional (Anonymous, 2014). The creation of a long-term, sustainable infrastructure where local production could flourish has been pushed aside in favour of media training, often endless and without any purpose – which this particular interviewee felt treated people like children and hence greatly undermined the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, that calls for real and equal partnership between donors and recipients (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005).

According to Batrawi (2014) while the training equipped people with skills, there was nowhere to demonstrate their skills and there was a general sense amongst Palestinian media practitioners that they had outgrown Palestinian media. Their capacity was built to such an extent that they could not see themselves functioning within Palestinian media – the national broadcaster or local, private media. Their skills were high and there was a demand in the lucrative Pan-Arab market for their skills. As a consequence many Palestinian media practitioners left the country in search of better employment opportunities. In fact most of the Palestinian media practitioners 'now working for *Al Jazeera* or *Al Arabiya* or the BBC [Arabic] [...] all basically started from local media [...] which is fine, but what happens to local media, that is the question' (Batrawi, 2014). The situation is similar in the children's television sector where skills are developed but the infrastructure is not strengthened, creating a brain drain. While some members of the children's television community have left Palestine altogether (such as

various producers of *Shara'a Simsim*),⁴⁹ others who are based locally (such as Dragon FX studio) are looking for external distribution networks and choosing to create content for pan-Arab consumption, rather than specifically for the Palestinian child audience.

Moreover, heavy reliance on international NGOs for funding has led to small-scale and short-term projects, based on one-sided partnerships that do not always take into account local needs and views, explains a Palestinian participant of an NGO-funded training workshop (Anonymous, 2014). A case in point is the 2010/11 undergraduate course 'Informal Children's Education through Media' run by the Institute of Modern Media. Convened and taught by the Harvard Graduate School of Education through video link. Offered to the Institute of Modern Media by the Sesame Workshop, the focus of the course was on formative research. The book 'G is for Growing: Thirty Years of Research on Children and Sesame Street' (Fisch and Truglio, 2001) was used as the core text book, and guest lectures were given by Palestinian Sesame veterans Cairo Arafat and George Khlefi. Since the course was taught in English at a media department where the language of instruction is Arabic, only 10 students signed up for the course and despite the Institute of Modern Media viewing the course as extremely beneficial in a society where 'informal learning endeavours are minimal' (Nusseibeh, 2011), it was not repeated in subsequent years because of the language barrier.

The German Goethe-Institut is also an important player in children's screen-culture in Palestine, having introduced several initiatives for children, such as the annual 'Science Film Festival' in 2013. The Goethe-Institut's two main objectives in Palestine are to bring German culture to Palestine, and to promote exchange between Palestine and Germany (Qatamesh, 2014). The Institute organises training sessions for local children's producers in association with the Prix Jeunesse Foundation, an organisation that amongst other things also holds training sessions in the developing world with the aim of 'improve[ing] the quality of TV worldwide for young people by deepening understanding and promoting communication among nations' (UNICEF, no date). The Prix Jeunesse Foundation has held two such training sessions in Palestine over the last 4 years alone. In 2012, a 3-day training workshop on children's news and documentaries was organised by Prix Jeunesse and the Goethe-Institut, in partnership with the Institute

⁴⁹ During the time of the research Daoud Kuttab, the Producer; George Khlefi, the Project Producer; and Ayman Baradawil, the Animation Producer were all based elsewhere.

of Modern Media. The trainer, Director of the German children's news programme '*ZDF Logo!*', Markus Mörchen, re-iterates issues around excessive training in an email:

Most of the participants already had other children's TV workshops and were real experts in that field. They had a clear view about what children know and what children don't know. In their films (which we watched together in the workshop) they tried to cover everyday problems of children in Palestine. The films they showed me had mostly good quality and had a good children's perspective – films with and for children and not about children like in many other countries [...] most of the participants had the strong wish to produce good quality children's program in Palestine. And I think they have the strength and the expertise to work on it. The question is: Do they really have the possibility to do it? Are there enough bosses who really support them? Is there enough money to spend on those programs? And will they really have the chance to work in this field or do they have to go to adult programs, because they will find better chances there? (Mörchen, 2014)

What can be gleaned from Mörchen's comments is that not only is there a strong commitment among the Palestinian television community, but there is also an awareness of child-centered television and the importance of incorporating children's voices into programming produced for them. However, despite the presence of these skills, the community that shapes children's television culture is fractured and important players that 'create, distribute, defend and support children's television' (Bryant, 2007: 36) are missing. Moreover, external constraints from the Israeli occupation exacerbate the difficulties faced by Palestinian producers. In a very candid article for 'Watchwords' newsletter entitled 'Workshop on Children's News Meets Harsh Realities in Palestine', Mörchen explains that on his arrival he found that the Israeli army had attacked the workshop venue site – AQTV studios – and he was not sure if the workshop would even take place. He concludes his report by stating that 'despite our three days of inspiring discussions and interesting points of views, the highly-motivated and talented Palestinians came away knowing how limited they are in their possibilities, with little financial scope and even less freedom' (Mörchen, 2012).

The lack of freedom and the smallness of the Palestinian producer (Sienkiewicz, 2013) in the face of these external constraints will be discussed in the next section. The cases of *Shara Simsim* and PANWAPA, two Sesame Workshop projects will be used to shed light on the political nature of aid and the tensions between local (Arab/Palestinian) and international (Israeli/Western) definitions of childhood.

5.4.1. THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL AID – THE CASES OF *SHARA’A SIMSIM* AND PANWAPA

While international funding has led to short-term and temporary projects, the Palestinian version of Sesame Street promised, at least initially, something different and long lasting. As the most long-running, popular and controversial children’s programme, *Shara’a Simsim* is a very important part of the history and politics of children’s television in Palestine. While it did succeed in creating elements of a Palestinian children’s television community (of producers, script-writers, voice over artists, and actors), it was also highly problematic due to the nature of its funding as well as the partnership with Israeli producers, causing tremors in the children’s television ecology felt till this day.

In its 15 years of existence (1996-2011), the Palestinian production only ever completed five seasons and was forced to take many unscheduled and long breaks because of funding shortfalls. In 2008, when the production ran out of funds, USAID saved the day by granting US \$1.6 million over three-years (2008-2011) ‘covering nearly all the program’s costs, from writing through post-production’ (Omer, 2012).⁵⁰ While Sesame Street is a lucrative international franchise,⁵¹ in Palestine, driven by US government funding, the aims of the programme have been more political, than educational or commercial. This was crystallised by the almost overnight cancellation of the project in 2011 due to funding shortfalls caused by US congress cancelling all funds to the Palestinian state as a punitive response to the Palestinian Authority seeking full membership of the United Nations (Ibid).⁵² A deeper examination of the history of *Shara’a Simsim* in Palestine can help provide context for the implications of international funding in a fractured media landscape and also explain the ways in which the politics of childhood are played out in international co-productions.

As explained in *chapter 3*, the programme debuted in 1996 as a joint venture between Palestinians and Israelis entitled *Rehov Sum Sum/Shara’a Simsim* (Hebrew and Arabic

⁵⁰ Smaller donors included the Righteous Person’s Foundation, a Jewish American foundation that granted US \$ 500,000 between 2007 and 2010 (RFP archives), the Government of the Netherlands, as well as Palestinian Telecommunications Group (PalTel) (Omer, 2012).

⁵¹ By 2005 it has been broadcast in more than 120 countries, and co-produced with local partners in another 25 (Steemers, 2016).

⁵² US Congress cancelled \$130 million of aid to the state of Palestine. USAID was scheduled to provide *Shara’a Simsim* a grant of \$1.6 million to last until 2014 (Pearse, 2012).

titles). Completing 70 episodes, this series consisted of studio segments and animations produced by the Palestinian team in colloquial Arabic, along with 'cross-over' segments taped in both Hebrew and Arabic, where Israeli Muppets would visit the Palestinian street (Selig, 1998). The Palestinian Authority had resisted the programme from the very beginning and the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation gave the proposal a 'cool reception', as supporting the programme would be seen as a political misstep in the Arab world. The newly formed PBC was negotiating funding from Arab countries in the Gulf, who would not see partnership with Israelis in a favourable light (Lampel and Honig, 2006: 252). Due to the lack of support, the joint-production was not renewed for a second season as Sesame Workshop admitted defeat and explained that 'based on reflections that promoting friendship between Muppet characters and humans from the warring nations was too much to ask, the current series keeps the characters confined to individual separate co-productions, with different Muppets for each nation/entity' (Sesame Workshop, no date). Moreover, referring to himself as a 'naïve American', Josh Selig, the Resident Producer of the joint venture, in a candid article for the *New York Times* chronicles how both the Palestinian and the Israeli production teams thought the project to be a:

Naïve idea, which in the Middle East is another way of saying an American idea. It's true that the atmosphere under the new Israeli Government wasn't exactly conducive to such a 'We Are the World' project, but the show's groundwork had been laid years earlier and most people felt that 'Sesame Street's' brand of Muppet love was needed now more than ever (Selig, 1998).

The Palestinian Authority did not agree with this version of love between Israeli and Palestinian muppets and hence the first series was not broadcast on Palestine TV, limiting the viewership within Palestine. The reach of the Sesame Street educational outreach programme was also limited as the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education rejected distribution in government schools and the programme was only distributed to United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools (in the West Bank and Gaza).⁵³ The Sesame project had included two rounds of an integrated outreach programme designed and carried out by the Institute of Modern Media. This programme included activity books, posters, storybooks and a calendar to

⁵³ United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the near East (UNRWA) is the body responsible for the welfare of Palestinian refugees.

accompany the series. Sesame Workshop stipulated that each of the five curriculum goals of *Shara'a Simsim* had to be represented equally in the activity books. One of the curriculum goals of the project was promoting 'mutual respect', due to Sesame Workshop's desire to alleviate the 'profound political tension in the region' (Cole et al., 2000: 159). Therefore the activity book contained material on 'cross-border' friendship, including an image of Israeli and Palestinian muppets having breakfast together (Nusseibeh, 2014).

While for the Sesame Workshop this image depicted the stated goal of creating 'mutual tolerance', according to Jibreel Hijjeh (2014), Educational Media Director at the Palestinian Ministry of Education, the image represented 'normalisation' of the occupation. He explains in an interview that the joint-production was dangerous for Palestinian children, as it attempted to re-brand the Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories as a 'tourist company' rather than as an occupying force (Hijjeh, 2014).⁵⁴ He underlines this point by explaining that the Israeli occupation is a big part of Palestinian children's lives and by removing any reference to the military occupation, the programme is doing a disservice to Palestinian children as it is not representing their lives.

While Israeli content was not part of the next four series,⁵⁵ and *Shara'a Simsim* was broadcast on Palestine TV and re-runs are still broadcast on the state satellite and local terrestrial channels, the first series tarnished the reputation of the project to a great extent. Abdulhakeem Jamous, another representative of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, explains that in the latter series while the producers might have used Palestinian imagery and symbolism, as pride in country and culture was an important goal of the programme, the curriculum and educational values were in fact closer to American conceptions of nationhood than Palestinian ones. He explains that:

⁵⁴ While the Palestinian production team produced their own animation in Arabic, as noted earlier there were some 'cross-over' segments with the Israeli programme, which included characters from the Israeli street visiting the Palestinian muppets (Haneen, a monster and Karim, a rooster) on their street.

⁵⁵ The second series was a co-production with Jordan entitled *Hikayat Simsim*, premiering in 2003. The following three series were solely Palestinian, co-produced by local partners Al Quds' University's Institute of Modern Media and later by the PEN Educational Network (Nusseibeh, 2014).

When we teach our children, we want to teach them love for people, love for goodness [...] and to live in peace with neighbours but also we have to teach them to end the occupation [...] and to love their country and know their history – Arab and Islamic too (Jamous, 2014).

The representatives of the Palestinian Ministry of Education felt that the project failed in its primary goal – which according to Executive Producer Daoud Kuttab (2016) was instilling a sense of pride in country and culture – as ignoring the occupation of Palestine is tantamount to ignoring Palestinian values. While for the local producers of *Shara'a Simsim*, the project constituted an unparalleled opportunity to produce tailored content specifically for Palestinian children (Kuttab, 2016), the representatives of the Ministry of Education view it as socialising Palestinian children into believing that living under occupation is 'normal', and even encouraging them to befriend their 'occupier' (Hijjeh, 2014, Jamous, 2014). While this was not the aim of the local producers, it is important to note that while Palestinian scriptwriters write the scripts, they are sent to New York to be vetted and approved.

The criticism of what Jamous and Hijjeh perceive as cultural imperialism is emotive and their rejection of the project is significant. Another project from the Sesame Workshop, in which the US definitions of childhood conflicted politically and culturally with local conceptions of childhood and the political settlement in the region is the PANWAPA initiative (Nusseibeh, 2014). The project is an online educational game encompassing the fictitious PANWAPA Island, where children can enter and play games. The project included an accompanying CD, which contained stories of 5 different children from the countries it was to be distributed in (Palestine, Egypt, China, Mexico and the US). However, the Palestinian story was removed from the CD after the project was not launched in Palestine due to local distributors disagreeing with the values of the project. According to one of the distributors, an NGO in Ramallah, the project was offered to multiple distributors but rejected by all (Anonymous, 2014).

PANWAPA is a collaboration between Merrill Lynch Foundation and Sesame Workshop aimed at creating global awareness amongst 4-7 year olds through promoting respect for similarities and differences, encouraging community participation and understanding of economic disparity (Cole and Lee, 2009). One of the targeted outcomes of the project is 'children's ability to name their own country, find their country on a globe, and name other countries' (Ibid: 9). Therefore, to log on to the game

and enter the PANWAPA Island, the first step is to ‘find your country on the map.’ The only option for Palestinian children would be to enter either ‘Jordan’ or ‘Israel’, both of which, given the historical and political context, are not appropriate to the citizenship building goal that the Sesame Workshop was aiming for. An interviewee who participated in one of the test workshops explains in an interview that children left the room crying when they could not find their country on the map (Anonymous, 2014). Another local distributor explains that the Sesame Workshop refused their request to include Palestine on the map (Anonymous, 2014). Another concern regarding the project was the story on the CD, which showed a young Palestinian girl from Haifa, a city in Israel, singing and writing in Hebrew, the Israeli national language. As concerns mounted, none of the organisations approached by the Sesame Workshop accepted to distribute the project.

For local distributors, rather than re-enforcing national identity, the project was seen as rejecting Palestinian identity. Due to the fear of offending Israel and its US backers, Sesame Workshop undermined the ‘citizenship building’ goal that the project was attempting to promote (Anonymous, 2014). The case of PANWAPA demonstrates that researching and analysing projects that do not get launched or broadcast is as important as looking at texts, such as *Shara’a Simsim*, that do end up making it onto the screen, as these projects can tell us a lot about the ways different conceptions of childhood are negotiated, maintained and circulated. At best, the role of the Sesame project in Palestine was perceived by the local television community as naïve and culturally insensitive, and at worst, it was perceived as insidious and pushing a certain political agenda.

As seen above, members of the local community perceived the Sesame version of childhood to be based on American values and goals for the political settlement in the region, which sat uneasily next to local values, which revere the national struggle against the Israeli occupation. This section looked at the restrictions that international aid places on local production; the next section will look at the repercussions local producers have faced when locally produced content has conflicted with US and Israeli definitions of Palestinian nationhood.

5.4.2. LOCAL DECISIONS, INTERNATIONAL DECISION-MAKERS

There is a growing discourse in Palestinian civil society that international aid is hindering development and some Palestinian NGOs are turning their backs on US funding.⁵⁶ The ubiquitous ‘USAID’ banner on schools, bridges, parks and other such funded developments has come to be seen as humiliating by a large section of the Palestinian community and a source of many in-jokes within the NGO community in Ramallah.⁵⁷ While local channels like Al Quds Educational TV continue to accept US money, albeit through gritted teeth, NGOs like PYALARA are rejecting what they consider to be the ‘soft power’ influence (Sienkiewicz, 2010: 356) and ‘chequebook diplomacy’ (Lasensky, 2005: 41) that comes with American funds.

The US state department’s stipulation that local partners sign the Anti-Terrorism Certificate (ATC) came up in numerous conversations. In order to sign the ATC, local NGOs must screen all their employees and beneficiaries of funds, to certify they are not affiliated with any US government-listed terrorist group (Joplin, 2004). A 2006 review of this vetting process published by the International Centre for Not-for-Profit-Law (ICNL) demonstrates that not just in Palestine, but NGOs across the globe are worried about signing the certification because it is thought that individuals can be falsely identified as ‘associated with terrorists because the government watch lists are riddled with error’ (Eremus, 2007). Separate from this, the US state department has additional proscriptions for Palestinian partners, which the local community find awkward and unnecessary. For example, interviewees explain that local partners are not allowed to work with children who attend schools named after ‘martyrs’ (men or women who lost their lives in the struggle against the Israeli occupation), or even with activists from *Bi’ilin*, a town renowned for its peaceful demonstrations against the Wall (featured in the Oscar-nominated film *5 Broken Cameras*) (Abu Arra, 2014; Hedayah, 2014; von Meyenn, 2014). With many Palestinian schools named after martyrs, a blanket ban on students, who did not choose the name of their school, comes across as excessive and vindictive to Naela Hedayah, project manager at PYALARA. She explains that

⁵⁶ Despite initiatives to bolster the private sector as an alternative to donor dependence, the private sector remains weak creating a culture of dependency in Palestine. Major campaigns to bolster the private sector have included the Portland Trust’s (2013) paper ‘Beyond Aid: A Palestinian Private Sector Initiative for Investment, Growth and Employment’, which presents a private-sector-led plan to replace aid and foster economic development. Another initiative with growing momentum is ‘Trade Not Aid’, (Saleh and Nafi, 2005) a campaign to help find new markets for Palestinian products.

⁵⁷ An employee at a television station tells me that ‘we joke that even newborn babies come with USAID branding.’

PYALARA does not seek or accept USAID funding as US funds are political and alienate a whole section of the Palestinian community (Hamadan, 2014).

Yet civil society organisations have also often lost donor money and significant partnerships due to the highly emotive and sensitive nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By monitoring Palestinian media content, and reporting evidence of perceived anti-Israeli sentiment to the international community, Israeli media watchdog groups play an important role by making ‘local Palestinian media decisions a global issue’ (Sienkiewicz, 2013: 28). The lobbying activities of Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), an Israeli watchdog group, and the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), a US-based organisation, have led to dire consequences for local media organisations, ranging from the cancellation of funding to the outright banning of entire channels.

The Palestinian Media Watch website (www.palwatch.org) has a wealth of information on children’s programmes in Palestine. Ruba Mimi, the presenter of *Katakeet*, jokes that if one wants to know anything about children’s programming in Palestine, one should look at the PMW website as the organisation seem to know more about PYALARA activities than PYALARA itself (Mimi, 2014). In fact, Palestinian Media Watch, because it includes the word ‘Palestinian’ in its title is often mistaken as a Palestinian NGO, rather than as an Israeli organisation. PMW picked up on a broadcast of children’s educational show *Katakeet*, in which the presenter Ruba Mimi used the map of historic Palestine (pre-1948 borders) in the ‘Explore Your Country’ section of the programme. Pointing to different cities on the map, she referred to historic Palestine, in what is now Israel as ‘Palestine’. Palestinian maps routinely omit Israel from the map, and Israeli maps vice versa omit Palestine. Both nations distribute ‘uncanny mirror maps [...] virtually the same map, depicting a sliver-shaped land between River Jordan and the Mediterranean, two overlapping homelands in one territory’ (Wallach, 2011: 358). However, for Palestinian producers, unlike their Israeli counterparts, this ‘banal nationalism’ (Ibid: 359)⁵⁸ has international repercussions. PYALARA staff members (Mimi, 2014; Hedayah, 2014) recount that the flag incident led to all their donors receiving letters from PMW declaring that the funders were ‘funding terrorism’ by donating to PYALARA. The fall out was momentous as UNICEF cancelled its long-

⁵⁸ Israeli academic Yair Wallach argues that these maps should be read as ‘empty-signifiers of multiple meanings, rather than as territorial ambitions to “wipe each other off the map”’ (2011: 358).

term strategic partnership; something the organisation was already considering because of an earlier incident Palestinian Media Watch had alerted it to (Mimi, 2014; Hedayah, 2014).

Palestinian Media Watch was among the first to raise the alarm about the now notorious children's television programme *Rouad Al Ghad* (Tomorrow's Pioneers), which airs on the Hamas-funded Al Aqsa TV channel.⁵⁹ The character *Farfour* designed to look like Micky Mouse seemingly incites children into martyrdom by talking about war and the consequences of Zionist and American hegemony (CBS News, 2009). Described as 'martyrdom programming', the content caused global controversy because it appeared to advocate violence against both Jews and the West. Similarly PMW also raised the alarm regarding an episode of the Al Aqsa TV programme 'First Class'. Airing in 2008 the programme showed a Palestinian child stabbing a puppet of the then President of the USA, George W. Bush, as revenge for all the people he has allegedly killed around the Muslim world (Palestine Media Watch, no date). Based on the American watchdog group MEMRI's briefings to the French authorities from 2008 onwards, the Al Aqsa channel was banned from French satellite, Eutelsat (MEMRI, 2010). PMW and MEMRI have been very successful in raising global attention about children's martyrdom programming. While the existence of such a genre is problematic, the discourse around such programming is too narrow as it is 'set squarely on *contents* and only on the contents of such media products' (Warshel, 2009). Both PMW and MEMRI frame this genre as the norm, rather than the exception, completely ignoring Israeli researcher Warshel's (2012) audience study that concludes that Palestinian children are watching Tom and Jerry, and not *Rouad Al Ghad* (Warshel, 2012).

The microscope that Palestinian producers are under is clear from both the example of the martyrdom programming, but also from the example of the consequences of the sacralisation of the Israel/Palestine map. This section shows that local decisions have significant international repercussions, as in order to secure and retain much needed donor aid, producers have to negotiate international (US and Israeli) conceptions of

⁵⁹ The US-based MEMRI which monitors Arab, Iranian and Turkish media, schoolbooks and religious sermons and translates them into English and other western European languages, has an entire page on its website dedicated to Hamas-run Al-Aqsa TV (www.memritv.org/content).

nationhood and childhood, which often conflict with their own dreams and desires for the future of Palestinian children and the nation.

5.5. CONCLUSION

The picture painted in this chapter is not a neat account of the children's television ecology, it is rather a presentation of a 'persistent field of tension in which ideas about childhood intersect with cultural, economic, political and technological change; and in which questions of culture and institutional culture are intertwined with the capacities, professional culture and ideological orientations of individuals' (Buckingham et al., 1999: 40). It is argued in this chapter that the fractured and unstable media scene in Palestine has led to the marginalisation, internationalisation and politicisation of media products for children.

This chapter mapped out the key members in the children's television community and argued that it is individuals and not systems that define the broadcasting landscape, which functions in a tight-knit community, where personal and professional relationships often intersect, and it is relations between the community and the wider ecology that defines what is produced for children. In Palestine, a children's television community (Bryant, 2007) does exist, but players are missing, causing a disruption to the process of content production, as there is not much that focuses on long-term development. Moreover, competition between different Ministries of the Palestinian Authority as well as an environment of mistrust between the state television network and civil society, has fractured distribution networks and even something as simple as acquiring slots is hindered. International donors have mainly focused on media training projects and short-term productions, which are of limited help due to 'lack of structures, systems and state support to provide any continuity' (Steemers, 2016: 129).

Players such as toy companies and advertisers are absent from the Palestinian ecology; replaced instead by politically motivated media monitoring groups and international funders, making the ecology a highly politicised and internationalised, rather than commercialised, one. Using examples of internationally-funded projects, this chapter

painted a picture of a television community that is not only lacking key players, but is also ‘occupied’ by external players, often with limited sensitivities for local culture and politics. To underline the longstanding internationalisation and politicisation of children’s television production in Palestine, this chapter used the examples of *Shara’a Simsim* and PANWAPA, as well as the role played by Israeli and US media watchdog groups to reveal the unequal power relations present in international partnerships and the unfortunate cultural costs to the Palestinian television ecology.

The next chapter will analyse societal discourses on media and childhood to understand more about the dominant definitions of childhood that circulate amongst the Palestinian children’s television community.

Chapter 6: Palestinian Children's Content: In Theory and Practice

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6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter maps out constructions of childhood as reflected in debates about children's media provision in Palestine. It identifies key issues affecting children's media, through an analysis of the changing discourses of childhood in Palestinian society and the ways in which these discourses are articulated in academic and public debates as well as in strategies for children's screen media. Society's concept of childhood as a life stage characterised by immaturity and dependency is shaped by different rules, customs and traditions including beliefs, religious and otherwise that affect children's lives. This in turn affects children's relationship not only with society and its institutions, but also with the media.

In Palestine, due to anxieties about the changing nature of childhood, childhood is a site of constant worry and contention. Academic and public debates about contemporary childhood in Palestine implicate the media in several different ways. Taking cultural and political factors into account, this chapter will glean information gathered through interviews and observations with the 'children's television community' as well as published and unpublished documents and reports to understand the changing perceptions of childhood and the impact that these social conventions have on local production for children.

Linking the function of children's television and the importance of indigenous content to the politics of childhood, this chapter looks at claims that local production is the best option for children, even though children vote with their remotes and often choose foreign content. Using examples of screen-based initiatives, this chapter focuses on those issues that connect conceptualisations of childhood and children with the dual nature of regulation, namely: 'negative' regulation against harmful effects and 'positive' regulation in favour of outcomes that promote quality content (D'Arma and Steemers, 2010: 115). Negative forms of regulation are concerned primarily with moral issues, whereas more 'positive' forms address questions of quality and diversity (Buckingham, et al., 1999). The chapter is organised around four themes, which encapsulate the data gathered from fieldwork in 2014: positive and negative regulation; children's needs

versus children's wants; and the two interconnected themes of children as (universal) consumers, and children as citizens.

6.2. SOCIETAL DISCOURSES ON CHILDREN'S TELEVISION

6.2.1. LOST CHILDHOODS AND THE OCCUPATION

As the 'politics of childhood' often has more to do with adult anxieties than children's own concerns (Jenks, 1996), discourses on children's media rarely encompass what children have to say about the media. Therefore, discourses surrounding children's television usually centre on adults' concerns for children as they are positioned as a source of adult anxieties. In Palestine, a pervasive claim that children are victims is connected to adult emotions as children are romanticized as innocent and framed as 'investments for the future'. The 'special status' attributed to childhood has led to what Zelizer (1985: 21) has called the 'sacralisation' of childhood as they come to be seen as objects invested with sentimental value. In the official discourse of government organisations as well as civil society, the figure of the Palestinian child has an increasingly romantic and symbolic role. For example the Palestinian Authority's 2010 report to the UN regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states, 'Children are the heart of Palestine' (Awad, 2010: 3). Moreover, as noted in *chapter 1* national narratives link the idea of a 'lost childhood' to the notion of a 'lost homeland' (Viterbo, 2012: 27) hence further romanticising childhood. The anxieties and hopes surrounding children ('the heart of Palestine') are both spatial and temporal in nature. The fear that children are forced to mature before their time and are being placed in childhood-denying spaces (war zones) has led to the omnipresence of the 'lost childhood' discourse in Palestinian society.

The responses of interviewees in the West Bank mirror arguments that appear in most academic studies of childhood in Palestine, most of which rely heavily on western-centric psychological studies of childhood, which includes the trauma discourse. There is a narrow view of Palestinian childhood as an innocent and carefree zone that has been violated by the Israeli occupation. In fact, as Christensen (1999) argues, there is an

affinity between the concept of ‘victim’ and ‘child’ as both are ‘paradigmatic concepts of passivity and innocence’ (p. 39-40). Viewed as the ‘ideal victims’ (Greer, 2007:22), children are portrayed as ‘vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion’ (Ibid). The influence of the Western Romantic concept of childhood is widespread among Palestinian opinion leaders as children are defined as innocent and passive, and who can only survive and develop if protected by adults, who are always defined as responsible and active.

For example, international co-productions like the pre-school programme *Shara’a Simsim*, described in *chapter 5*, focus heavily on working with children from a very young age. Lucy Nusseibeh, Director of the Institute of Modern Media, and one of the co-producers of *Shara’a Simsim*, echoes the Sesame Street mantra that instilling positive values in children should start at an early age. She warns:

Because if you do not start there, it is much harder later on. You know if what you are doing is pushing children in a certain direction, through songs (Islamic) or attitudes, then you are actually building barriers and building conflict [...] you are setting the stage for future conflict. Whereas if what you are trying to do is build at least recognition that people are more like yourself, [that these are] people that you can talk with and interact with, then you are building a basis for peaceful interaction later on (Nusseibeh, 2014).

As a consequence of these notions of childhood passivity, other players within local NGOs worry that the space of childhood is becoming too greatly controlled by adults. According to Radi Al Wannani, the Director of Youth Without Borders, a Nablus-based NGO, childhood in Palestine is being ‘held hostage’ by parents because of their concerns and fears for the safety of their children due to the risks arising from the Israeli occupation (Al Wannani, 2014). He explains that children in the West Bank have restricted independent mobility as parents grant their children limited freedom to play or travel unaccompanied by adults. According to some media specialists like Ahmad Barghouti, Head of Media at the Palestine Medical Relief Society (PMRS) and Lecturer at the Al Quds University’s Institute of Modern Media, the idea that children need protection from their society projects the older generation’s (parents) own perceptions and fears linked to memories of the two *Intifadas*, which marked their childhoods. Memories of the *Intifadas* and the desire to shield their children from experiencing the

same brutality is part of this protective outlook, and also shapes Palestinian attitudes to the media (Barghouti, 2014).

This paternalism implicates the media on two levels. Firstly, the media, foreign as well as local media are charged by members of the Palestinian children's television community with invading the already 'corrupted' space of childhood and reinforcing the victimisation of children. And secondly the media, particularly local production, are seen as a means to provide children an alternative view of the world and re-connect them with their heritage. While there is a strong discourse that argues that local production is more valuable than foreign imports, what exactly makes local production valuable is a question seldom answered or even asked (D'Arma and Steemers, 2011: 14). This issue will be tackled in the following section.

6.2.2. NEGATIVE REGULATION AND REACTIVE INITIATIVES

A dominant theme in public and academic debates about the relationship between children and the media in Palestine centres on the damaging effects of foreign media, mostly Western (American) but more recently encompassing pan-Arab Islamic satellite channels for children such as the Jordanian *Tayoor Al-Janna* (Birds of Paradise) which is very popular with Palestinian children (as seen from YouTube hits⁶⁰ as well as interview analysis). Buckingham et al. (1999) argue that this type of paternalism has 'both a moral and a cultural dimension' (p. 154). According to some players within the Palestinian children's television community, like Hania Bitar, the Director of PYALARA, and Nibal Thawabteh, Director of the Media Development Centre at the Birzeit University, Palestinian children are a vulnerable audience that are in constant need of protection – not only from foreign programmes, but also from negative values and messages that are absorbed due to living under a military occupation. They both explain their unease with the programming available on western channels as well as pan-Arab channels for children (Bitar, 2014; Thawabteh, 2014). Speaking about Palestinian children's viewing habits, Thawabteh explains:

⁶⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXz4RpYsdzo>

I believe it is very important what kind of programmes they [children] are watching. I am not satisfied, I am not happy, I am worried about the quality of programmes which are produced on Arab channels and the Palestinian children get it. For example on MBC3 we have terrible programmes. It is very far away from our culture, our spirit and it is not helpful for our children to be good citizens in the future. It is all about digital kids, all about fighting, about wars (Thawabteh, 2014).

Haroun Abu Arra, Director of Al Quds Educational Television (AQTV), adds that he does not allow his own children to watch Saudi-owned MBC3 or Cartoon Network as he thinks the channels broadcast violent and aggressive content, which ‘gives children nightmares at night’ (Abu Arra, 2014). The discourse is closely linked to the ‘media effects’ discourse, which is omnipresent in Arab studies of children. The idea that foreign programmes have a negative impact on young impressionable viewers and need to be counteracted with home-grown productions is a well-rehearsed theme in Palestine. This argument is present in government as well as civil society reports on children’s culture and was echoed by countless interviewees. Organisations such as the Institute of Modern Media, the producers of *Shara’a Simsim*, and PYALARA, the makers of *Katakeet*, stress the need for positive local programming to teach children local values (without always clearly defining these) to counteract the ‘damaging’ content available on satellite channels. For example, Hania Bitar, the creator and producer of *Katakeet*, a magazine programme for 7-13 year olds, explains that the programme was created as a response to what she perceives as the dual threat from both Islamic satellite channels as well as western programmes for children. She says that certain kind of Islamists are very aware of the power of television, which has led to a mushrooming of religious satellite channels for children, such as the aforementioned *Tayoor Al Janna*. While she believes that some of the programmes are ‘really excellent [...] the way they compose their songs, the children they use, the messages they convey’, she also believes that ‘again sometimes there are extreme messages [...] we don’t want to put our children in such contexts.’ Bitar is an advocate for a secular Palestine, but believes that western programming is also unsuitable for a Palestinian child audience as Palestinian children live in a religious (mainly Islamic) environment where what they see on their television screens does not match the reality of their lives. For this reason Bitar asserts the:

Context has to produce its own programming [...] like a person like myself, I believe in liberalism and secularism but again I can't shoot it from above. It has to come in a mild process, if you shoot from above you will have a contradictory and contrasting reception [...] So people can go into more extreme, rather than being open-minded and accepting. And so on. So this is why people have to craft these things in a thoughtful manner (Bitar, 2014).

She further adds that Palestinian children need television programming that is sensitive to the local context, challenges and people because in a culture where Islam is prominent, it is risky to expose Palestinian children to what is considered anti-Islamic by the local population. It is important to note that while the term Islamic and Palestinian are not synonymous, there are significant overlaps. As the birthplace of Christianity, Palestine has a strong Christian heritage, especially in cities like Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah, where Christian events such as Easter parades and Christmas celebrations are an integral part of the annual calendar. However, due to changing demographics and the gradual emigration of the Christian population, in 2015, the population accounts for less than 2.5 % of the West Bank (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2012). Bitar, herself a Palestinian Christian, uses the example of girls in bikinis on Disney and Nickelodeon to explain that it is confusing to children to show them this image of girlhood on television, and then to go on to tell them that what they are seeing is *haram* (forbidden in Islam) (Bitar, 2014).

While Bitar (2014) has a more nuanced view as she calls for local Palestinian production to counter both pan-Arab (Islamic) and western messaging, the official Palestinian discourse places the blame at the door of global media products. The Ministry of Culture of the Palestinian Authority, for example, fears the 'spread of globalisation culture among Palestinian children and youth' (Ministry of Culture, 2013: 22), calling it a real challenge and obstacle to their goal of 'protecting cultural heritage in order to unify cultural identity and promote a sense of belonging' (Ibid: 23). This discourse to protect local culture from the insidiousness of global youth culture is also evident in the Palestinian national educational curriculum. In a Year 6 textbook for the module 'National Education', there is a chapter entitled 'Imitation and Innovation' (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2000/2001: 79-80) which states that 'negative imitation is the blind imitation of extraneous ways of behaviour that do not comply with our authentic Arab culture, customs and traditions such as imitation of

foreigners' mode of dressing, their eating, their daily way of life, all of which contradict our values and traditions' (Nordbruch, 2002: 5). Appealing to safeguard an un-defined 'authentic' Arab culture in the face of foreign influences, a task linked to this chapter invites children to look at various pictures of youth in Palestine as well as in the West and answer questions such as: '(lets) recall some negative phenomena which our youths copied from other youths of other societies?' and 'what is your opinion about negative imitations of the West within our Palestinian society?' (Ibid: p.54-5).

As mentioned in *chapter 3*, there is a strong argument in the Arab world that globalised youth culture stands in stark contradiction to Arab-Muslim identity, a notion that is defined as linear and unchanging. The textbook is warning children against imitating what they see on their television sets due to the perceived threat of western culture invading the Palestinian (mainly Arab-Islamic) way of life. Secularism and individualism portrayed in European and American programmes is seen as dangerous to most in a society for whom religion and family still play a very a pivotal role (Abu Arra, 2014). The disdain and fear of such values are best summarised by Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential Muslim writers who wrote that:

If free sexual relationships and illegitimate children become the basis of a society; and if the relationship between man and woman is based on lust, passion and impulse, and the division of work is not based on family responsibility and natural gifts...then such a civilization [...] cannot be considered civilized, no matter how much progress it makes in history or science (Qutb, 1964: 182).

Beyond this fear of a depraved, soulless and inferior Western culture invading the Islamic way of life, in the West Bank there is also an existential fear of the spread of Western culture leading to the disappearance of centuries old Palestinian culture and traditions. This anxiety over national extinction is present in official discourse on education, culture and the media. For example, the 'First Palestinian Curriculum Plan' formulated by the Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre states that:

Never has the identity of a people been so exposed to the dangers of being vanquished or demolished, as has that of the Palestinians. The preservation of their identity from absolute dissolution remains the basic indication of the existence of this people and a guarantee for its survival at the present and in the future (Palestinian Curriculum Development Centre, 1998: 7)

6.2.3. POSITIVE REGULATION AND PRO-ACTIVE INITIATIVES

If culture is an existential element of survival, then the role of local production is not only to counteract identity issues and the invasion of foreign values espoused by foreign media – Western and Pan-Arab alike – but also to bear the responsibility of preserving the existence of the Palestinian people itself. This discourse for local production is hence situated within the Palestinian national project, as in Palestine all local socializing agents – such as family, educational systems, media, religious institutions – exert their influence around the need to re-assert cultural identity (Hart, 2000). Children’s programming and the discourses surrounding it need to be understood in the unique context of Palestinian society today, where issues of occupation and loss, love for the land, return to the homeland, ‘us’ and ‘them’ are central in children’s everyday lives. Just as in Israel where locally produced children’s television programmes take ‘pride in emphasising national identity by highlighting holidays, traditions, historical sites, the Hebrew language, national heroes, the longing for peace, and the like’ (Lemish, 2002: 129), the Palestinian discourse embraces a pro-active call to emphasise Palestinian heritage.

Representatives of various ministries of the Palestinian Authority echo arguments made by World Summits on Media for Children that children need television programmes to teach them about their heritage, and that they are entitled to content which reflect their lives. For example Clause 2 of the ‘Children’s Television Charter’, which was agreed in 1995 by the World Summit on Media for Children asserts that ‘Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their languages, and their life experiences through television programmes which affirm their sense of community and place’ (Children’s Television Charter, 1995). Moreover, in Section C of Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), State Parties are called to ensure that ‘the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for [...] his or her own cultural identity, language and values’ (United Nations, 1989).

For Abdel Hakim Jamous, representative of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, local programmes should help ‘teach children to love their country, to know their history – Arab and Islamic too.’ He explains:

I mean we have to have national programmes that talk about the Palestinian context. And it should have special national things [...] like programmes in Pakistan, specialises on Pakistani things [...] if there is an American programme, it will discuss American issues [...] it is from our rights that a programme in Palestine should make children aware about their education and identity...this is our demand [...] and we hope it happens [...] (Jamous, 2014).

Producers and presenters of both *Bait Byoot* and *Katakeet* echo these ideas that local production should aim to present Palestinian culture, symbols and identity. For these reasons both programmes have segments that seek to teach children about their country. The segment 'Explore your Country' in *Katakeet* was inspired by 'kids express(ing) their ignorance of Palestinian geography and inability to reach certain areas due to the Israeli checkpoints that hinder their movement' (PYALARA, 2009). In *Bait Byoot* the segment *Bladi Ana* (My Country) consists of presenter Wala'a Battat visiting different cities and preparing a short reportage. Due to the limits on freedom of movement, children are unable to imagine children from other Palestinian cities and hence such programmes provide them with the opportunity to overcome physical borders and create unity. This is an important message that Battat often relays on her programme *Bait Byoot* when Palestinian children from Israel visit the studio.⁶¹ In an interview, Battat (2014) explains that local production can help connect children to the 'land' as well as to each other. Such initiatives are linked to positive regulation that aims to create diversity and different voices for children. In contrast to the negative regulation associated with regulating against harmful effects, positive regulation for positive outcomes recognises that children's media can be a potentially positive social influence (Messenger Davies, 2007). It is a discourse that can be seen both as paternalistic, as the concept of the child follows the *tabula rasa* discourse whereby the child is seen as an individual who can be educated to become a good and knowledgeable citizen; as well as child-centred as it provides space for children to participate (as talent and guests).

⁶¹ While it is possible for Palestinian citizens of Israel to travel into the West Bank, the strict permit regime prevents people from the West Bank and Gaza from interacting with one another and with other Palestinian communities across Israel. Moreover, children from Gaza are unable to leave Gaza altogether.

Besides being culturally and socially relevant, these programmes are also presented in the local Palestinian dialect, rather than the standardised Arabic, which some interviewees see as an alienating element of pan-Arab programming. For example, Haroun Abu Arra, the Director of Al Quds Educational TV argues that while Baraem, the Al Jazeera channel for pre-schoolers has excellent programming, Palestinian children do not understand the language as it is not a language spoken in their daily lives (Abu Arra, 2014). While certain pan-Arab channels, such as Qatari-owned Jeem TV (formerly Al Jazeera Children's Channel) and Baraem have a policy of using modern standard Arabic (MSA) in order to reach a wider audience of children across the Arab world, programmes created specifically for Palestinian children – *Bait Byoot*, *Katakeet*, and *Shara'a Simsim* – utilise colloquial Arabic.

Since there are many regional varieties of the Arabic language, 'the linguistic duality of Arabic means that the choice between the high variety of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and the lower variety of Colloquial Arabic has been at the centre of ideological debate since the Arab renaissance in the 19th century' (Yacoub, 2009: xi). MSA, based on classical Arabic of the Quran (*Fos·ha*) is the literary standard of Arabic, and used for education, official purposes, written materials, and formal speeches (Ethnologue, 2015). Classical Arabic or MSA is not used in common oral conversations in any Arab country. Colloquial Arabic (*'Ammia*) refers to regional varieties of Arabic spoken in different countries of the Arab world. Whereas MSA is uniform in all Arab countries, the spoken vernacular varies in different regions and Al Ashaer (2016) explains that some linguists argue that 'Arabs have two languages, a language for scholarship and knowledge and a language for daily conversations and interaction. Those two languages differ to a great extent in vocabularies, structures and styles'. Palestinian television uses MSA for news and political programmes, and colloquial Arabic for entertainment programmes. This is mirrored in *Bait Byoot*, which while broadcast in the local dialect, utilises a mixture of colloquial and MSA for the children's news section. While *Shara'a Simsim* used colloquial Arabic, as producers wanted to communicate with Palestinian children in a language they spoke (Kuttab, 2016), this was a point of contention for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, which believed that since *Shara'a Simsim* is an educational programme, MSA should have been used to compliment the national educational curriculum (Jamous, 2014). However, for the producers of *Shara'a Simsim*

since language acquisition was not one of the main goals of the programme, it was decided that the ‘best way to reach the children of Palestine was to speak to them in their local language’ (Kuttab, 2016).

6.2.4. RECLAIMING CULTURAL IDENTITY VS THE UNIVERSALISM OF CHILDHOOD

While pan-Arab channels use a common language to reach Arab children in different countries, Havens (2007) argues that global distributors and producers of children’s content use the notion of ‘universalism of childhood’ to maximize potential for a global market. The idea of universality of the experiences of childhood is based on models of cognitive child development and is an important business strategy, particularly in early childhood programming, which remains one of the most exported content (Ibid). In Palestine, local channels and distributors, like AQTV, invoke this concept when broadcasting imported programming. For example, in 2014 AQTV broadcast Japanese and German children’s programmes obtained through partnerships with the Representative Office of the Japanese Government in Ramallah, as well as the Goethe-Institut, a German cultural institution with offices in Palestine. All were provided dubbed into Arabic and at no cost. The German content comprises mostly German fairy tales, such as Little Red Riding Hood and Rapunzel whereas the Japanese content comprises both animation (titles including ‘The Mice’s Sumo Wrestling Match’, ‘The Mean Raccoon’, ‘The Angel’s Robe’, ‘Ugly Ducking’) as well as science-based programmes (titles including ‘Earth the Watery Planet’, ‘Gleaming Calcium’, ‘Helium and Other Inert Gases’, ‘Water as Liquid’).⁶² All the programmes, according to Simone von Meyenn, the German project manager at AQTV, have universal values and hence are appropriate for children in Palestine and all around the world. While the scientific programmes are neutral and abstract, and hence considered appropriate, the German fairy tales are perceived to be a way of introducing Palestinian children to foreign stories and cultures (von Meyenn, 2014).

Since all programmes are provided free of cost and pre-dubbed, the rationale behind broadcasting these un-defined ‘universal’ programmes becomes clear. Since AQTV is an educational television channel with a remit to provide for children, these

⁶² Schedules were provided by AQTV.

programmes provide a good way of filling up the television schedules as it is the lack of resources and options that ties the hands of broadcasters and ultimately guides their decisions. Moreover, broadcasting tried and tested programmes with high production values boosts ratings as well as AQTV's reputation as high-quality television providers.

The reputational factor is very important. For example, Lucy Nusseibeh, Director of the Institute of Modern Media claims that AQTV does not accept every free programme. Despite being granted open access to choose from the Sesame Workshop media library, AQTV rejected the option of broadcasting the organisation's early-childhood programming because Nusseibeh believes it does not speak to Palestinian children (Nusseibeh, 2014). Even though the Sesame library provides an option for accessing free programming with high production values, the risk of damaging the reputation of the channel (see *chapter 5*) and coming across as pro-American is a risk the channel is unwilling to take. For this reason, decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and there are no clear and defined guidelines on what constitutes universal programming and what does not (Nusseibeh, 2014; von Meyenn, 2014).

These ideas of universal tastes are also expressed by the Goethe-Institut⁶³ when discussing the Science Film Festival, which it brought to Palestine in 2013.⁶⁴ Now in its third year, the first festival (2013) included the screening of 25 international films, all dubbed into Arabic and followed by hands-on science experiments with the child audience. According to Palestinian project manager of the Festival, Ahmad Qatamesh, the festival reflects child-centred ideals of creative learning and participation to make science more fun for children (Qatamesh, 2014). In addition to the child-centred approach, the discourse supporting the Festival also encompasses universal notions of childhood. According to Qatamesh:

⁶³ The Goethe-Institut's two main objectives are to bring German culture to Palestine, and to promote cultural exchanges (such as art exhibitions and the like) between Palestine and Germany (Goethe-Institut, Palestine, no date), and the Palestinian project manager, Ahmad Qatamesh explains that if an offered programme does not fit within these two objectives, the Institute is reluctant to partner (Qatamesh, 2014).

⁶⁴ Initiated by the Goethe-Institut in South Asia in 2009, the festival travelled to the Arab world (Abu Dhabi, Jordan and Palestine) in 2013. The festival was expanded to the Arab world, in addition to 16 South East Asian countries due to the belief that models of education in South East Asia and Arab world are very similar – strict and based on rote-learning.

Children are children worldwide; they all have the same needs. They all want to be entertained, they all want education. If a Palestinian in Gaza or Ramallah watches the same film, they will probably learn the same thing from it. The idea of children's films, to make them in the first place or to make Prix Jeunesse [films] in the first place is that children worldwide are identical – and the problem is that their upbringing is not identical; their education is not identical [...] Children are only interested in the story, not in identifying with the characters, [they are not interested] in how people look in films, this is not very important, if they are dark skinned or light skinned or blond or whatsoever [...] they are more interested to know how the story continues, what happens in these films, because these films are not documentaries, they are educational films [...] they tell a story (Qatamesh, 2014).

This developmental approach, which is endorsed by some members of the children's television community, overlooks the uniqueness of children's local experiences. Even if a programme is completely stripped of cultural identity, it can still carry ideas about identity, race, gender, age and class and even scientific programmes can be ideological. Crucially the 'ideal viewer' is not Palestinian. In the Japanese scientific programmes, the children conducting the experiments are Japanese, not Palestinian. While this may seem insignificant and of course children are curious and have the right to know more about the world, according to representatives of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Jibreel Hijjeh and Abdel Hakim Jamous, children also have the right to see themselves in programmes and not feel alienated by everything on their television screens (Hijjeh, 2014; Jamous, 2014). While many of these initiatives are child-centred and promote cross-cultural learning, the investment in a universal, homogeneous 'norm' of childhood further stunts and marginalises local voices.

Besides issues surrounding culture and language, there is a strong discourse that argues that local production is more important than foreign programming because it provides children with the space to participate. Karen Lury (2005) explains that this concept of space is crucial to any understanding of children's television, as children's television has the potential of providing a space for and about children, which is both physical and metaphorical.

6.3. CHILDREN'S NEEDS VS CHILDREN'S WANTS

For Haroun Abu Arra, the Director of Al Quds Educational TV, while the space is present, it is defined and controlled by adults. While the discourse promoting local production is positive and has created some good initiatives for children in Palestine (such as *Bait Byoot*, *Katakeet* and *Shara'a Simsim*), it does often ignore children's voices, reflecting dominant power relations, as adults' inspirations for children shape the agenda. Abu Arra, a parent himself, advocates for a more child-centred view of children's programming. He disapproves of popular Jordanian satellite channel *Tayoor Al-Jannah*, not due to its religious messaging, but because he believes the content provides children with a clear moral path to take, and does not allow 'children to think for themselves' (Abu Arra, 2014). As described in *chapter 5*, Abu Arra has had a dream for the last five years of creating a dedicated satellite channel for Palestinian children.⁶⁵ Abu Arra believes that all Palestinian screen-content has hidden messages for children, and explains that his channel would in fact have hidden messages for parents on how to treat their children better. He explains the channel would be on the 'side' of children, take their opinions seriously as it would be:

By children and from children [...] A to Z by children. They interview, they report, they give the news [...] the channel would have reports on environment, other issues that bother children such as schools bags being too heavy. [It would] tell stories about children from children's eyes, children's mouths [...] their own words (Abu Arra, 2014).

While Abu Arra's child-centric vision for children includes providing a space for children based on what they 'want', not all initiatives are based on similar premises. This section looks at the discourses around local production for Palestinian children and whether these characteristics are best understood as wants or needs. Bignell (2005), in his analysis of the anxieties around Teletubbies explains that the issue is whether the purpose of children's television, made by adults, should be to:

Discipline an unformed and wayward childhood out of its alienness and towards adulthood, or whether television should cradle an Edenic and natural childhood whose difference from adulthood is a sign that it is the essential core of humanity before adult culture deforms it (p. 386).

⁶⁵ However, as noted in *chapter 5*, this remains an unrealized dream.

The need for television to instil certain social values in Palestinian children, as well as protect them from the perceived negative impact of both the occupation and foreign programming, rests on the premise that the role of television is formative and exists to socialize them into the norms of adulthood (Bignell, 2005: 385). This focus on children's needs leads to highly didactic cultural texts for children, such as *Bait Byoot* (textual analysis in *chapters 7 and 8*) and *Katakeet*. In *Bait Byoot*, every episode has a theme, and all segments – documentary clips, news, live phone calls, discussions in the studio – revolve around this theme. After each segment, the presenter usually sums up the theme with a sermon about the moral lesson, such as obedience to parents and gender equality, that the producers expect the children to learn. Moreover, as will be seen in *chapter 7*, the themes presented in the programme are not child-centred. While educational programme *Katakeet*, produced in 2009 by PYALARA, was not analysed for this research project, the title, which translates into 'chicks', says a lot about how local producers define the child audience. The Director of PYALARA, Hania Bitar, explains that the title came about because chicks are 'cute' so 'we thought our children are like *Katakeet*' (Bitar, 2014). Chicks are chickens that have yet to mature (not reached adulthood) and in a way their size and age render them insignificant. The presenter of *Katakeet*, Ruba Mimi asserts that the function of children's programming in Palestine is to equip children with skills that they are unable to develop due to the Israeli occupation. She explains that Palestinian children experience a lot of 'abnormal' things due to the occupation and they are unable to express themselves. The rationale behind *Katakeet*, therefore, was to equip children with the tools to discuss complicated matters in a constructive way (Mimi, 2014) and hence as Bignell suggests to 'discipline an unformed and wayward childhood out of its alienness and towards adulthood' (Bignell, 2005: 386).

This idea that children need to be instructed and trained by adults is evident in PYALARA's rejection of funding (from the Dutch foundation, Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland [SKN]) for a children's news programme, due to the belief that Palestinian children are 'not ready' for news programmes. Bitar explains that since Palestinian children have such limited programming created for them, starting with hard news would have been inappropriate, as children in the West Bank do not possess the

intellectual and emotional tools to process news, even if it is presented in a child-friendly way. The priority therefore is to teach children:

What they should eat, what they shouldn't, how they should behave, where to go [...] all those behavioural things, already we don't have programmes for them. So we thought before going into news, hard news, to be presented in a simple way for children, first we should find ways of saying simple things to them (Bitar, 2014).

This is echoed in the news segment of Palestine TV's *Bait Byoot*, which deals with fictitious news, built around moralising hints and themes. The news, told by puppet newscasters, deals with domestic issues, such as household chores, the importance of education, obedience to parents and the like (see *chapter 7*). The news segment was incorporated from the programme, *Akhbar Saghaar* (Small News) produced by the Christian charity the Palestine Bible Society and aired on Ma'an TV for one season. The Palestinian approach to children's news demonstrates that children are not constructed as citizens, and children's needs are framed in a narrow, simplistic and paternalistic context. Contrary to the Palestinian approach, BBC Media Action Jordan's news programme *Shebab News* (Youth News) broadcast on Jordan TV in 2007 was produced with children's civic development in mind. According to the producer Ian Prince the production goal was to empower children and make them aware of their rights. *Shebab News* credited children with a lot more intelligence and resourcefulness than the Palestinian *Akhbar Saghaar* as it reported on real and serious issues such as hereditary diseases, environmental problems, as well as political issues such as the effects of Israeli cluster bombs in Southern Lebanon (Prince, 2007). While there are no credible viewing figures, the programme was available online and was watched by children all over the Arab world, and was also popular amongst adults (Ibid), as it tackled issues that were too controversial for adult news (Steeimers, 2013a).

Cynthia Carter (2013) explains that 'when news is produced with children's civic development in mind, it has the potential to enable them as citizens and empower them to develop an on-going interest in the world' (p.255).⁶⁶ Despite the opportunity presented by children's news programmes to construct children as citizens, news programmes around the world remain limited. As noted in *chapter 2*, while commercial

⁶⁶ See also Carter et al., 2009.

channels hide behind a host of different excuses for ignoring children's news programmes such as news not fitting with the brand of the channel (Nickelodeon), or the inability to compete with BBC's popular programme *Newsround*; the real reason is actually the lack of financial incentive (Hirst, 2002). In Palestine, the reasons behind the lack of news services for children are indeed financial, but they are also linked to narrow definitions of childhood as a protected zone. Since funding for children's television is so limited, the supposed long shelf life of magazine programmes as opposed to news programme was certainly one of the reasons, if not the main reason behind PYALARA choosing to produce *Katakeet*, a magazine programme, rather than a news programme, as proposed by the donor. Hania Bitar (2014) explains:

Certain programmes don't die. The topics are forever, when you discuss hygiene, when you discuss malnutrition, when you discuss, you know the gap between parents and kids and how to bridge it, these topics don't die, you don't solve these problems, they are from one generation to the other, and everyday you have to educate young people how to wash their hands, how to eat fruits, how to study well, how to deal whenever they have problems [...] and of course there is nothing wrong with repeating a message to make sure it sticks in people's minds. If you want to, for example, tell your child wash your hands after you use the toilet, you don't say it one time, you say it maybe for 5-6 years before they catch this habit and it becomes part of their personality and behaviour.

While the argument is that magazine programmes can be repeated an unlimited number of times, the discourse also exposes certain assumptions about children's intellectual abilities and their rights. The focus on instilling social values and attitudes comes from a belief that children are irrational, incomplete and require constant instruction (from adults). Since Palestinian children are exposed to politics on a daily basis – living under military occupation as well as being exposed to adult news – they are not disaffected or politically unaware (a popular reason given by western commercial children's channels for not commissioning news programmes for children). However, in Palestine the assumption surrounding children's news is not that children are 'disaffected' but that they are too 'innocent' to deal with challenging and critical news, and need a more simplistic form of education.

In a sense it is almost like the Sesame Street message, directed at a very specific level. The idea that children's content should aid in the psychological and cognitive development of childhood (Messenger Davies, 2008a: 94) is influenced by the Lockean

construction of childhood whereby children are born as ‘blank slates’ who through schooling and reasoning might become civilised as adults. Lina Bokhari (2014), head of the Film Department at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture echoes this blank slates discourse when she explains that screen content is an ‘[...] important medium for child development and growth; it is very significant for children to have that medium directed at them [as] it is a way to protect them and safeguard them to grow in a healthy manner.’ Therefore, there is a normative view about the function of television as it is argued by some involved in producing content for children, that children should be learning values while they are consuming media products. Children’s media come to be seen as a luxury (news) or a need (moralising messages), but rarely as a right. While it is accepted that adults need entertainment to de-stress, children are not afforded the same right. ‘Fun’ and enjoyment, which is an important element of children’s rights discourse (Messenger Davies, 2010: 159), is not seen as the primary purpose of television.

The dominance of such views has led to didactic cultural projects for children becoming the norm. For the Al Qattan Foundation, a local not-for-profit organisation working in the fields of culture and education, the problem with Palestinian programming for children is not the lack of quantity, but rather quality, caused by both small budgets and lack of regulation. Mahmoud Abuhashash, Director of the Arts and Culture Programme at Al Qattan Foundation worries that this lack of regulation and quality control means anyone can create media products for children and the end result is low quality content with superficial and shallow content. He argues that those who produce content for children think it part of their job to instruct children about religious, political and social norms as artists in Palestine ‘always want to pass on messages, whether it is a story or theatre, art becomes very illustrative [...] as they are trying to send a message [...] and this affects the quality’ (Abuhashash, 2014). It is the infusion of these messages that makes Palestinian local production very dangerous, he adds, giving examples of amateur puppet shows and theatre projects for children. According to Abuhashash, despite containing radical and divisive messages, such puppet shows are widely available in public schools and kindergartens, through the support and blessing of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Buckingham (2002: 55) argues that for education to succeed in engaging learners, it has to be entertaining, and entertainment is always educational as it is bound to teach children something. However, Abuhashash argues that due to the moralising content in Palestinian cultural products for children, the end result is that the programmes are neither entertaining nor educational. The didactic nature of cultural productions for children led to the Al Qattan Foundation dedicating a Call for Proposals in 2012 for children entitled 'Lets Perform for children'. The foundation invited local producers to create high quality productions (such as mobile theatre) that were accessible for all Palestinian children (i.e. could be easily moved to refugee camps and areas with narrow streets). Mahmoud Abuhashash was disappointed with the responses to the call as the proposals submitted were mostly educational and moralising, which according to him compromised the integrity of the proposed projects. In his opinion the initiative did not improve cultural production for children because the problem is much more deep-rooted and he suggests that the 'whole approach, and the whole discourse should be changed [...] Here [in Palestine] there is a lot of compromise, because people want to send a message [...] ' (Abuhashash, 2014). Whether the message is obedience to parents (as seen in *Bait Byoot*) or the importance of education and healthy eating (as seen in *Katakeet*), the presence of so many messages, in Abuhashash's opinion, diminishes the quality of the programme.

The paternal discourse prevalent in media products in Palestine, such as *Bait Byoot* and *Katakeet* (as will become clear in *chapter 7*) and the desire to infuse texts with moralising messaging comes from a desire to maintain traditional notions of childhood innocence and purity, and to protect children by providing them educational messages to fulfil their 'needs'. While not necessarily denying agency altogether, the agenda is defined by adults, and limits the choices available to children. The endurance of didactic media for children can be understood in the context of Palestinian education, which is criticized by Palestinian civil society for being too rigid and out-dated.

6.3.1. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE PALESTINIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Palestinian community is highly literate (in 2013 male literacy was at 97.4% and female at 91.7%) and has high enrolment rates in schools, as schooling is mandatory until year 10 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). This is a considerable achievement as the Ministry of Education and Higher Education established in 1994 had the challenging job of setting up the educational system from ‘scratch’ (Teacher Creativity Centre, 2010: 5). The Palestinian Authority inaugurated the national curriculum, which is relatively new, in September 2000. Prior to this date textbooks were out of date and lacked relevance to Palestinian society (Nordbruch, 2002) as Jordanian textbooks were used in the West Bank and Egyptian ones in the Gaza strip. Despite the achievements, the educational system is criticized from all quarters of Palestinian civil society for being too rigid and strict, as it teaches children to read, write and memorise, but not to think creatively or actively be part of knowledge creation. Ayed Abu Eqtaish, the Director of Defence for Children-Palestine, calls the current educational system ‘banking education’ and explains that:

The whole educational system is very conventional. It does not prepare children for future life [...] like training children on life skills, which is more important than the textbooks, because now it is not a matter of what information they have [...] because they can get the information from anywhere. Now a 10 years old child has a smart phone, so he can Google whatever information he needs. But how to use this information – this is the more important part [...] and for this the whole educational system should be changed (Abu Eqtaish, 2014).

The Arab Knowledge Report (UNDP, 2009) confirms Abu Eqtaish’s views that education in Palestine is failing Palestinian students and it suggests that the statistics on completed levels of education are misleading and do not reflect the true quality of individuals’ knowledge and skill set, as curricula in the Arab world lack activities aimed at developing students’ ability to analyse and organise, as they focus too much on memorising and rote learning (Ibid). The head of the Early Learning Programme at the Welfare Association, Maha Sadr, explains that the rigid tradition of rote learning is introduced from a very early age and if you enter a kindergarten (ages 3-6) in the West Bank, you will see children at their desks reading and writing, rather than learning

through play.⁶⁷ Rinad Qubbaj, head of the Tamer Institute for Community Education in the West Bank further explains that this problem is not limited to Palestine, or even the Arab world; it is a problem with education worldwide as:

When we are talking about education systems, we are talking about systems. And systems are hard, very hard to deal with differences. They look at the children as one package, classrooms as one package and hardly would they deal with individuals [...] So they look at it like they own the knowledge and they own the information and they now have to pass it to the children and the children have to memorise whatever is given to them by their teachers. It is like an empty glass and you have to fill it (Qubbaj, 2014).

As noted in the previous section, Palestinian children's media do not address children as citizens; rather they are constructed as 'blank slates' (Locke, 1693) or 'empty vessels' (Qubbaj, 2014) that need to be filled. The educational system in Palestine provides context for the discourses around the purpose of children's television and explains why most children's content is didactic and morally instructive.

The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education has, however, responded to the criticism of Palestinian education by setting up a Committee of experts to evaluate the textbooks and provide recommendations on how to improve the educational system. While the recommendations are classified, Walid Kurdi, a member of the Committee explains that the Committee will be requesting an overhaul of the complete system – not just textbooks, but training programmes, teacher training and the like – which Kurdi believes is tantamount to 'something like a revolution' (Kurdi, 2014). The potential change to the educational system might therefore have a ripple effect on the kind of media produced for children.

The next and final section looks at issues around participation and agency in the context of 'youth programming'.

⁶⁷ It is important to note that pre-school education in Palestine is privatised as is provided by charities and private companies, and not the government. Therefore, the critique of the educational system is not only limited to state education, but calls for an overhaul of the whole discourse around education.

6.4. AGE-BASED NOTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP (YOUTH MEDIA)

Another argument in favour of local television programmes is that unlike imported programmes, it offers children the opportunity to participate by contributing to the content, helping with technical aspects, or performing and acting as the ‘talent’. However, in Palestine due to the limited number of local productions, there are only few opportunities for children to participate in any type of production, limiting their participation in the public sphere. While both *Bait Byoot* and *Katakeet* have children as guests and ‘talent’, their participation is restricted to those roles. While there are countless media products about children, and some for children, in Palestine media produced by children themselves are extremely limited. In *Bait Byoot* (produced and broadcast by Palestine TV), the only locally produced children’s programme at the time of writing (2015),⁶⁸ the only role offered to children, who are invited as guests, or phone in to the studio, is to perform (usually sing or recite poetry) on the programme. Using Fairclough’s (2015: 151) criteria of social actors, it can be inferred that while children are indeed present in *Bait Byoot*, they are the affected or the beneficiary of social processes (the ones affected by processes) rather than the social actors in processes. These production decisions are significant for instance with respect to the representation of agency or lack thereof (explored in further detail in *chapter 7*).

While there are some programmes in Palestine that provide room for children to participate, these programmes are usually reserved for older children, and are categorised locally as ‘youth programming’. The category of ‘youth’ like childhood is socially constructed, and in the Arab world is defined by the onset of puberty, rather than age. The distinction between childhood and youth is hence blurry. After the Palestinian Child Law No.7 of 2004, which defines the child as any person who has not reached the age of 18 (Palestinian Legislative Council, 2004), the most important law that defines childhood is the Code of Judicial Rulings of 1293. Article 985 of the Judicial Ruling defines the transition from childhood to adulthood according to physical developments, and Article 986 sets the parameters of those developments between the ages of 12-15 for boys and 9-15 for girls (Palestinian National Authority, 2010: 41). While not always age-specific, the end of compulsory education at grade 10 or age 15

⁶⁸ In the West Bank.

can be seen as a crucial (but not the only) distinction between childhood and youth, as young Palestinians leave the protective environment of the school and enter the public sphere.⁶⁹ AQTV uses the term ‘youth’ in grant proposals for children over the age of 15, as the German project manager, Simone von Meyenn explains ‘the needs are different because [children] are orienting towards adult life’ (von Meyenn, 2014).

Besides the lack of a definitive lower age limit for the category of youth, there is no upper age limit either as youth in the Arab world can last anytime from puberty to marriage. The term can be hence used for unmarried people in their 30s and 40s ‘eroding all serious analytical meaning of the word’ (Simonsen, 2005: 7). The Palestinian term for teenager is *muraahiq(a)* and the term *shabab* is used for youth. The term ‘youth’ however, does not fully explain the Arabic term ‘*Shabab*’, which means both a stage of life and is also a term used for the particular people considered to be in this group by society. The term also carries connotations of friendship and camaraderie, and is highly gendered (Hart, 2000: 52-60).⁷⁰

While there are conflicting definitions of the category of ‘youth’ especially when applying age-based definitions, it is an important stage of life in contemporary Arab societies (Simonsen, 2005:8). Youth has come to be seen as a very important political category and a critical force for the benefit or harm of society (see Hermansen, 2012: 130; Simonsen, 2005; Gregg, 2005). As described in *chapter 2*, the on-going conflict and the occupation of Palestine has to a certain extent caused an alienation from both state and society, as young Palestinians, especially men are faced with difficult choices about their futures. The prominence of the global discourse around the radicalisation of young Muslim men has led to countless donor-led cultural programmes for Palestinian youth as they are treated as security risks that need to be mitigated before it gets too late (Marshall, 2014). Nibal Thawabteh, Head of the Media Development Centre, at the Birzeit University asserts that this heightened interest in cultural activities for young Palestinians comes from a pre-conceived notion that Palestinian children need intervention when they reach a certain age. She explains:

⁶⁹ According to the Palestinian Child Law Article 37 (b) ‘Education is compulsory until the completion of the stage of higher basic schooling as a minimum’ (Palestinian Legislative Council, 2004), thereby defining it according to achievement rather than age. According to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, schooling is compulsory until the 10th grade, again defining childhood according to achievement rather than age. However, Article 10 of the Draft Education Law does consist of age-based definitions as it specifies that education is compulsory for children from the age of 6 to 15 (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2006).

⁷⁰ In the Palestinian dialect the term *sabiya* (*sabaya*, the plural form) is used for females.

Because you know youth is the age when [Palestinians] have the choice to either fight Israelis and to throw stones or to be in theatre or cinema. Many donors and organisations decide to work with youth, because youth in Palestine is the time where they need to choose an option in their life [...] the options is to be activists, and go to demonstrations, [which leads to life in] prison or be killed [...] which we don't want (Thawabteh, 2014).

Youth programmes are therefore important for international development agencies as it is seen as a crucial time when young Palestinians will make important decisions that will not only impact their own futures but also that of the Palestinian nation. Various other interviewees such as Walid Batrawi, Director of BBC Action, as well as Tala Halawa, a children's voiceover artist, voice similar opinions, explaining that foreign donors are more interested in cultural programmes for youth than children. In the West Bank programmes that allow children to participate and be part of the knowledge creation are rarely ever defined as 'children's programmes'. Rather the category of 'youth' is used whenever individuals under the age of 18 (legally still defined as children) are seen as active participants, rather than vulnerable consumers. An audit of Al Quds Educational Television's (AQTV) children's programmes since 2007 (provided by Project Manager at AQTV) and PYALARA's programmes since 2002 (available on the website) indicates that programmes that promote agency and participation are limited to older children, who are always categorised as 'youth'.

For example, *Id Lal Ashra*, (Hold Your Horses) a programme about conflict resolution, which was produced by AQTV in partnership with PYALARA, and aired from February 2010-February 2012 is defined as 'youth programming' despite being aimed at 13-17 year old Palestinians. The 24-part television series, airing live each week addressed Palestinian children as citizens and invited them to participate. Each episode consisted of two different segments; the first being a scripted drama and the second a discussion of the themes of the drama led by experts in the relevant fields. Each episode started with a 10-minute pre-recorded situational drama, focusing on a different issue relating to political, social, and religious subjects. The scenario was paused half way through and a live audience of young Palestinians would discuss how the main characters should respond to the situation. The clip was then resumed, showing how the characters actually dealt with the situation. The programme was based on a role model

framework, whereby a young female and male actor were chosen to ‘attract young people into considering modes of responding and dealing with situation of conflicts and intolerance’ (PYALARA, 2012: 18). The programme dealt with serious issues such as child marriage, child labour, domestic violence, corporal violence, divorce, and gender inequality in families as well as in Palestinian society as a whole. Both segments of the programme included young Palestinians as social actors rather than the beneficiaries or affected parties of social events as they discussed issues from their every day lives.

Al Quds Educational Television has commissioned and produced various other similar programmes based around participatory models. ‘Lets Dream Together’, funded by Canada Fund, aired from January 2010 to January 2011 and was repeated as recently as 2014. The programme was aimed at young Palestinians with special educational needs. The programme trained 15 students with special needs to use cameras and edit films. Nine talk shows, raising awareness of the rights, talents and capabilities of people with special needs were aired, with the moderator himself a young Palestinian with special needs. Other AQTV programmes include ‘Peace Through Modern Media’ which aired from February 2008 to April 2009 and ‘Youth Advocates for the Rule of Law’ whereby 20 high school students were trained on the justice system, culminating with them staging mock trials.

Similarly PYALARA also uses participatory methods for its ‘youth programmes’. PYALARA’s stated goal is to empower Palestinian youth, whom the organisation defines as being between the ages of 13 and 25, to solve their own problems as well as contribute to the development of Palestine (PYALARA, 2014: 3). Besides *Id Lal Ashra* (Hold Your Horses), and *Katakeet*, PYALARA has produced two other programmes. The TV department launched in 2002 with the production of ‘*Ali Sawtak* (Raise your Voice) followed by *Talaat Maqdastet*, a programme about the historical, cultural and religious characteristics of Jerusalem, in 2005. Both programmes, as well as *Id Lal Ashra* are based on participatory models as according to the organisation’s draft strategic report for 2014-2017:

PYALARA has the issue of young Palestinian's rights, participation and inclusion in the decision making process at the core of its work. We have been working on empowering and enhancing capacities of young Palestinians both males and females on the national level on their rights and community engagement techniques along with rebuilding their resilience through activating their role in the society, improving their life conditions and granting them independent media forums through which they can interact, express their issues and advocate for their rights (PYALARA, 2014: 3).

While the three PYALARA programmes that are addressing the 'youth' category focus on participation and agency of young Palestinians (13-25 years old), the only programme defined as 'children's' (*Katakeet*) (7-13years) follows the paternalistic instructional discourse, which sees children as 'blank slates' that need to be educated and socialised into rational adults. A narrative report to the donor, Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (SKN), explains the content of *Katakeet*, detailing that the programme 'accompanied children in healthy cooking lessons, *made them* (author's emphasis) dance and play sports, discussed with them social habits and attitudes and took them on trips to discover their homeland' (PYALARA, 2009). While the pre-production of *Katakeet* involved formative research which included focus groups with children asking them what kind of issues they would like to see on their television screens, the producer of the programme Hania Bitar asserts that:

Even if you consult with children, you do not just act on what they think is the best, because sometimes you see things differently. So for example with food, children are not interested to learn what's good for them, what's not. They only like to eat what they like, so this was the challenge to make them like fruits [...] many parents complained how their kids don't like to eat fruit or vegetables. So for us the question was how to involve them to make a delicious cocktail [drink] out of fruits so that they can drink it or a beautiful salad so they participate and learn what the benefits are (Bitar, 2014).

Such ideas prove that children's television is based on adult aspirations for children, rather than children's own desires. Even when children are invited to express their opinions, their ideas are rarely taken into account and production decisions are ultimately based on the fears and desires of adults (producers and parents) – who ultimately control the agenda. On the other hand, the trend in children's literature in Palestine is quite the contrary. As the sole publishers of children's books in the West Bank, the Tamer Institute for Community Education is active in trying to challenge

traditional education by campaigning for integrative education.⁷¹ As in the case of screen-based media, it is interesting to note that it is the civil society, and not the private sector that publishes books for children. However, contrary to screen-based media, the Tamer Institute has a child-centred approach to literature, whereby amusement and entertainment is seen to be as important as education; and children are viewed as important partners in knowledge creation. Through the books it is choosing to publish and translate, as well as annual reading campaigns and festivals, the Tamer Institute is creating a space for children's ideas and opinions to be taken seriously. Children's writing and drawings are used in many books published by the Institute. For example, the 'Cities tell their stories' book is fully conceptualised and produced by young children. The Institute used culturally relevant techniques such as oral history, which is a big part of Arab story telling tradition, and trained 20 children from different parts of the West Bank on interviewing, registering oral history and photographing. In partnership with the children, themes were chosen for each book. For example, for 'Jerusalem tells its story' the focus was on the old city of Jerusalem and the different ethnic groups who live within the walls of the old city, like the Armenian and African communities. The children interviewed inhabitants and participated in digging into the history of the different communities, their habits and traditions, festivals, food and so on. According to the Director of Tamer Institute, Rinad Qubbaj, the project exposed children to a different way of learning and created a sense of pride and ownership over the knowledge produced (Qubbaj, 2014).

Other Tamer projects include a national reading campaign and a bi-monthly magazine supplement in the *Al Ayyam* newspaper (the second-largest circulation daily in Palestine) called *Yaraat*. This supplement is fully conceived and published by young Palestinians.⁷² As children are the producers rather than just the consumers of literature, Tamer Institute constructs children as active participants, rather than passive consumers, crediting Palestinian children with the intelligence and creativity that children's television does not. The Director of Tamer Institute, Rinad Qubbaj, explains that the aim of the Institute is to involve children in knowledge creation, to celebrate

⁷¹ Tamer is one of the leading organisations calling for change to the Palestinian national curriculum.

⁷² A few of the members of the children's television community interviewed started off their careers after being inspired by their involvement with *Yaraat*, where activities also involve weekly literary salons to discuss books, poetry and members' own writings.

individuality, to build children's imagination and sense of humour, and to encourage participation. Qubbaj explains:

As you know, not only in Palestine, but also in the whole Arab world, we live in a patriarchal society so they [society] try to always tell the children what to do, what not to do, what to like, and what not to like. But through this way you tell them no, they can be equal in many ways and they can express themselves in terms of what they like and what they don't like (Qubbaj, 2014).

Tamer Institute has created an environment that promotes horizontal relations between adults and children. It also nurtures children's creativity by rejecting the emphasis on target setting that characterises discourses around education in Palestine (Qubbaj, 2014). Not only through projects that invite children to publish stories for themselves, but also through the kind of stories that the Institute chooses to publish and translate as Qubbaj explains that the Institution 'looks carefully at every story that we publish, and we are very much into books that stimulate the imagination of our children and definitely we are into books that make them happy and laugh' (Ibid). Approximately 50 books published by the Tamer Institute have been integrated in public school libraries and as the only publisher of children's literature in Palestine, the institute is playing an important role in challenging traditional discourses of education and children's literature.

While Palestinian literature for children is challenging traditional notions of childhood and re-constructing childhood as a dynamic space of empowerment; screen-based media are simply re-enforcing dominant models and sustaining power relations (by making people amenable to the demands of state education). Screen-based media in the West Bank merely reflect the dominant culture and confirm the hegemonic political culture in Palestinian society and as a result do not challenge the conservative discourse that characterizes the education system of the establishment (the Palestinian Authority). Constructing children as critical consumers and even creators who can gain mastery of information about their culture and society is limited to an older child audience and this category is almost always defined as 'youth', a group that can be anything from 13 to 40. The notion of the empowered child, or the child-as-citizen, is almost non-existent which links back to the ideas presented in *chapter 1* about the complete de-politicisation of Palestinian childhood. Contrary to the dominant construction of childhood, the social

grouping defined as youth is seen as an extremely political category and hence a time where risks need to be mitigated in order to ‘save (us from) the children’ (Marshall, 2014).

While the definitions are loose and ages between the two categories overlap, the significance in defining the programming as belonging to ‘youth’ rather than ‘children’ should not be underestimated. It cannot, however also be discounted that after a certain age children do distance themselves from the concept of ‘childhood’ explained by what Havens (2007) calls ‘up-ageing’. This is a self-perception among older children that they are no longer children stemming:

From the fact that kids are largely dependent upon older authority figures and, therefore, fantasise about being more grown-up and independent. It's all about taking on ‘older’ experiences and thereby distancing themselves from so-called ‘kids’ (Havens, 2007).

Local NGOs such as Welfare Association are led by this self-perception and advertise children’s projects (aimed at children as young as 12) as ‘youth projects’ as Palestinian children often feel alienated by the tem childhood (*tafula*), which they are so desperate to distance themselves from (Sadr, 2014). However while boundaries overlap and young Palestinians can be children and youth at the same time, it is significant that ‘youth programming’ credits its viewers with agency that children’s media do not. This demonstrates that the concept of ‘childhood’ is so intertwined with the idea of ‘chicks’ – birds that have yet to mature, innocent, vulnerable and naïve – that when children are credited with intelligence and resourcefulness, they are almost always defined as ‘youth’. While youth programming provides children with a space to participate, children’s television is wholly controlled by adults.

6.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter mapped the discourses on children’s media that circulate in Palestinian society and explained the different ways producers and distributors define the Palestinian child audience. Arguing that without children’s participation, television

remains a space for power struggles and adults' own aspirations for children, the chapter discussed the spatial nature of childhood and children's television. With anxieties around childhood and the fear that Palestinian children are placed in childhood-denying spaces, by both the occupation and foreign media, it is argued that local production could potentially provide children with space to express themselves. However, with protectionist discourses based on both Romantic and Lockean constructions of childhood dominating discussion on children's media, this space is 'occupied' by adults (parents and producers). Children are defined as vulnerable and passive victims of their circumstances and are not credited with possessing the tools to play an active role in their own learning. Local media products only construct older children as active citizens, who are usually categorised as 'youth' rather than 'children', the former signifying a political status that is stripped of the latter.

Citizenship building programmes such as children's news programmes get undermined not only due to funding issues but also due to these assumptions about children's abilities and their rights. While local production is valued, the paternalistic need to provide behavioural and ethical lessons makes children's screen-content extremely didactic and hence less enjoyable for children. Children's television has many lessons to learn from children's literature in Palestine, which has a more complex view of childhood, and is providing Palestinian children, older as well as younger, a space to be producers as well as consumers of knowledge. With importance placed on fun and entertainment, children's literature is breaking away from trends in education in Palestine, whereby children are constructed as 'blank states' and hence challenging assumptions about children's intellectual and emotional abilities. With proposed changes to the Palestinian curriculum and discussions around new approaches to teaching on the agenda, there is hope that screen-content will also follow suit.

The next two chapters (7 and 8) are based on textual analysis of *Bait Byoot* and two pan-Arab programmes (*Anbar* and *Mansour*) available to Palestinian children. The next chapter (7) looks specifically at the ways in which the texts confirm or challenge dominant discourses of childhood that circulate in Arab societies.

CHAPTER 7: The Positioning of the Child in Palestinian and Pan-Arab Texts

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7.1. INTRODUCTION

The children's market in Palestine is very large as 46% of the population is under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2015). The average age in the West Bank is 19 and as *Bait Byoot* is the only locally produced programme (at the time of the research) in the West Bank, not only is the remit very wide but so is the target age range. However, Palestinian children have a number of Arabic-language alternatives to *Bait Byoot*. These programmes while in the Arabic language, offer an array of different dialects and viewing experiences that are different from the local Palestinian dialect and socioeconomic context. As noted in previous chapters, besides *Bait Byoot*, two pan-Arab programmes available to Palestinian children – the Jeem TV produced magazine programme *Anbar* and the UAE-produced animation *Mansour* – have been analysed to compare narratives of childhood in Arabic-language productions for children.

This chapter compares the definition and representation of childhood in the three texts, using critical discourse analysis to examine the ways in which the texts construct narratives of childhood and whether they reproduce or challenge hegemonic definitions of childhood, which were explored in *chapters 2 and 3*. This chapter analyses the language used to address the child audience and the ways in which adult-child relations are depicted, taking a special interest in the 'modes of address' (Morley, 1992: 84) and the way the audience is positioned. Behavioural traits assigned to boys and girls and the definitions of girlhood and motherhood will also be briefly examined. The chapter begins with some brief contextual information on each programme.

Note on style: the programme name is in Italics, whereas the character names are not italicised. For example: Anbar, the programme is in italics (*Anbar*), while Anbar, the title character is not italicised. Except for names of people and characters, all other Arabic terms are italicised.

7.2. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON TEXTS SELECTED

The programmes analysed are as follows:

1. *Bait Byoot* (Palestine TV) – A live magazine programme with adult presenter (Wala’a Battat) and puppet co-presenters (Na’os and Marwan). The programme includes children studio guests as well as live phone-ins. It is broadcast weekly (every Friday) in the Palestinian dialect.⁷³
2. *Anbar* (Jeem TV, Qatar) – A live magazine programme with adult presenter (Ashraf) and puppet co-presenters (Anbar and Lahouh). The programme contains daily competitions for children, and expert studio guests (adults). It is broadcast daily and in Modern Standard Arabic.⁷⁴
3. *Mansour* (Abu Dhabi TV/ Cartoon Network Arabic) – Animation, broadcast in the Emirati dialect. Series 1 contains 26 episodes and debuted in January 2013.⁷⁵

While *Anbar*, broadcast in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), was created by the Qatari children’s channel Jeem TV for a pan-Arab audience; *Bait Byoot* and *Mansour* premiered on state satellite television networks – Palestinian and Emirati respectively, and were created for local child audiences. However, while *Mansour* is broadcast in the Emirati dialect of Arabic, the audience soon widened as Cartoon Network Arabic purchased the animation and began airing it in March 2014 ‘in order to reach a greater number of young minds across the region’ as the animation’s creator, Rashed Al Harmoodi, explained:

Cartoon Network Arabic is the ideal platform for us to reach out and connect with children across the Mena [Middle East and North Africa] region. It is vital that we inspire imagination and curiosity in the next generation and highlight the importance of the Arabic language, family and community values, while also celebrating our rich cultural heritage (cited in Trade Arabia, 2014).⁷⁶

⁷³ Episodes analysed – 28 February 2014; 21 March 2014; 4 April 2014; 16 May 2014; 13 June 2014

⁷⁴ Episodes analysed – 14 November 2013; 10 December 2013; 5 January 2014; 6 February 2014; 10 March 2014.

⁷⁵ Season 1 aired in 2013 on Abu Dhabi TV and Sama TV (first 13 episodes were broadcast from January 3-February 14 and the rest of the episodes were broadcast from April 3 until May 16). The series was then purchased by Cartoon network Arabic and re-broadcast in summer of 2014.

⁷⁶ The second series has also been picked up by Cartoon Network Arabic and began airing in January 2016. In order to reach a more regional audience; the creator announced that the second series would contain new characters as well as current characters travelling more widely in the Arab world as Mansour and his friends ‘take their adventures to new and exciting locations, learning new lessons and exploring different cultures. Travelling with his father Khalid, a pilot, Mansour will start to explore countries such as KSA, Egypt, North Africa, Kuwait, Jordan and even travel to Europe!’ (Mubadala, no date)

Therefore an importance difference to note is that while both Jeem TV, producers of *Anbar*, and Cartoon Network Arabic, which broadcasts the animation *Mansour* are niche channels for Arab children, Palestine TV, producer and broadcaster of *Bait Byoot* is a generalist state-owned television channel. The other significant difference is that while *Anbar* targets children from the ages of 7-12 years (Jeem TV, no date) and *Mansour* is produced for 5-12 years olds (Al Harmoodi, 2012), the target audience of *Bait Byoot* is considerably wider as it aims to reach children from the age of 3-15 (Battat, 2014).⁷⁷ Starting with *Bait Byoot*, this section provides a brief background to each programme analysed.

7.2.1. BAIT BYOOT

Bait Byoot, a long-running Palestinian magazine programme for children has been on air since 2006. Presenter Wala'a Battat, who is assisted by two puppet co-presenters, hosts the hour-long programme. The live programme entails the presenters interacting with studio guests as well as callers, mostly children, who some times perform (recite poetry, sing songs etc.) Pre-recorded documentary inserts, relating to the theme of the episode, break up the studio discussions. While the segments vary from year to year, the producer, Mohammad Farraj (2014) explains that the ones that featured in 2014 were:

1. *Bseer ou Mabseer* (Happens or Doesn't Happen) – an educational sketch acted out by the puppets.
2. *Al Akhbar* (The News) – fictional news, usually corresponding to the segment above, also presented by the puppets in a comedic manner.
3. *Bladi Ana* (My Country) – a sketch involving the puppets touring different cities of Palestine.
4. *Matbakh Bait Byoot* (Kitchen of Bait Byoot) – cookery style segment.
5. *Basat Areeh* (Magic Carpet) – the female presenter, Wala'a, dressed in traditional Palestinian clothes, flies on a magic carpet and visits different countries around the world.⁷⁸

The episodes are thematic and each episode tackles a different educational matter. The presenter Wala'a Battat (2014) explains 'we discuss topics that are important and interesting to children and through the topic we create a sketch so that the children have

⁷⁷ The producers of *Anbar*, Al Jazeera Children's Channel, founded in 2005, recognised the difficulty in catering for such a wide age group, and in January 2009 expanded with a new channel for pre-schoolers, aged 3-6 years old, under the title *Baraem* (Buds). It would later in 2013 re-brand its main channel, Al-Jazeera Children's Channel (JCC) as Jeem TV for 7-15 year olds.

⁷⁸ The episodes analysed consist of the first three segments. Data on the last two segments has been gathered from interviews with the producers and presenter.

a clear picture of the topic.’ In the episodes analysed for this project, the themes have included helping parents with the household chores, seeking permission from parents before leaving the house, staying close to teachers during class trips, as well as larger issues including gender equality. After each documentary insert, the presenter usually sums up the theme with a didactic summary about the moral of the episode. She then opens the discussion with the children. Each episode has a highly pedagogical conclusion as the themes are primarily concerned with adult ideas of maintaining high moral and cultural codes.



Image 3: Bait Byoot, Palestine TV studio

Still from 13 June 2014 episode – picture quality reflects the poor quality of the online stream available on the PBC website. Also note the cameras and lights visible in the studio.

7.2.2. ANBAR

Similarly, *Anbar* is a long-running live magazine programme presented by an adult presenter, Ashraf, and a puppet co-presenter, Anbar. The tag line of the programme is ‘Daily Competitions/International Highlights/Healthy Eating’

(<http://www.jeemtv.net/en/shows/anbar/episode/>). Promoting healthy eating is one of the main goals for Jeem TV and the channel runs a ‘Healthy Eating Campaign’, which includes games, competitions and tips to prepare healthy meals (Jeem TV, no date). At the time of writing, the programme is in its fourth series, with each season containing

210 episodes. Episodes consist of the two presenters (adult and puppet) interviewing studio guests, such as nutrition experts and sports instructors. Pre-recorded documentary inserts include reports from travelling journalist, puppet Lahouh, who sends in a report from a different city or town from around the world. Inserts also include dubbed reports about the sport and/or nutritional advice dished out in the episode. In the episodes analysed studio guests discuss the benefits of sports, for example the calming effects of yoga; as well as healthy eating, such as trying to cut out sugar from one's diet and the benefits of brown bread as opposed to white bread. The programme also consists of a live multiple-choice competition whereby children phone in in an attempt to win an iPad.



*Image 4: Anbar, Jeem TV studio
Still from 5 January 2014 episode – Anbar, Ashraf and studio guest*

7.2.3. MANSOUR

Since child obesity is a problem in the Gulf region, health and fitness is also an important element in the Emirati animation *Mansour*. According to the Cartoon network Arabic website, the storylines in *Mansour* promote a healthy life style as the ‘GCC and wider Arab region suffers from high levels of obesity and diabetes’ (Cartoon Network, no date). Other goals of the programme are promoting education and strengthening national and cultural identity. Mansour, the eponymous character is a 10-year-old boy from Abu Dhabi. He is described by the creator, Rashed Al Harmoodi, as a child who has a real passion for life, is very energetic, loves sports, especially football and jujitsu,

and dreams of becoming an aeronautical engineer when he grows up (Al Harmoodi, 2012). Al Harmoodi explains that the animation was ‘created to engage with young people [...] by incorporating important issues facing the region’s next generation into compelling storylines designed to captivate their imagination’ (cited in Cartoon Network Arabic, no date). The first series (analysed in its entirety) follows the title character and his friends on a series of adventures. Most adventures portray the children resolving problems their school and the city (Abu Dhabi) are facing, thanks to their knowledge and competence with technology.



*Image 5: Meet Mansour
Still from the Mansour Cartoon website*

The next sections will look at the themes presented in the three programmes. It will focus on the ways in which the child audience is addressed to glean constructions of childhood in Arab societies as well as compare and contrast the positioning of children in Palestinian and pan-Arab texts.

7.3. ADULT - CHILD RELATIONS: ELDERS AND BETTERS

Ethnographic literature on the Arab world points to the existence of hierarchical relations between older and younger members of Arab families (see *chapter 2*). This section looks at whether Arabic-language programmes for children confirm or challenge this accepted discourse on the Arab family by looking at the ways in which conventions of adult-child relations are managed in the three selected texts. This section looks at the construction of childhood in the two studio programmes in tandem, and then moves on to analyse the animation separately. For the animation *Mansour*, conclusions regarding children's roles in the family will be gleaned from the narrative and themes presented in the programme. In the case of the studio programmes, *Anbar* and *Bait Byoot*, the analysis will focus on how texts:

Address and construct the child audience – for example, the various ways in which the viewer is spoken to; how the viewer is or is not invited to be involved; the function of children as actors or participants within the programmes; how adult-child relations are presented or enacted (Buckingham, 2008: 230).

In terms of how children are addressed, in both the Qatari *Anbar* and the Palestinian *Bait Byoot*, the adult presenters refer to the child audience as 'our friends' (*asdaqaana*) and include themselves in this group. For example when Wala'a, presenter of *Bait Byoot* addresses the children or even refers to the children, she mentions the group of children as a collective 'we' (for example: what do 'we' do in the summer holidays; 'we' need to be careful around strangers). While both programmes position themselves on the side of the children (albeit to different degrees), the ways in which children are spoken to belie the terms of solidarity and camaraderie used by the adult presenters. For example in the 14 November 2013 episode of *Anbar* a caller is asked by Ashraf, the presenter, if he watches the programme regularly to which the child responds 'sometimes' eliciting the response from Ashraf: 'Why sometimes? The programme is beneficial, it is educational, it is entertaining', instructing the child to watch it more regularly. Furthermore, on *Bait Byoot*, live phone-ins are a good example of adults controlling the agenda. Studio guests are often encouraged to speak to the callers. However, instead of children in the studio interacting with live callers, the discussion ends up being one between the adult presenter and the parents (of the callers), as the

host prompts the children with questions to ask on one side of the line, and parents are answering for the children on the other side. Children are constructed as subjects to the control – of parents, television presenters, the government and society as a whole. They are viewed as incompetent and ultimately needing the help and guidance of adults, even in simple things as communicating with each other. Analysis shows that in both *Bait Byoot* and *Anbar* while children are present in the text, they are the ‘affected or the beneficiary (loosely, the ones affected)’ by the social processes rather than active (the ones making things happen) (Fairclough, 1993: 145).

For example, in the ‘*Bseer ou Mabseer*’ segment of the 13 June 2014 episode of *Bait Byoot*, two puppets Marwan and Souad are on a school trip to a park in Jericho. They decide to break away from the larger group, including the teachers, to explore another part of the park. Not very long into their unaccompanied journey, Marwan falls and badly injures himself as Souad looks on in horror at the trouble they are in as there are no adults around to ‘save’ them. The clip ends unresolved and back in the studio Wala’a explains the message of the sketch:

See they were happy and enjoying the trip, it was so good, but then they took the wrong decision [...] *We* should always stay with adults, because if *we* don’t bad things happen. Because adults know more than *us*.

It is important to note, as stated earlier, that even while providing very adult advice, she includes herself in the group of children. After dishing out the advice, she directly addresses one of the studio guests – 15-year-old Ahmad and the following conversation ensues:

Wala’a: Has something like this ever happened to you? Tell us, seriously seriously?

Ahmad: No

Wala’a: Good, but you as well, [even though] you are older but you should still never go off by yourself.

This ‘friendly’ advice constructs Palestinian children not only as vulnerable but also as erratic and reckless. In *Bait Byoot*, while the children in the studio are invited to display

their talents (usually singing, dancing or reciting poetry), and featured as ‘role models’ for other children to follow, the discussion session of the programme often patronises and belittles them. When Wala’a questions the children about the moral of the show, she is always slightly disbelieving of their responses. For example in the 4 April 2014 episode, which revolves around the theme of the negative consequences of taking action without seeking parental permission, she holds the following conversation with 8 year old Zeina, who is the youngest guest in the studio:

Wala’a: Zeina you are the youngest so you may not know much about this topic. But do you always ask permission from your parents before you leave the house?

Zeina: Yes I do

Wala’a: Honestly, tell me honestly honestly.

Her disbelieving and doubtful line of questioning is repeated with a 13-year-old studio guest. When the teen claims that she always seeks permission from her parents, Wala’a responds asking twice: ‘Truly? Really?’, making the guest look self-conscious and embarrassed. While the episodes of *Anbar* analysed do not point to a similar construction of childhood, the presenter does sometimes embarrass the children. In the 10 December 2013 episode, the studio guest, Dr. Rima Selman, a nutrition specialist lists food, including *shawarma* (meat sandwich), which are allegedly bad for children. Later in the episode, a caller, Fatima from Algeria phones in to take part in the daily competition, in an attempt to win an iPad. Ashraf, the presenter, quizzes her eating habits and an affirmative response to eating *shawarma* elicits an admonishing reply from Ashraf who repeats Dr. Selman’s advice on refraining from eating too much *shawarma*. He also instructs her (and the child audience) to only eat from restaurants and avoid outdoor stalls where vendors may not be wearing gloves etc. The caller sounds deeply embarrassed as evidenced by her loss for words. While the set at *Anbar* may be more elaborate (see *image 4* on *page 169*) and the programme has a higher budget than *Bait Byoot* (see *image 3* on *page 168*), they both depend on similar notions of adult control and guidance.

On the other hand, in the Emirati animation *Mansour*, the balance of power is reversed and children’s interests are prioritised over adult concerns. Significantly because it is an

animated programme, *Mansour* does not have the restrictions that live-action programmes face, and gets around issues of adult dominance by placing adults in the background. Children are in the foreground of all storylines. Mansour and his group of friends are active in social processes and are constructed as capable and adept. The children are often found on the streets of Abu Dhabi solving some mystery or crime, not only without the help of adults, but also usually because adults are constructed as incapable of solving these problems. Mansour has created his own robot, called Nano (third character from the right, in *image 5* on *page 170*), and his friend Salem has created his own electronic dictionary, not very dissimilar to the ‘SIRI’ function on an iPhone, to which he asks questions and gets instant responses (*episode 14*). While there is a focus on instant gratification and getting prompt answers, the ability of the two characters to create such technologically advanced products shows their agency and ability, emphasising childhood as a space of empowerment, and allowing for the appearance of child-centred themes. In some ways Mansour represents the Nickelodeon version of childhood – independent, capable, makes decisions, and does not need adults to guide him. The animation, like the Nickelodeon brand, recognises children as autonomous political subjects and ‘allows children to explore their own self-agency, a specific identity construction that stands in contrast to childhood innocence that has served adults so well in the twentieth century [...]’ (Banet-Weiser, 2004: 215).

In the Emirati animation, the children live in a material and technologically advanced world and Mansour loves high-tech gadgets. His whole world is in his bedroom – which contains an array of gadgets including the robot, Nano; a large flat screen television; a personal computer; a tablet (resembling an iPad); and a smart phone that he carries around with him. While he lives with his parents, siblings (an older brother and a younger sister), as well as his grandfather, the house is spacious and technology often replaces the traditional role of the family as a source of comfort and information. Questions or advice usually sought from parents are put to Nano. According to the creator of Mansour, Nano is ‘a walking encyclopaedia and a search engine with high capabilities who always comes to the rescue and plays a major role in Mansour's daily life and adventures’ (cited in Lord, 2012). He does indeed play a major role in Mansour’s life. Nano, the robot acts as a worried, helpful parent as well as friend and companion all rolled into one. Nano is always there for Mansour – to help him and

entertain him (for example in *episode 18*, Mansour is sitting in his room bored and Nano offers to play chess with Mansour), and is consulted first when Mansour needs advice. In *episode 12*, Mansour is feeling very nervous as he is participating in a Formula 1 style model car race at school. In the morning of the race he asks Nano for advice on what to wear: he holds up two different outfits and asks Nano to choose one for him. He then goes to tell him why he is feeling so anxious and asks the robot for advice on how to cope, to which Nano gives parental advice. Moreover, in *episode 18*, Salem, Mansour's friend has the hiccups so he comes to Mansour's house looking for a cure. Mansour's first reaction is to look for a cure on his tablet (iPad like device), followed by asking Nano, his robot. Mansour does not ask his family for help, rather it is his sister who comes in to his room and offers to help. When he is home, Mansour spends most of his time in his bedroom (which is where Nano lives) and he seems to have a closer relationship with Nano, than with his siblings or parents. In fact, the interactive website for the animation directs the viewer directly to Mansour's bedroom, and nowhere else when you click on 'Mansour's home' section (<http://www.mansourcartoon.ae/en>). In terms of seeking advice, the mother, who can usually be found in the kitchen tending to domestic chores, is almost never consulted, because the children always manage to find solutions through technology. This is an interesting intervention – subverting parents in an area where the family is so central – as it is very rare in Arab programming. As noted in *chapter 2*, the compliance department of Jeem TV, found the backgrounding of family in Disney programming rather unsettling (Sakr, 2013).

For Maha Sadr, the Palestinian Director of the Early Childhood Department at the Ramallah-based NGO Welfare Association, the family is the most important variable in a Palestinian child's life. She explains that if a child is asked ‘ “do you prefer your father brings you a toy or plays with you?” of course he [the child] will answer ‘to play with me” ’ (Sadr, 2014). The Palestinian production reflects this view, and confirms findings from ethnographic literature presented in *chapter 2*, as *Bait Byoot*, provides constant reminders about the importance of the role of the family (especially parents) and constructs hierarchical relationships of obedience. Childhood is seen as a unique, distinct and protected space and themes highlighted in *Bait Byoot* such as seeking permission from parents, helping in household chores and the like, place children in the

‘private sphere’ of the home and school; protected from the ‘public sphere’. *Mansour* on the other hand frames the child in the context of the street and the city (Abu Dhabi) as most adventures take place in the public sphere and outside the spheres of the family and the home. While the important role of the family (especially the father and grandfather) is mentioned in a few episodes, adults do not limit the freedom or movement of children, and the animation presents horizontal and peer-based networks, as most episodes revolve around the friendship and camaraderie between the three boys (Mansour, Salem and Obaid).

The animation, however, presents a confused sense of respect for authority and elders. While the themes presented relate to respecting family (for example Mansour’s admiration for his father’s career), there is no such reverence reserved for those who work in the public sector. While Mansour has a lot to learn from the male members of his family, others in position of power such as teachers and the police, conversely all have something to learn from the children, and are at times constructed as objects of ridicule. Access to technology has not only made children more knowledgeable, but has also drastically shifted power relations between children and adults. For example in *episode 14* Mansour shows his chemistry teacher, *Ustaad* (Teacher) Ali, a GPS system on his phone and the teacher is suitably impressed. Most episodes, featuring *Ustaad* Ali depict a role-reversal as Mansour and his gang of friends are constructed as capable ‘adults’ and the teacher is depicted as a ‘child’. *Ustaad* Ali is depicted as stupid and clumsy: in *episode 4* he uses the wrong chemicals in an experiment and faints from the smell (see *image 6* below) and in *episode 11* he first gets tied up in electric wires and then goes on to electrocute himself by putting his finger in a power socket.



Image 6: Ustaad Ali, Still from Mansour, episode 4

In an incredible role reversal and power shift, Mansour (the child) then explains to his chemistry teacher (the adult) that sticking your finger in electric sockets is dangerous. In later episodes (23 and 24) Ustaad Ali's child-like qualities are depicted once again as he is shown scooting around on a scooter in the same vicinity where the children are using high-tech filming equipment to shoot a film about aliens for the Abu Dhabi film festival. The teacher hits a tree and passes out and later wakes up to see the elaborate space ship that Mansour and his friends have built for the film, and gets terrified believing there are aliens in the area.

Another member of the public service who is constructed as incompetent and as the perfect antithesis to the children is Bilal, the police officer. While the children are constructed as intelligent, creative, dynamic and brave, Bilal is portrayed as dim and cowardly. To portray children's agency, the animation often invokes the power of technology. Bilal embodies an older Arab generation (30-40 years old), who are not comfortable with technology, in stark opposition to Mansour and his friends (10-12 years old) who represent the 'future of the Emirates' – technologically advanced and highly connected.⁷⁹ For example, in *episode 14* Mansour hears the news that a thief has broken into Mansour's school and is now at large. He confides in Nano, his robot, that while he is sure Bilal will find the thief, he is going to help in the police effort, as he has created a software on his phone which can track people who have entered the school. While Nano advises him to leave it to the police, he explains that the police do not have this special programme and will hence struggle to catch the thief without his help. The difference between the children and the police's capabilities are stark as while Mansour and his friends arrive at the school dressed as ninjas and armed with sophisticated tracking devices, Bilal follows later with a whistle and a torch. Furthermore, Bilal gets scared and hides in the cloakroom, while the children catch the thief and save the day.⁸⁰

Such adventures construct Mansour and his friends as active producers, rather than just passive consumers of media and technology. Mansour has created a robot and a tracking

⁷⁹ The 'cartoon subtly nods to the jobs and fields that will become increasingly important to the Emirati workforce over the next decade as the UAE is diversifying away from oil and gas, and there are more industries being created such as aerospace, high tech industries and satellite industries' (Lord, 2012).

⁸⁰ The episode sees a return of Ustaad Ali who finds out about the children's heroics. Ustaad Ali finds Bilal hiding in the closet, and giving a conspiratory look to the children, tells Bilal that it was indeed he (Bilal) who caught the thief and thanks to him the school and the city are safe. The children laugh at Bilal and run off, and as Bilal tries to run after them, he slips and falls down (*episode 15*). Other episodes also show Bilal as dim, for example in *episode 9*, he flags a car for speeding, but after stopping, the driver speeds off as Bilal gets distracted by seeing someone he knows (Mansour) and gets very side-tracked.

device, and his friend Salem has created an electronic encyclopedia. The group of friends have also created a sophisticated spaceship and are producing a film for the national film festival. While the themes are child-centred and the creators are positioning themselves on the side of the children by showing adults behaving in a daft manner, such themes also reveal the nature of society in the Gulf, which contains big divisions between the elite and the people that serve them.⁸¹ This will be discussed in the next chapter but it is important to note here that the adults constructed as silly and child-like are public servants, rather than parents and grandparents. Mansour and his friends often play pranks on their teachers, especially Ustaad Ali, whom even the Principal of the school ridicules and demeans in front of the children (*episode 4*). In the UAE, recognising the lowly status of teachers, important steps have been taken by the government to underline the importance of the teaching profession. For example in 2014, under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President of the UAE and Prime Minister of Dubai, the Global Teaching Prize, an annual US \$ 1 million prize was inaugurated symbolizing that teachers deserve to be ‘recognised and celebrated’ (Varkey Foundation, 2014). While the construction of teachers as an object of ridicule in *Mansour* confirms the dominant discourses on public servants in the Gulf, it is far from the truth in Palestine, and many other Arab countries, where teachers are not only respected but also feared. Research into corporal violence in Palestinian schools demonstrates that a high percentage of children have experienced beatings from their teachers (Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children, 2016).⁸² The position of authority occupied by Palestinian teachers is confirmed by various interviewees in Palestine, from a schoolteacher at the Al-Saffa Secondary School for Girls (Badran, 2014), to the Principal of a large private school in

⁸¹ While Arab public servants are constructed as cowardly and objects of ridicule, the non-Arab migrant workers are constructed in an even more negative and damaging fashion (see *chapter 8*).

⁸² 2010 research which included a survey of ‘306 students in three schools and focus groups with 88 students, teachers, counsellors and principals found that 36.6% of students had often seen a teacher hit students or been hit themselves: 37.6% reported that this happened sometimes, 25.7% rarely. A fifth (22.2%) had heard a teacher insult students or been insulted themselves often, 30.6% sometimes and 47.1% rarely.’ (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2016) In 2009 research on violence in educational settings ‘which involved 1,723 children in 15 schools in five districts in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, 80% of students in school grades 1-3, 15% in grades 4-6 and 30% in grades 7-10 said they were “exposed to beating” at school’ (Ibid).

Ramallah (Amra, 2014) and also by representatives of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (Hijjeh, 2014; Abu Jamous, 2014).

In reflecting on the adult-child relations present in the three texts, it becomes evident that while the two magazine programmes construct childhood as a protected zone, in *Mansour*, producers have dispensed with purely pedagogical objectives in favour of entertainment. In the animation children are active in social processes and are credited with resourcefulness and ingenuity that challenge dominant definitions of childhood present in *Bait Byoot* and *Anbar*. This model of the socially active child recognises ‘children’s social and technological accomplishments and their growing maturity’ (Buckingham et al., 1999: 171). The next section looks at the ways in which childhood is represented in the three texts.

7.4. REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Since *Mansour* revolves around the adventures of three young boys, the animation provides rich representations of childhood. However, the magazine programmes *Bait Byoot* and *Anbar* also provide ample ground for the analysis of representations of childhood as both contain puppets, representing school-aged children (voiced by adults) and also include real children who are present in the programme – as studio guests in *Bait Byoot* and live callers on *Anbar*. On both programmes the puppets are co-presenters, and are also present in documentary clips, through which their individual characters and personalities are built. Even though the exact ages of the puppets are unknown, both programmes make multiple references to the puppets attending school. While interviews with the producers of *Bait Byoot* have contributed some knowledge about the biography of the puppet co-presenters (Marwan and Saeed), the only known information on the two puppets that present *Anbar* (Anbar and Lahouh) is gained through character description provided on the websites of Jeem TV. Some information is also available on the UK-based animation studio Team Cooper’s website, which was commissioned by Jeem TV to develop a running-based game *Al-Marathon* (The

Marathon) featuring Anbar.⁸³ In the question and answer session available on the Jeem TV website Anbar gives his age as ‘anbar-teen’ year old, and he is further described as ‘a mischievous boy with a sense of adventure and big dreams of fame and glory’ by Team Cooper (Teem Cooper, no date). Lahouh is the travel reporter for the programme and not based in the studio.⁸⁴ He travels the world, producing reports for the programme and dreams of ‘becoming an international reporter’ (Jeem TV, no date).

On the Jeem TV programme, the two puppets and hence children, are represented as (and are expected to be) energetic and lively. The adult presenter, Ashraf, as well as the puppet Anbar often make callers repeat the name of the programme in a more animated and excited manner if deemed to be too subdued. For example on various episodes analysed, the presenters answer the phone in the following fashion:

Ashraf: We welcome you to the programme...[waiting for the caller to say the name]

Caller: Anbar

Ashraf: No.....AANNNNNNNBBBAAAAAARRRR [Said in a more enthusiastic manner]

Caller: ANBAAAAAARRRRRR

Similarly, on the Palestinian programme the puppets Saeed and Marwan are also very talkative and lively, and Wala’a the adult presenter similarly expects studio guests as well as callers to be excited and sprightly and often seems to embarrass her reserved child guests by forcing them to talk and explain why they are not chatty and forthcoming with conversation.

In the case of the puppet Anbar, while he is excitable and energetic, ironically it is these very qualities that seem to get him into trouble, as he is a constant source of annoyance for the adult co-presenter Ashraf. For example in the 10 March 2014 episode, Anbar gets very excited when the studio guest is talking about high jump, which gets Ashraf riled up as he admonishes Anbar to *ihda* (behave, calm down), explaining that he is

⁸³ The game, available on the Jeem TV website can be played in both English and Arabic and claims to put the player ‘in Anbar’s excitable shoes as he sets out to explore Qatar’s capital city of Doha, leaping from roof-top to roof-top’ (Team Cooper, no date).

⁸⁴ He is not based in the studio in the episodes analysed. In more recent episodes of season 4, he presents the programme with Anbar and Ashraf.

embarrassing him in front of the guest. There is always conflict between the adult (Ashraf) and the child (Anbar) confirming perspectives from ethnographic literature, which point to childhood in the Arab world being a period of nuisance in adult eyes (Ammar, 1954: 126). For example, in the 6 February 2014 episode, when Anbar suggests that there is a link between concentration and eating popcorn, Ashraf laughs at him, to which Anbar gets upset and asks ‘why do you always try to undermine me?’ Similarly in the 14 November 2013 episode he remarks to Ashraf ‘you are trying to belittle me and destroy me’ and in an interaction between the two in the 10 March 2014 episode, after Ashraf announces that the next clip is about Thailand, Anbar gets excited and asks ‘what is it about?’ which elicits the annoyed reaction from Ashraf who mocks him with ‘how would I know before even watching it.’⁸⁵

Anbar is characterized as endearing and sweet, but at the same time naïve, clumsy, jealous, petty and irrational. The adult studio guests notice this as well. In the 14 November 2013 episode, a yoga instructor, who is the guest, comments that yoga is very good for children and that ‘even Anbar can get benefits from it’. She explains that yoga has numerous health benefits as it is good for back pain and rheumatism and other adult ailments, that on the face of it do not seem particularly relevant or interesting for children – in Qatar or Palestine. However, she explains ‘yoga is good for kids as when a kid enters the class he feels serene and self esteem is boosted and he will walk with his back straight.’ The programme is based on passing on educational messages, especially about health and active living, through light comedy. The comedic element of the programme, which is based around banter between Ashraf and Anbar, ends up creating Anbar, who is the main representation of childhood, as a nuisance.

Lahouh on the other hand is shown to be the ideal model of childhood – he is competent, sensible and gracious – everything Anbar is not. However, he is a less seen representation of childhood, as he is only ever featured in short documentary clips. While he is not present in the studio in the episodes analysed, Anbar and him are seen together in the online games available on the website. In the television programme, Anbar is shown to be very jealous of Lahouh, as he constantly critiques his travel

⁸⁵ The relationship between Anbar and Ashraf is interesting as Ashraf is easy to irritate and Anbar is easy to upset. Anbar is always picking on Ashraf and Ashraf always gets annoyed and reacts. For example in the 10 December 2013 episode Ashraf is using the computer to play a game and Anbar keeps closing the laptop on his hand and typing on the keyboard to distract Ashraf.

reports and pulls faces whenever Ashraf introduces the reports. While describing him as his 'best friend' on the Jeem TV website question and answer page (Jeem TV, no date), Anbar is often very disparaging of Lahouh's reports and is unhappy when his face comes up on the screen. For example in the 10 December 2013 episode he tries to say something negative about Lahouh's report from Thailand, but gets told off by Ashraf, his co-presenter. Anbar is in fact also shown to be jealous of one of the callers. In the 14 November 2013 episode, he is annoyed at Ashraf for getting excited over a child (caller from Egypt) winning the daily competition and hence an iPad (which is no easy feat and the only win in the five episodes analysed). Anbar is initially pleased for the winner but exclaims to Ashraf 'you do not need to be *that* happy' and moves on quickly to the next caller. While this is a one-off in the episodes examined, his jealousy of Lahouh is portrayed in every episode analysed. In the 10 December 2013 episode, Ashraf explains to Anbar that he prefers Lahouh as he 'concentrates and has discipline' as opposed to Anbar, which greatly annoys Anbar who is then told by Ashraf to 'practice yoga and take deep breaths to become calm'. As made obvious by Ashraf's statements, Lahouh is the model child, which Anbar (and all other children) should aspire to be like.

Anbar, represented as an unruly child, finds reading and learning boring. Since *Anbar*, the programme is highly didactic; there is tension between the desire of the producers and presenters for the child audience to be 'affected' (to learn and benefit) by the programme, and the resistance of the primary representative of childhood, Anbar, who appears unaffected. For example in the 10 March 2014 episode, in a segment about physical education (PE) when Ashraf questions the studio guest, who is a PE teacher, if there is any positive correlation between PE and scholarship, Anbar exclaims in an exasperated fashion 'why are you talking about learning?' As noted earlier since a major theme of the programme is healthy living, each episode has a segment about nutrition. Anbar makes his aversion to healthy eating clear, as he looks bored and frustrated while the nutritionist explains the benefits of eating healthy food. For example, in the 5 January 2014 episode the healthy eating segment is about the harmful nature of sugar. Anbar looks uninterested and unconvinced by the nutritionist who gives detailed and quite complex information on the harmful nature of sugar. He keeps making banal comments, unrelated to the topic, and remains unengaged with the conversation, and occupies himself by taking selfies (pictures of himself) and hiding

under the studio table. Anbar is bewilderingly represented as a child who is completely unreceptive to the idea of eating healthy – which happens to be the main theme and aim of the programme.

Despite this representation, analysis of themes and segments in *Anbar* shows that the assumption being made about children is that they should be disciplined and calm, and they are (or should be) interested in schooling, education, healthy eating and sports. While the *Bait Byoot* studio is very simple (and low-budget)⁸⁶ and quickly assembled,⁸⁷ the set in *Anbar* is very elaborate. The table, at which Ashraf and Anbar host their guests contains a collage of high definition rotating images of football stadia and footballs (see *image 4* on *page 169*). The studio design matches Qatari strategy to become a major player in world football, as seen in the country's successful bid to host the 2022 FIFA world cup as well as Qatar's connections with major European football clubs such as Barcelona FC and Paris St-Germain. Shelves in the studio also contain footballs, as well as other sporting equipment such as a rugby ball, bowling pins, shuttlecocks, tennis racquets and the like. The shelves also contain a multitude of books as well as transparent jars filled with healthy foods, such as cereals and nuts. The studio design corresponds to the themes of sports and healthy living as well as to the guests invited to discuss the themes, such as PE instructors, football referees, yoga instructors and nutrition experts (who are present in every episode). The assumption is that all children, girls and boys, like technology and sport, especially football. This is made clear in the 14 November 2013 episode when Ashraf speaks to a female caller:

Ashraf: What is your name:
Caller: Mishal
Ashraf: Where are you from?
Caller: Saudi Arabia
Ashraf: What is your favourite sport?
Mishal: Football
Ashraf: Do you like iPads?
Caller: Yes!

⁸⁶ It is, however, the most expensive programme produced by Palestine TV, according to Samir Masry, the Head of Directors at Palestine TV (Masry, 2014).

⁸⁷ The set is assembled, by a couple of the members of the production team, approximately an hour before going on air. A few children's books are placed in the bookshelf, as well as a couple of stuffed toys, such as Sponge Bob (author's observation, 4 April 2014 and 16 May 2014).

The assumption that children like sports is already made when the presenter asks a question about the favourite sport, rather than asking if the child likes sports at all. Moreover, Anbar manages to exclude all children who do not like football by exclaiming ‘who doesn’t like football?’ when Ashraf asks the guest in the 10 March 2014 episode, who is a PE teacher, if most children like football.⁸⁸ The discussion around football, therefore, relates to themes of healthy living, but also connects with the nation –Qatar’s – branding initiatives (see Sakr and Steemers, 2016).

While the theme of healthy eating is not present in the *Bait Byoot* episodes analysed, this was a theme tackled in *Katakeet*. As seen in *chapter 6*, for the producer Hania Bitar, instructing children what to eat was an important element of the programme (Bitar, 2014). However, since child obesity is not an issue in Palestine, the theme of healthy lifestyle is not as dominant as it is in Gulf-originated content for children. The themes of healthy eating and love for sports depicted in Jeem TV’s *Anbar* are also prevalent in the Emirati animation *Mansour*. Mansour and his friends are very interested in sports and take part in many sporting competitions, such as football championships, jujitsu matches and the like. Through playing sports Mansour and his friends learn lessons about healthy competition, sportsmanship and other themes that *Anbar* discusses through the use of studio guests and documentary inserts.

The creator of the animation, Al Harmoodi, explains that since the UAE has the second highest rate of diabetes in the world, promoting a healthy lifestyle is one of the three main goals of the animation (Al Harmoodi, 2012). While *Anbar* uses nutrition experts to explain the importance of healthy eating, the animation uses Obaid, Mansour’s overweight friend to achieve this goal. Obaid is represented as a kind-hearted but slightly foolish child, as he always pre-occupied with the thought of food. He is continuously ridiculed by the narrative as there is a link drawn between being overweight and having a low intellect (see *image 7* on the next page). Throughout the first series, Obaid is shown to have lower physical as well as intellectual abilities, and often represented as a hindrance to his group of friends. In the first episode, when

⁸⁸ The PE teacher explains that in the academic year 2007/2008, the ‘spiritual father’ of sports in Qatar, Sheikh Suad Abdulrahman Al-Thanni (a member of the Qatari ruling family and its sports ambassador) along with some other Qatari nationals, set up sports clubs in all schools. Each year the clubs have a theme, with the first year theme being ‘Sports and Health’, the second ‘Sports and Family’ and the current theme (2014) is ‘Sports and Healthy Competition/Integrity’. At the end of each academic year there is a party celebrating achievements of the club based around the theme. The guest explained to Anbar that physical education helps children stay healthy and learn about teamwork, respect for rules, and how to be a good winner and loser.

Mansour and his friends are running around looking for his lost jujitsu belt, Obaid can be seen far back in the distance, out of breath as he tries to keep up with his friends. He later catches up with them, pushing them into the river as he halts at great speed. Similarly in *episode 6*, the group of friends are running on a treadmill to get physically prepared for their trip to space. Obaid cannot keep up and falls off the treadmill dragging his friend Salem down with him. In the same episode, while taking part in a game-show style quiz about space, Obaid almost loses the game for his team, as he keeps pressing the buzzer at inappropriate times and giving wrong answers as he has food on his mind. These are just some examples as most episodes of the first series contain storylines that make a correlation between Obaid's portly shape and his low IQ. In its warning to children about the perils of unhealthy eating and lack of exercise, such characterisation only leads to the victimisation of overweight children, without creating any real awareness of the causes and perils of diabetes, which is a real problem not only in the UAE but also in Palestine.



*Image 7: Obaid
Still from opening credits of Mansour.*

While *Anbar* is created for a pan-Arab audience, and *Mansour* is distributed to a pan-Arab audience through Cartoon Network, the focus on healthy eating and diet indicates that Gulf interests dominate and the preferred audience is children located in Gulf countries. While some of the health issues overlap with concerns in Palestine, such as the prevalence of Diabetes Mellitus, which is dangerously high amongst the Palestinian population (12-15% of the population) (St John Eye Hospital, 2010), child obesity and lack of activity is not a concern in Palestine (Farraj, 2014). This is in contrast to high-

income Gulf countries where increased consumption of fast-food and lack of exercise due to the hot climate has led to obesity reaching epidemic proportions (Nohair, 2014).

The next section contains a very brief look at the ways in which the three texts introduce gender roles to Arab children.

7.5. REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER: GIRLHOOD AND MOTHERHOOD

As noted in *chapter 2*, ethnographic literature demonstrates that childhood in the Arab world is a very gendered concept, as men and women have different memories of growing up (Davis and Davis 1995; Dorsky and Stephenson, 1995; Fernea, 1995). According to Davis and Davis (1995) males and females in Arab families tend to accept their traditional gender roles, and parents enforce these willingly too (p. 94-97). Raddi Al Wannani, the Director of Nablus-based NGO Youth without Borders explains that in Palestine, especially in villages, girls have limited space to express themselves outside the domestic sphere, as girls are expected to help with household chores, like cooking and looking after younger siblings. Al Wannani (2014) explains:

Girls are [treated] as women after the age of 15; they have added pressures and responsibilities at home. Lack of freedom is also commonplace as due to security concerns for girls as well as wider cultural concerns, girls are not allowed outside the house after a certain time [...] and age. Boys do not face the same problem and have it slightly easier in this regards as they still have the opportunity, however limited, to express themselves outside the house.

Due to this context, Wala'a Battat, the presenter of the Palestinian programme *Bait Byoot* explains, in an interview, that the issue of gender equality is very close to her heart and a subject she likes to address in her programme. In the 21 March 2014 episode of *Bait Byoot*, Wala'a's professed passion for gender parity becomes evident. In the episode dedicated to celebrating 'International Women's Day', the theme concentrates on the division of domestic workload. All featured segments in this episode relate to gender equality in households, encouraging parents to treat their sons and daughters

equally. The *Bseer ou Mabseer* segment depicts a small family of four (acted out by the puppets). The scenario begins with the children returning from school with their exam results. While revelling in the achievement of his son, the father ignores his daughter, Shireen's excellent grades, which are far higher than his son's. This upsets Shireen, as well as her mother, who complains to her husband that he should have congratulated his daughter, to which he replies 'what is the point, she will be getting married soon anyway.' After the end of the clip, Wala'a and the puppet presenter Saeed discuss the clip expressing sadness at the inequality shown by the father. Wala'a sums up the segment with an impassioned speech addressing young boys:

There is no difference between boys and girls [...] and there shouldn't be [...] In households we shouldn't leave all work for the girls [...] there is no difference between boys and girls. After girls graduate from school, they will be studying with you in university, and then after that you will be working together *Inshallah* (God Willing), so there is no difference between you and girls.

However, while professing the merits of gender parity, the presenter automatically reverts to the age-old gender stereotype of girls liking pink, and boys blue. Saeed, the puppet, borrows Wala'a's pink tablet and after thanking her for it complains about the colour, as he would rather have a blue one, to which Wala'a replies 'sorry I forgot that you are a boy', reaffirming the traditional idea that boys do not (and should not) like pink. The rhetoric of gender equity sits uneasily next to the promotion of 'a highly gender-segregated world, along traditional and stereotypical constructs of femininity and masculinity' (Lemish, 2014: 179).

In the three texts analysed, Wala'a is the only female led, as *Anbar* is presented by males – an adult and two puppets; and *Mansour*, which while containing strong female characters towards the latter half of the series, revolves mostly around three young boys. In *Anbar*, while the studio is a male-dominated space, they tend to steer away from traditional representations of masculinity and are often seen wearing pink clothes. In the 5 January 2014 episode, both presenter and puppet are wearing matching pink collared shirts. However, it is important to note that in every episode analysed the nutrition expert has always been female, and the sports representative (except for yoga) has mostly been male, reaffirming traditional stereotypes about gender and work. While *Mansour* is also a male-dominated space, episodes in the second half of the series

attempts to tackle the idea that certain kinds of sports are masculine pursuits. For example, in *episode 13* a young girl, who makes an entrance wearing a long red traditional dress, with her beautiful long hair tied up with a flowery red headband, is introduced. A few episodes later (*episode 16*) she re-appears as an anonymous character (wearing a mask to disguise herself) who beats Mansour to win a jujitsu competition. She reveals her identity at the end of the episode, raising many questions about femininity and the exclusion of girls from certain sports (see *images 8 and 9* below). While creating an acceptance for girls in combat sports, the fact that she has to disguise herself as a boy to compete also reveals something about Arab societies' acceptance or rather lack of acceptance of girls' participating in traditionally male-dominated sports.



*Images 8 and 9: Jujitsu competition
Stills from Mansour, episode 16*

Along with notions of girlhood, the concept of motherhood has also changed greatly in Gulf society, as more women have entered the workforce, leading to an increased reliance on nannies. According to statistics from 2012, 96% of Emirati families employ domestic workers to take care of their children and 'domestic workers perform an estimated 80% of parental responsibilities' (Migrant-Rights Org, 2015). With more women working and nannies becoming an important part of children's lives, this issue

was brought up by Emirati children in a ‘Children’s Parliament’ organised by the government in 2000 to fulfil Article 12 (Respect for the view of the Child) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). One of the issues the children raised was the excessive time they spent with nannies, as mothers worked long hours and were exhausted when they returned home. In a meeting with the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Treaty Body) to discuss the report, one of the delegates from the UAE team explained that since ‘children wanted to be able to talk to their mothers more, and had requested more time with their mothers [...] courses had been organized to impress upon mothers how important it was to spend time with their children’ (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2002b: 10). Another report suggested that such courses would impress on Emirati mothers to ‘play their natural role in the family’ (United Arab Emirates, 2001: 70).

In line with such suggestions, Mansour’s mother, Mariam plays this ‘natural role in the family’ and the family does not have a nanny. Mariam is portrayed as a stay-at-home mother, who describes her interests as ‘poetry, painting and arts, and above all, my family’ (Trade Arabia, 2012). However, the character is not well developed and lacks depth. While the mother is often present in the text, she is almost always in the background, mostly in the kitchen, tending to domestic chores; and there is not much known about her. Despite being described in Emirati newspapers as a ‘leading light in our young hero's life’ (Khaleej Times, 2012), Mansour and his mother have limited interactions in the animation and there is no evidence of a meaningful relationship between the two. While his father is a very busy pilot and plays an important role in Mansour’s life and his career ambitions, the mother is not shown to have any value. The only time Mansour’s mother is shown to take any initiative is in *episode 8*, when she comes up with a plan for her busy husband to make a video presentation for Mansour’s ‘me and my father’ school project. However, the role she plays is secondary, that of an assistant and a facilitator. Whereas the animation tackles the perceived problem of working mothers by placing the mother in the domestic sphere, it ignores children’s complaints that they do not spend enough time with their mothers. As noted earlier, Mansour relies on his robot Nano, and not his mother, for parental advice and guidance. In contrast to the representation of motherhood, the representation of the professional woman is much more diverse. *Ustaada* (Teacher) Nahla, a schoolteacher and Dr. Layla,

an aeronautics specialist, are not referred to by their marital status and there is no indication as to whether they are married or have families of their own. In the case of the two professional women, especially Dr. Layla, physical appearance as well as other characteristics conform as well as defy traditional gender stereotypes. Introduced in *episode 7*, Dr. Layla is bright and intelligent but also conforms to the male gaze as she is beautiful, has an hourglass figure and sways her hips when she walks (*episode 7*), showing that women can be both beautiful (sexy even) and intelligent.⁸⁹ While Dr. Layla is young and attractive, she is not passive, and has authority, a trait traditionally associated with men. Lemish (2014) explains this dual conceptualisation in the context of the third-wave feminist notion that women can be both feminist and feminine that is to say ‘one can be an independent and smart girl and still enjoy displaying girlish sensibilities and feminine performances’ (p. 183). Similarly, Ustaada Nahla, a female schoolteacher, shows that being tough and feminine are not binary positions. She wears red lipstick, big red hoop earrings, red heels and has bouffant hair sticking out of her headscarf. She is often portrayed as foolish as the children play pranks on her. However, in *episode 8*, there is power shift between her (female) and the (male) children as she knocks out Obaid, one of the boys, with her professional karate moves, after he tries to steal her handbag in an elaborate prank. As soon as she realises she is being mugged, she karate chops Obaid, picks him up off the floor with one hand, growls at him and then kicks him to the ground with her red heeled sandals. Despite the animation being about a group of boys,⁹⁰ the presence of the three strong female characters (Dr. Layla, Ustaada Nahla, and the Jujitsu champion),⁹¹ allows for the construction of a multi-layered representation of womanhood and girlhood. While conforming to traditional notions of femininity (appearance wise at least), the three female characters are presented as empowered and active.

⁸⁹ Peterson’s (2005) analysis of regional magazines for Arab children shows that this construction is not present. For example, *Zakia Al Dakiyya* (Zakiya the Bright One) one of the main characters in *Majid* magazine is very intelligent, but she does not fit with the stereotypical standards of beauty, as she wears big glasses and has buckteeth.

⁹⁰ The young jujitsu champion is more heavily featured in the narrative of the last few episodes of the animation (episodes 16-25) as she and Mansour’s younger sister Sara, join Mansour and his friends on some of their adventures.

⁹¹ Not given a name in the animation, but confusingly given the same name in the credits – Layla – as the aeronautical specialist.

7.6. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the two magazine programmes, *Anbar* and *Bait Byoot*, demonstrates that while there are some characteristics unique to Palestinian programming, the positioning of children and the ‘modes of address’ are similar in the pan-Arab and the Palestinian programme, and there are common assumptions and idealisations of childhood. The notion of childhood in both the local and pan-Arab magazines is based on a developmental psychology understanding of children as irrational, incomplete and in need of protection (and control). Adults are always present in the world of children – instructing, teaching and directing. Both programmes are based on moralising themes and didactic messaging and in the bright moral universe of *Anbar* and *Bait Byoot*, children are constructed as simple and easily distracted. *Anbar*, the puppet is a ‘mischievous boy’ whose age is not specified, but is constructed as foolish, clumsy, jealous and competitive. While *Lahloul*, the globetrotting puppet, gives some agency to children and provides an alternative representation of childhood, he is in the background and a much less visible representation of childhood than *Anbar*.

Mansour, on the other hand challenges dominant (adult-generated) definitions of childhood present in Arab societies, by presenting childhood as an identity construction *for* children and *by* children. The eponymous character represents the Nickelodeon version of childhood – independent, capable, makes decisions, and does not need adults to guide him. Because the genre of animation allows the flexibility to background adults, which is more challenging in magazine programmes hosted by adults, *Mansour* is able to create an identity for children, as separate, or even in opposition to adults. As opposed to the adults, the children are producers as well as consumers of media and technology. By constructing childhood as a dynamic space of empowerment and providing diverse representations of girlhood and womanhood, *Mansour*, places Arab children in the public sphere and addresses them as ‘citizens’, which is missing in both the Palestinian and pan-Arab magazine programmes.

The animation, however (as well as Jeem TV’s *Anbar*), represents interests (such as child obesity) and practices (such as attitudes towards public servants) from the Gulf perspective, which is not always relevant to the Palestinian context. Carrying on from

here, the next chapter looks at identity construction in the three texts to ascertain the different techniques used to create an 'imagined community' of Palestinian and Arab children. The construction of the child as a citizen and a (universal) consumer will be discussed in the context of the construction of an 'imagined community' of Arab children.

Chapter 8: Representation of National, Regional and Religious Identity

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8.1. INTRODUCTION

As noted in previous chapters, in the Arab world satellite television is seen as an important tool for the development of a ‘public sphere’ and belonging to the nation, enabling a shared imagination of not only the *qawm* (national community) and the *watan* (homeland) but also the wider regional community based on linguistic and cultural similarity (*Al-Qawmiyya Al-‘Arabiyya*) as well as religious solidarity (*Al Ummah Al Islamiyya*) (see *chapters 1* and *3*). Since pan-Arab television appeals to both Arab and Islamic levels of Palestinian identity, this chapter looks at how *Anbar* and *Mansour* construct the child audience in order to appeal to children from different Arab countries and the diaspora. This chapter also looks specifically at the techniques deployed by the Palestinian programme *Bait Byoot* to capture Palestinian children’s imagination and loyalty, and the way these sentiments and ideas about Palestine (the *qawm* as well as the *watan*) are employed to develop a sense of national solidarity.

This chapter will apply perspectives gleaned from children’s regional magazines and videogames in *chapter 3* (in particular *section 3.4*) to analyse the techniques deployed by the three texts to construct an ‘imagined community’ of Arab children. As the three programmes are broadcast in different Arabic dialects, another layer of analysis is to discern whether the language used relies on national (Palestinian, Emirati, Qatari), regional (pan-Arab), or religious (Islamic) sensibilities. This chapter then investigates the way language and discursive techniques are used to affirm these identities through the construction of the ‘other’.

8.2. THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY OF ARAB CHILDREN

It is important to note that the Palestinian context assumes important particularities due to contested borders as well as the decades long struggle for national liberation. Due to the distinctive socio-political context (see *chapter 1*) it is therefore not surprising that the fostering of national identity is much more politicised in *Bait Byoot* than it is in the other two Arab programmes. As noted in *chapter 1*, the idea of ‘nation’ in Palestine is not rooted in the idea of a sovereign state. While the ‘State of Palestine’, as recognised

by the United Nations, consists of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza, many use the term 'Palestine' to imply the former territory of the British mandate (west of the Jordan River, including all of Israel). In the West Bank Israel is commonly referred to as '1948 Palestine' and Palestinian citizens of Israel (who account for 20% of the Israeli population) are referred to as '1948 Arabs'. All socialising agents in Palestinian society, whether the family or educational institutions or the media, are involved in fostering the child's sense of belonging not only to the national community (*qawm*) but also to 1948 Palestine – a specific territorial home land (*watan*) (Hart, 2000: 111).

Due to a sophisticated permit regime employed by the Israeli occupation, Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem are separated and cannot physically interact with each other without special permission (which is rarely granted) from the Israeli state. Moreover, even in the West Bank, travel between cities, villages and towns is difficult due to road closures and diversions, as well as the threat of settler violence. Therefore, the concept of 'imagining' a *qawm* or national community, that transcends physical borders is important for the defining and redefining of Palestinian nationalism. The host of *Bait Byoot*, Wala'a Battat, sees it as her patriotic duty to encourage Palestinian children to imagine each other (Battat, 2014) and hence in various episodes analysed calls on Palestinian children living in Israel⁹² to visit the set in Ramallah and interact with children in the West Bank and Gaza through her programme. She 'virtually' introduces them to each other, and encourages callers from the West Bank and Gaza to phone in and speak to their Palestinian 'brothers and sisters' from 'Palestine 48'.

Moreover, through the live-action segment *Bladi Ana* (My country), the programme introduces children to different cities, town and villages in Palestine and Israel, teaching children about their *watan* or homeland. While the episodes analysed only contain trips within the West Bank, the host confirms in interviews that the segment has also featured the Gaza Strip as well as Arab cities in Israel (for example Haifa and Jaffa) (Battat, 2014). In the episodes analysed the focus of the segments has been on the natural beauty of the 'land' as well as the friendly and hospitable nature of its 'people'. For example, in the 13 June 2014 episode, Marwan (the puppet co-host) and his friend Souad go on a

⁹² Palestinian citizens of Israel can mostly enter the West Bank without requiring special permission or documentation.

school trip to the city of Jericho. They admire the beauty of the city and describe its various attributes as they ride a funicular. On spotting some tourists, Marwan shouts to them ‘welcome welcome to Palestine, welcome everyone [...] all foreigners are welcome to Palestine’, and then he whispers to his companion Souad:

You know Palestine is much better than Europe. There are so many foreigners in Palestine [...] Jericho is so beautiful; it is famous all over the world for its bananas and oranges.

Later Souad notices some African tourists in traditional garb and wonders out loud about where they are from to which Marwan responds:

Oh we love people from all over the world.

While such clips which construct Palestinian people as loving, open and hospitable, and instil a sense of love and pride for the land (fertile and beautiful) could be found in other Arab programmes, what is unique to *Bait Byoot* is the attempt to keep alive the memory of a specific territorial homeland, the *watan*, which Palestinian children do not have permission to enter. The national imagination is important not only for refugee and internally displaced children living in the West Bank and Gaza, but also for those living in Palestinian camps in other Arab countries as well as in the diaspora in Europe and America. Since on the basis of birth to a Palestinian parent a child is automatically assumed to belong to a specific city, town or village in the *watan*, being able to name the family village that was lost more than 60 years ago (in 1948) is highly valued in terms of expressing belonging and continuity (Hart, 2000: 111-112).

As noted in *chapter 1*, the Palestinian refugees right to return is a key stumbling block in the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Themes presented in *Bait Byoot* match the popular Palestinian sentiment of a mass return, and each episode analysed referenced the refugees right to return. The theme of keeping alive the memory of the *watan* is most apparent in the 16 May 2014 episode,⁹³ broadcast on the day after the annual commemoration of the *Nakba* (catastrophe). The programme starts with a solemn looking Wala’a (the host), dressed in all black – black shirt, embossed with the

⁹³ http://www.pbc.ps/tv_programs.php?id=60&more=1

words *Al 'Awda* (The Return) and an image of the key of return⁹⁴ – a huge contrast to her usually very colourful outfits. While the term *Al-Awda*, simply means ‘Return’ in the Arabic language, in the Palestinian dialect, it has a very emotive and political significance, as it refers to the ‘The Palestinian Right to Return’ to the lands lost in 1948 (now Israel).

Following in the footsteps of *Shara'a Simsim* and *Katakeet*, *Bait Byoot* is broadcast in the local dialect.⁹⁵ While the decision to use the local dialect, according to Mohammad Farraj (2014), the producer of *Bait Byoot*, is related to programming norms, whereby entertainment programmes are broadcast in local dialect, and educational programmes in MSA, the use of the local language is instrumental in realising the programme’s aim of fostering national pride. Similarly as noted in *chapter 6*, despite being an educational programme, for Daoud Kuttab (2016) the Executive Producer of *Shara'a Simsim*, the decision to use the local dialect over MSA was straightforward, at least among the production team,⁹⁶ due to the belief that to reach Palestinian children, one has to speak to them in their local dialect. While the stated goals of *Shara'a Simsim* (Kuttab, 2016) and *Bait Byoot* (Farraj, 2014) are also similar in regards to the aim of fostering national pride, while the former is based on cultural symbols, the latter is built around fiercely political messages. This again is not surprising given that *Bait Byoot* is made by local producers on the payroll of the Palestinian Authority, where as *Shara'a Simsim*, despite being created by local producers, was funded by USAID, and content was regulated by the Sesame Workshop in New York.

Themes presented in *Bait Byoot* and the rhetoric and discourse employed by the hosts calls on an unquestionable sense of belonging. The use of colloquial Arabic allows the host to invoke Palestinian symbolism and jargon and frame the fight for national liberation as a purely Palestinian one, rather than an Arab or Islamic cause. In the Nakba episode (16 May 2014), Wala'a, the host opens the show with an impassioned speech:

⁹⁴ The key is a symbol of Palestinian right to return. When Palestinian refugees left their homes in 1948 and 1967, they took their keys with them in the belief that they would be returning soon. The key is passed down generations as a symbol of the refugees’ desire to return to their homelands (see *chapter 1*).

⁹⁵ Even though, interestingly, it does use Modern Standard Arabic in the news section of the programme, as all news programmes in the Arabic world utilise MSA, rather than local dialects.

⁹⁶ Of course, as noted in *chapter 5*, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education did not agree.

Today, like every year, 15 May, we talk about the Nakba [...] my friends, what the Nakba is and what happened to our parents and grandparents from Haifa and Jaffa [cities in historic Palestine, now Israel] [...] who all became refugees [...] I am going to tell you about this today [...] and this still happens to us [...] every day [in Palestine] people die, and every day people get imprisoned and live in very bad conditions [...] Every day they [Israel] kill our parents, grandparents, our friends [...] but we will return, we will return to Palestine 1948 soon [...]

The entire episode is dedicated to the *Nakba* and all callers to the programme are tested about their knowledge of this historical event. Children of all ages show their extensive knowledge and Wala'a adds more information to supplement their knowledge, using populist rhetoric such as 'we are going to return [to our lands] tomorrow'⁹⁷ *Insha'Allah* (God willing)'. The episode also contains recitations of nationalistic poems and songs from the children in the studio. For example, a young girl recites a poem which contains the sentence '[...] Alas for the refugees who were banished from the cities and villages of Palestine that is called Israel today' to which the host replies 'Bravo, bravo! I want to tell you *asdaaqana al atfaal* (our children friends) that the land was stolen from us and we will return to it one day! We will continue to defy the occupation and will continue to stand firm against the occupation until our land is returned to us and Jerusalem is ours.'⁹⁸

The host also questions the children (in the studio and the callers) regarding the city or village in the *watan* the children are from. She explains to Yahya, a guest who answers that his family were originally from Ramle (a town in Israel) that he should 'always remember that you have a home, where you will go to and you live there one day.' The preservation of this particular refugee identity is also reflected in the *Seer Ou Mabaseer* segment of the episode. The narrative around the sketch is as follows: Marwan, the young boy (puppet co-host) is standing at the door to his home in the refugee camp complaining to his grandmother that the camp is horrible and that he hates it. The grandmother replies that their land in '1948 Palestine' is beautiful and fertile, to which Marwan asks why they left. The grandmother explains the story of the *Nakba* telling Marwan that people got scared and fled when the Israeli army attacked their village. Black and white documentary footage of the events is played while she relays the story.

⁹⁷ The word 'tomorrow' here is used in a metaphorical, rather than literal sense.

⁹⁸ The text from this episode is in fact picked up by Palestine Media Watch (PMW, no date), the Israeli media watchdog, mentioned in *chapter 5*. It is available to view on the organisation's website (<http://www.palwatch.org/main.aspx?fi=844>).

She explains that those beautiful lands that they left behind are waiting for them, and he should keep the hope alive that one day they will return, adding:

If you do not return, you have to tell the story to your son, and your son's son. We have to remember that our land is the best in the world. And remember in the camp things are not great, but the people, they are great.

This story reassures Marwan that his life in the miserable camp is only temporary and he has a bright future to look forward to. Marwan leaves his grandmother happy and skipping saying that he is going to go ask all his classmates where they are originally from. After the sketch, back in the studio, Wala'a sums up the story:

He [Marwan] is bored of the refugee camp, he says [to his grandmother] I want to leave the refugee camp, didn't you tell me we have land elsewhere?, he is bored but when his grandmother tells him the whole story he decided to wait, because they will return soon to their beautiful houses and land.

The message of '*Al Awda*' (the return) has become more symbolic than realistic as members of the Palestinian Authority have privately and publically relinquished the right to return to their homelands (for example the Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas publically waived his right to return to Safad, the town from which his family were forced to flee in 1948).⁹⁹ Marshall's (2015) ethnography with Palestinian children in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus shows a desire amongst children to improve the conditions of refugee camps, which is a departure from the steadfastness with which older Palestinian generations 'avoided outward improvements to the camp out of a desire to maintain their refugee identity and right of return' (Marshall, 2015: 191). The message of patience presented in *Bait Byoot* can be seen as a way to keep Palestinian children from rebelling against the dire conditions of their lives (perhaps to prevent a third *intifada* from breaking out). This corresponds to a study on children's literature by the Tamer Institute which concludes that Palestinian children's literature after 2001 (the beginning of the second *Intifada*) was much more conciliatory and the concept of resistance was based on patience and humility, as opposed to literature before 2001, which used populist rhetoric about armed struggle (Al-Hashish and Al-Khadur, 2011). The incoherent messages presented by *Bait Byoot* – using populist, nationalist rhetoric of the patriotic acts of resistance on the one hand, and using language to appease the

⁹⁹ See Sherwood, 2012

population on the other – parallel the rhetoric of the Palestinian Authority, a government which has lost considerable legitimacy with its people, as evidenced by Hamas’s landslide win in the 2006 elections.

Moreover, analysis of *Bait Byoot* also points to the weakening of the political project of pan-Arabism – in which Palestine occupied such a central place (see *chapter 3*). While the programme attempts to connect children to both the *qawm* as well as the *watan*, there is little evidence that the programme is interested in fostering a sense of belonging to the Arab nation (*Al-Qawmiyya Al-‘Arabiyya*) or the Islamic community (*Ummah*). While there is a segment entitled *Basat Areeh* (Magic Carpet), in which the host travels on a magic carpet to different countries, there is no preference shown for Arab or Muslim cities over other cities (Farraj, 2014). The symbols of local Palestinian culture (embroidered dresses, folklore) and political resistance (*handala*, the key of return, map of 1948 Palestine) are central to the representation of Palestine rather than images that demonstrate the wider religious or political significance of the land. The primary identity construction is based on national (Palestinian) affiliation and not pan-Arab or Islamic as the contemporary identity promoted by *Bait Byoot* is based on the *watan* and keeping the memory of the homeland alive.

Anbar, produced by Al Jazeera Children’s Channel for a pan-Arab audience also points to the waning of pan-Arabism as an ideology. Qatar is often quoted as the last ‘Arabist nation standing’ (Gaub, 2014: 1), and some in the region saw the creation of Al-Jazeera in 1996 as influential to the revival of pan-Arabism. Qatar is also often described as suffering from a ‘small-state syndrome’ (Ibid) as the country is perceived to be projecting political and economic power in the Arab world by taking a lead role in local politics of Arab countries.¹⁰⁰ In regards to Palestinian politics, Qatar was behind the Palestinian statehood bid at the United Nations in 2011; it facilitated re-conciliation talks between *Hamas* and *Fatah* in 2013, and bailed out the Palestinian Authority in the same year by investing a US \$1 billion into construction projects in the West Bank (Ibid: 2). However, in the episodes of *Anbar* analysed, there is no mention of Palestine

¹⁰⁰ Some examples: Qatar mediated between Hezbollah and other Lebanese parties in the 2008 political unrest and also joined NATO’s toppling of Gaddafi in Libya.

or any politics for that matter. While it is not surprising that a children's television programme would steer clear of politics, it is significant in a context in which pan-Arab video games, literature and print magazines for children have traditionally utilised populist rhetoric and political themes, especially in relation to the occupation of Palestine, which is framed as an Arab and a Muslim issue (see Sisler, 2013; Karimi and Gruber, 2012; Sisler 2008; Peterson, 2005) (see also *chapter 3*).

Anbar relies primarily on an apolitical and commercial notion of pan-Arab belonging. While *Anbar* uses Modern Standard Arabic (as is language policy of Jeem TV), based on the classical language of the Quran, the programme rarely discusses Islam or defines children by their Islamic identity. Similar to *Bait Byoot*, which invites children from different Palestinian areas to 'imagine' each other, *Anbar* invites children from different Arab countries to 'imagine' each other. For example, children who call to participate in the live competition to win an iPad are asked their names and country of origin, rather than age or any other questions. The name and country of origin is then duly broadcast on screen while the child is taking part in the competition. Children from the diaspora are also asked to give the name of the Arab country they 'belong' to. For example on the 5 January 2014 episode, a young caller Jihad who tells the host he is from France is asked which country he is originally from and it is Tunisia (his country of origin) and not France (his country of birth) that is presented on the screen. Jeem TV has other initiatives where Arab children can interact with each other, through the website as well as in person. The television channel runs an annual football tournament entitled 'Jeem Cup' whereby schools in Arab countries compete with each other, and winners play winners from other countries. Matches are broadcast on television and are available to screen online (<http://www.jeemtv.net/en/shows/jeem-cup-matches>). Furthermore, an online game related to this tournament allows children to play virtually. While the Jeem TV website is bi-lingual – available in both Arabic and English – the drop-down menu only contains Arab countries and children are hence only able to represent Arab countries.

Besides these references to separate Arab nations, the programme rarely reference Arab culture or traditions. As noted earlier in the chapter, each episode contains clips and guests speaking about different sports and foods, as well as a travel report from *Lahouh*,

the roving journalist. None of the five episodes analysed (from November 2013-March 2014) contain any reference to Arab or Islamic foods, cities or history. The sports included have been yoga (twice), football, archery and high jump. The archery episode contains a documentary insert from South Korea. Travel reports have been from the city of Plovdiv in Bulgaria, a butterfly garden in Thailand, ancient tribes on the Thailand-Myanmar border, and a bakery in France.¹⁰¹ The few locally produced clips used as inserts are set locally in Qatar, such as the 10 March 2014 episode, which includes a clip of physical education classes in Doha. Moreover, while some of the guests (nutritionists, sports instructors etc.) are non-Qatari Arabs (as evident from their accents), as seen in *chapter 7* they speak of issues, such as healthy eating and exercise, from a Qatari perspective. All guests are Qatar-based; speak, for the most part, in Modern Standard Arabic; and are identified by their job title, rather than country of origin.¹⁰² Despite *Anbar* calling on Arab children to imagine each other, the programme reflects Qatari interests and sensibilities.

Similarly on *Mansour*, Islam or the Arab world is rarely referred to. Rashed Al Harmoodi, the creator of the animation, explains that one of the main aims of the programme is to preserve Arabic ‘our mother tongue, the language of the Quran, which we want to keep safe in our hearts and in our lives’ (Al Harmoodi, 2012). While Mansour and his friends wear traditional Emirati clothes, and they speak the local Emirati dialect of Arabic, there is no focus on Arab or Islamic heritage or holidays. While few scenes, especially ones involving Mansour’s grandfather, reflect themes of national culture such as pearl diving and fishing, there is no sense of a regional or religious sense of belonging.¹⁰³ The only reference to the Arab world comes in *episode 16*, during the Jujitsu competition, where flags from different Arab countries hang in the school gymnasium (see *image 8* on *page 188*).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, English is portrayed as the language of modernity (in the narrow sense of access to technology), as while the animation is in Arabic, all information presented in written form on the gadgets, such as NANO, is in the English language.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.jeemtv.net/en/shows/anbar>

¹⁰² Guests sometimes break into their own dialects, as MSA is not a spoken dialect. Moreover, even when Arabs speak in MSA, the accent can usually give away their country or region of origin.

¹⁰³ *Saqer*, Mansour’s grandfather, is a former pearl diver who is described as ‘an embodiment of Emirati heritage and a rock in Mansour’s life’ (Khaleej Times, 2012). In the centuries before oil was discovered, pearling was the main source of income for the UAE, and hence Saqer’s character is used as a connection to UAE’s past.

¹⁰⁴ The Bahraini, Saudi and UAE flags are the only identifiable flags. The rest are simply different patterns of red and green that could be Arab flags but are not in reality.

Since the affluent family in Abu Dhabi provides the context for childhood, geographies created for the child audience draw on ‘glocal’, rather than a religious or regional sense of space and time. *Mansour* is set in very material world, a world where children have access to money and gadgets and participate in international sporting events, defining the conception of childhood as a market category. For example, in *episode 13*, Mansour and his friends participate in ‘F1 in Schools’, an international competition in which school children work in small teams and follow the same processes real Formula One teams follow – from creating a business plan and gaining corporate sponsorship to manufacturing and testing the car using high-tech software. On race day 20-meter ‘F1 in schools’ racetrack are used to see who has designed and manufactured the fastest car (F1 in schools, no date). In *episode 13*, Mansour and his friends, dressed in sharp suits, rather than the national dress (white, ankle length robe) they usually wear, attend business meetings and secure 2000 AED (UAE Dirham), equivalent to UK £ 350, for their team to participate.

The animation is, therefore, both a cultural product and a commodity, as the ideal audience created ‘has to be reasonably affluent and educated, not only able to afford the goods depicted, but also be familiar with them’ (Peterson, 2005: 183). This focus on technology¹⁰⁵ and the access to elite events and products excludes Arab children from less privileged and rural backgrounds, where television is still the prevalent platform. Similarly in *Anbar*, the competition prize is an iPad, and only the children who know how to use an iPad or have use for one will phone in and participate in the live quiz. For Palestinian children living in refugee camps or even in middle-income households, while they are able to watch *Mansour* or *Anbar*, the goods depicted in them are out of their ‘social imagination’ (Ibid), that is to say they can consume the cultural product, but not the world created by the texts.

While *Bait Byoot* calls on a purely local Palestinian sense of time and place, both *Anbar* and *Mansour* invoke a ‘glocal’ sense of time. The next section looks at the ways in

¹⁰⁵ The addiction to technology is also represented in comedic manner as the protagonist’s brother, Nasser, a business studies student at university, who is the sole representative of the stage of youth in the animation is shown to be addicted to his phone, much to the annoyance of his family. He is glued to his phone everywhere. At Mansour’s Jujitsu match, he is on his phone and his grandfather gets so annoyed that he pushes it out of his hands (*episode 16*).

which *Bait Byoot* and *Mansour* affirm the constructions of identity presented to children in opposition to the ‘other’.

8.3. REPRESENTATION OF THE ‘OTHER’

Since the Israeli occupation is such an important part of Palestinian children’s lives and the only Israelis they encounter are members of the Israeli army they face at checkpoints and roadblocks, children’s impression of Israelis is unsurprisingly negative. These negative ideas of the ‘other’ are re-iterated by the host of *Bait Byoot*, who mentioned the impact of the Israeli occupation in every episode analysed, referring to Israel in a scathing fashion, mirroring adult Palestinian programming (news and discussion programmes). In an interview, Wala’a Battat, the host explains that it is her duty to mention the rights that Israel violates. She explains that she has the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) memorised by heart. She adds that in the programme:

We constantly talk about Child Rights [...] we always talk about children’s rights because it is very much violated in Palestine [...] [For example] the child who has been arrested by Israel is a child who is forced into a situation just because he was at a peaceful demonstration or maybe he was just going to school. There are many rights that Israel violates. So it is our duty to mention them [...] these children are considered heroes because they are keeping patient in a situation that they are forced into it [...] normally they should have lived their childhood away from all this injustice (Battat, 2014).

In the 13 June 2014 episode, a 12-year-old caller, Ayah from Ramallah phones in and when asked about her summer holiday plans, the following conversation takes place:

Ayah: I will go to Al Quds [Jerusalem] for Eid [Muslim celebration] and I will pray there, and make special prayer for my bother who passed away. I will also pray for all the prisoners.

Na’os (the puppet host): Ayah is a very nice girl because she is remembering the political prisoners and this is a matter that we should all remember.

Wala’a: Yes. The prisoners are in prison. They are on a hunger strike since 50 days. They are striking because Israel, the occupier is not giving them their rights.

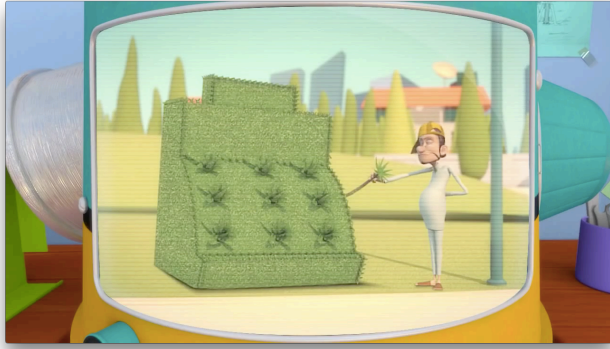
Such conversations are commonplace on the programme as issues of political prisoners, children in Israeli jails, martyred children as well as everyday struggles of living under occupation is brought up repeatedly by all participants – the host, the puppets, as well as children. The occupation is such an integral part of Palestinian life and every-day hardships that Israel, the ‘enemy’ is referenced not only in poetry recitations and nationalistic songs, but also in every-day discussions, as noted above such as innocent conversations about summer holidays. While the Palestinian programme is much more obviously political and re-produces dominant ideologies of the ‘other’, the animation *Mansour* is also culpable of reproducing dominant ideologies of non-Arabs. Migrant workers are featured heavily in the animation, revealing the different ways in which the UAE perceives and relates to non-nationals (the ‘other’). The important role that migrant workers play in the national imagination of Emiratis is stark, as this social group feature heavily in the animation and is present in the text from the very first episode. In *episode 1*, Mansour has lost his jujitsu belt and believing that it has been stolen goes on a mission to find the thief. *Nano* suggests a list of three suspects; the names and descriptions of the suspects show up on Nano’s screen as follows:

1. **Shawkat**, Age: 32; Height: 5,6’; Skill: Cooking; Location: Kitchen
2. **Shakoor**; Age: 31; Height: 5, 2’; Skill: Cutting; Location: Garden.
3. **Tareq**; Age 30: height: 5, 8’; Skill: teaching; Location: Classroom.

The first two characters are migrant workers; *Shawkat* is the school chef and *Shakoor* the house gardener. They are both foreign labourers who speak in broken Arabic, with South Asian accents. Their voices, accents, and use of language, as well as every aspect of scenes that includes the two characters can be viewed an attempt to ‘denigrate and compartmentalize’ (Lippi-Green, 1997) foreign workers into an archetype that fills misconceptions of foreign workers in the Gulf region. Both characters are short (5,6’ and 5,2’), have unattractive features (hunchback, big moles, potbelly, squint), and are ridiculed by Mansour and his friends, providing a racist platform to air social and cultural issues in a comedic and flippant manner. Both the language and appearance of the characters presents a series of coded racial stereotypes, as the animation disseminates messages of exclusion, cultural and linguistic inferiority and ultimately

racism. Lippi-Green (1997), found through her analysis of language use in Disney films that the entertainment industry teaches children to 'be comfortable with the same [accent or ethnicity as theirs] and to be wary about other accents, and that language is a prime and ready diagnostic for this division between what is approachable and what is best left alone' (p. 103).

Besides the appearance and accent of the characters, the storylines of the animation also perpetuate racist representations of migrant workers in Gulf society. For example, after being listed as a suspect, Shakoor, the gardener, makes his first appearance in *episode 4*, as he sells an energy drink to Mansour. He is very quick to take the money from Mansour and the character is developed as someone not to trust as he stands to profit from children. Shakoor is a recurrent character throughout the first series, and the subplots constructed around him provide a platform for this mistrust and bigotry. In *episode 6* he comes to haunt Mansour in a dream – he is in a space ship, laughing in a stereotypical Hollywood villain fashion while chasing a terrified Mansour across the Arabian desert. He catches up with Mansour, presses a button on the spaceship to destroy Mansour with a look of wicked glee in his eyes, and then luckily Mansour awakes from his sleep to realise that it was only a nightmare. The scene has no relevance to the narrative of the episode other than re-confirming what the audience learnt from earlier episodes about the devious nature of Shakoor. After a lengthy absence, he re-appears in *episode 17* as Mansour and his friends are lamenting the fact that Mansour did not win the first place medal at the Jujitsu competition. He is once again portrayed as a greedy profiteer as he offers to help the children steal the gold medal for a small fee. Obaid, Mansour's friend tells him off and calls him an *afrit* (imp/demon), this time the producers' clearly spelling out Shakoor's nature for the child audience (*see images 10, 11 and 12 on page 207*).



*Image 10: Shakoor carves a garden bush into a cash register
Still from Mansour, episode 17*



*Image 11: Shakoor conning Mansour out of money.
Still from Mansour, episode 17*



*Image 12: Shakoor counting the money he received from Mansour
Still from Mansour, episode 17*

Shaukat, the second suspect on the list is the school cook and is introduced in *episode 6*. Once again he has South Asian features and speaks in broken Arabic. In the continuation episode (*episode 7*) he is shown to be cooking up something in the kitchen which leads to him presenting some pills to the children, claiming they contain vitamins and proteins. Against their better judgment and initial protests, the friends decide to take the pills and one of them swallows it, which leads to his mouth burning. In the end of the episode the children see a crying Shaukat on the news getting arrested for preparing hazardous pills. While the moral of the episodes and the take away for children is that energy drinks /pills are bad for the health and children should not indulge, there is an added layer of messaging present in the racial stereotyping of Shakoor and Shaukat that migrant labourers are devious, greedy profiteers. These constructions of the ‘other’ have no relevance to a Palestinian child audience, for whom the character representations would be mystifying and confusing, and perhaps as alien as animations from the US or Japan.

While the number of expatriates outnumber the number of locals in the UAE, there is open and accepted racism against non-nationals. In 2013 migrant workers accounted for over 90% of the UAE’s private workforce (Malit and Al Youha: 2013). This includes men and women from some of the poorest countries of South Asia – Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Gulf countries are frequently criticized by human rights organisations for discrimination against South Asian workers (see for example Human Rights Watch, 2003)¹⁰⁶ and more recently the exploitation of migrant workers has been the subject of international news attention due to the dire conditions of the workers involved in the preparation of the 2022 FIFA world cup in Qatar (Fisk, 2015).

The third and final non-Emirati represented in the first series of the animation is a white English ship captain who rescues Mansour’s grandfather’s boat when it is lost at sea (*episodes 19 and 20*). The representation is in stark comparison to the one of the migrant workers as the English captain saves the boat out of kindness and is constructed as well-meaning and caring, albeit a bit scatter-brained. In *episode 19*, Saqer, Mansour’s

¹⁰⁶ Human rights groups around the world have denounced the *Kafala* system, which is in place in the Emirates as well as other parts of the Gulf. The *Kafala* is a sponsorship system whereby domestic migrants have an in-country sponsor (usually the employer) responsible for organising their visa and work permit, rendering migrant workers beholden to their employers. This creates an easy opportunity for exploitation of workers, as many employers confiscate workers’ passports, limiting their movement, and abusing migrant workers with little chance of legal repercussions (Fisk, 2015).

grandfather, takes him and his friends on a fishing trip to teach them the virtues of patience. Their boat almost sinks because of Obaid (the overweight friend) and ends up on the deck of a submarine. The captain of the submarine, an unnamed English man, comes out of the submarine and exclaims ‘where on earth are we?’ and then ‘we appear to be a little bit lost’ and looks at his map with confusion, realising after a few seconds that he is trying to read the map upside down. He tells Mansour and his grandfather ‘I see where we went wrong now; we should have turned left at Abu Dhabi. Sorry for the inconvenience, well let’s get you down *Assif Assif* [Sorry, Sorry], Sorry for all the inconvenience folks, cheerio, *ma’asalama* [in peace].’ After saying their goodbyes, the boat once again almost sinks and ends up on the submarine, to which the captain retorts: ‘Assalamulakium...again...ooh I do hope I didn't scare you...oh we should have turned left again, ha ha ha, how embarrassing!’ The English captain is shown to be scatter-brained and forgetful, as he does not know the location of his own submarine and looks perplexed, but is helpful nevertheless as he saves the boat twice, and then tows it back to land. While confused and disorganised, he is at the end of the day a helpful and affable character, which is in stark comparison to the greedy and profiteering South Asians.

8.4. CONCLUSION

This analysis of the three programmes suggests that national identity presented to children is not blended with Islamic or Arab identity and that while the Palestinian programme depends on very localised and politicised sense of belonging, the two other programmes *Mansour* and *Anbar* rely on a ‘glocal’ sense of time and place and deploy techniques of consumer loyalty to capture children’s imagination. Despite both *Mansour* and *Anbar*’s stated wish to connect children with their language and heritage, there is little evidence of a religious or regional sense of belonging being invoked. Both programmes target a middle-class audience of Arab children, constructing children as consumers who are reasonably familiar with global products (such as iPads and Formula 1) and elitist sports (such as yoga and jujitsu), but also reflects the local context of where the programmes are produced (Abu Dhabi and Doha).

While *Mansour* provides a less didactic and moralizing approach, which is so needed in the Arab world (as seen in *chapter 7*), by constructing childhood as a market category (as with *Anbar*), and giving a platform to racist discourses that circulate in Gulf societies, it alienates Arab children living in less affluent areas (such as parts of Palestine), for whom the themes and products might be as far-fetched as Disney fairytales.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

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9.1. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

This study of Palestinian childhood is an integrated production and cultural studies examination that while paying attention to the wider political, economic and social context, places importance on the micro-level of children's television and discourses of childhood that circulate within Palestinian society. Contrary to childhood studies that frame childhood as universal and timeless, this study took a socio-constructionist view and located definitions and representations of Palestinian childhood at a specific moment in time. In short, the study aimed to use children's media as a window into discourses and practices of 'childhood' available to children living in the West Bank.

The conclusion of the thesis is organised around the contexts and texts themes that run throughout the study. The first section concentrates on conclusions drawn about the nature of the 'children's television community' (Bryant, 2007) in Palestine. The second section uses the context within which the Palestinian children's television community operates to explain the implications that competing discourses of childhood have for the texts that Palestinian children are likely to encounter. This section ends with a brief return to the socio-political context of the West Bank to address issues that emerged from my fieldwork. The final two sections of this chapter bring the thesis to a close, reflecting on the limitations of this study and proposing recommendations for future studies.

9.2. THE PALESTINIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION COMMUNITY

In the field of children's media there is limited academic research addressing the individuals and organisations that produce content for children. This is even more acute in the Arab world, where there is virtually no research about children's television production, and most research on television production in general has focused on the macro factors such as state interference and control. Due to the absence of contextual information on children's television production in Palestine, the first step taken to understand the ways in which the children's television community envisage the child audience was to map out the people and institutions that belong to this community. This

study therefore provided a space to understand more about those involved in producing content for Palestinian children, as well as the ways in which their beliefs and ideas impact what Palestinian children encounter on their television screens. By identifying the main players in the children's television community in Palestine and exploring the relationships between local players and international actors, the study used a bottom-up approach to provide an insight into the micro and meso-level power relations and cultural dynamics at play in the children's television industry in the West Bank.

The study found that it is individuals rather than systems that define the production ecology, which functions in a tight-knit community where personal and professional relationships often intersect; and it is relations between the children's television community and the wider media ecology that define what is produced for children. Due to the lack of regulatory incentives (tax relief, subsidies) or obligations (quotas) or the presence of any private sector funding, local producers are forced to look to international aid agencies and foreign governments for financial support. While international NGOs have attempted to fill this vacuum and financed various initiatives for children's media, the focus has mainly been on training and in the absence of solid foundations and state support; these projects have been of limited use in promoting sustainable production. These constraints have caused a brain drain as highly trained producers (trained by international NGOs) have either left for more lucrative areas such as the Gulf states or moved into 'adult' programming. Besides regulatory and financial constraints, meso and micro-level issues such as competition between different Ministries of the Palestinian Authority as well as an environment of mistrust between state television and civil society has fractured distribution networks, hindering even something as simple as acquiring slots. Television channels approach commissioning and broadcasting decisions in an ad-hoc fashion and general programming departments, rather than specific 'children's units' handle children's programming.

Moreover, the dependence on international (and highly political) funding from international institutions, as well as the presence of international monitoring bodies, has turned local decisions into international matters, further increasing the pressures on the Palestinian children's television community. By examining internationally funded media products, such as *Shara'a Simsim* and PANWAPA, the research contributes to

the growing discourse on the politics of aid in Palestine, arguing that the presence of international actors is a restrictive force, rather than a liberating one.

Due to the unequal relations between international donors and Palestinian partners, the dependence on international aid has created structures whereby international actors can exert power over discourse, whereas local actors have less say in the decision-making process. This raises questions about the purposes ascribed to 'local production' and whether in a situation controlled by external forces linked to the Israeli occupation, can local production ever be truly 'local'. While *Shara'a Simsim* was produced locally, scripts were vetted and approved in New York. Moreover, local producers have to be very careful about the kind of imagery and language used due to the international microscope that Palestinian programming is under as a result of the monitoring activities of Israeli media watchdog groups. For example, PYALARA lost significant international monetary support due to the inclusion of the map of historic Palestine (omitting any reference to Israel) in an episode of *Katakeet*. A mirror-image of this map is regularly used by their Israeli counterparts (omitting Palestine) in what Wallach (2011: 358) terms 'banal nationalism.' However, for the Palestinians the consequences of this 'banal' and symbolic nationalism have been significant.

Since children symbolically represent the future of the Palestinian national identity and sovereignty, the concepts of childhood and nationhood are closely tied. For this reason international and political forces in children's media expose tensions not only between different definitions of childhood but also between different notions of nationhood and the hopes for a future Palestinian state. The thesis therefore examined the perils of dependence on international aid, which has made not only charities and projects, but also the Palestinian state itself vulnerable to funding cuts. This was most evident in the punitive measures taken by the US Congress in its 2011 cancellation of US \$ 130 million of aid to the Palestinian Authority, which also led to the abrupt end of the *Shara'a Simsim* project.

The analysis of such cases leads to the conclusion that while elements of a children's television community does exist in the West Bank, important players and systems are missing, and the community is 'occupied' by external players, often with little

sensitivity for local culture and politics – ultimately hindering the creation of viable local projects for children. The Palestinian landscape is dominated by political rather than commercial elements, and Bryant's (2007) concept of a 'children's television community' is especially useful in identifying missing elements, such as the lack of private sector support. This raises questions about whether Palestinian children's television might stand to benefit from some level of commercialisation.

9.3. DEFINITIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD

Due to the constraints noted above, there is very little content produced *by* Palestinian producers' *for* Palestinian children. What little content available is often didactic and full of moral and political messaging. The thesis therefore argues that the children's sphere is further 'occupied' by adults (parents, producers and presenters). In Palestine, childhood is a constant focus of adult anxieties due to the fear that children are placed in childhood-denying spaces, by both the Israeli occupation and foreign media. The trauma discourse, which is prevalent in both local and global discourses on Palestinian childhood, is a well-rehearsed conversation amongst the Palestinian children's television community, and Palestinian children are almost always constructed as passive victims.

These attitudes position children as being at the mercy of their social and political environment – implying that only through adult intervention and support, they can survive and develop successfully. Due to the dominance of paternalist discourses in Arab societies, Palestinian children are defined as 'blank slates' (Locke, 1693) and hence children's television is mostly regarded as a narrow educational tool rather than one that can give children scope to develop their own views. The concern to protect involves shielding children from knowledge and content, which they are deemed too immature to deal with. As a consequence, children's relationship with the media is framed within the needs discourse, rather than the rights discourse and local production initiatives have mostly come from a reactionary place as local producers attempt to counter the perceived negative influence of global youth culture.

In the West Bank, citizenship building programmes, such as children's news programmes are not produced, and the priority is given to long-running and low-budget magazine programmes such as *Bait Byoot*, which prioritise behavioural and moral messages. The desire of Palestinian producers, like those of *Katekeet* (as seen in *chapter 6*) and *Bait Byoot* (as seen in *chapter 7* and *8*), to offer behavioural and ethical lessons makes children's screen-content extremely didactic, and possibly less enjoyable for children. However, Palestinian children have an array of different Arabic-language alternatives to Palestinian programming and local television faces stiff competition from resource-rich pan-Arab television for children. This study analysed *Bait Byoot* alongside two pan-Arab programmes – the Jeem TV magazine *Anbar* and Cartoon Network's animation *Mansour* – to compare the notions of childhood and nationhood available to a Palestinian child audience.

Textual analysis of *Bait Byoot*, a magazine programme created specifically for a Palestinian audience and *Anbar*, a magazine programme created for a larger 'imagined community' of Arab children, shows that the 'modes of address' are similar. While *Bait Byoot* contains more outward political messaging, especially in relation to the Israeli occupation, surprisingly the notion of childhood is similar in the Jeem TV production *Anbar*, as both programmes are based on a developmental psychology understanding of children as irrational, incomplete and in need of protection (control) and guidance. While adult hosts of both programmes use terms of friendship and camaraderie, like *asdaqaana al-atfaal* (our children friends), the ways in which they address the children – in the studio and on the phone – often distrusting and admonishing, reveals that children are not constructed as equals.

By constructing children solely as 'adults in the making', the two magazine programmes, *Bait Byoot* and *Anbar*, do not encourage children to think independently, creatively or critically. Children's opinions are not sought; instead it is adults providing constant advice and judgments. This is in stark opposition to the child-centred themes presented in the Emirati animation *Mansour* as well as the mantra of the Tamer Institute for Community Education, the only publisher of children's literature in Palestine. Both initiatives place children in the 'public sphere' and challenge traditional constructions of childhood by addressing Palestinian children as citizens. As the citizenship discourse

has an intrinsic element of the future as well as the present, they address children as both ‘beings’ – social actors actively constructing childhood, as well as ‘becomings’ – i.e., adults in the future; demonstrating that there are progressive ways of thinking about children as ‘becomings’, without diminishing their agency. Since the social constructionist paradigm views the concept of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ as conflicting discourses, the framework offered by the ‘new sociology of childhood’ (James and Prout, 1990) proves inadequate in this respect. The Tamer Institute and the producers of *Mansour* present a more realistic and holistic construction of childhood as a state of being as well as a process of growing up, rather than simply one or the other.

The animation, *Mansour*, shows the title character and his group of friends creating a film for Abu Dhabi Film Festival, preparing to go into space as well as creating high-tech gadgets such as robots and an electronic encyclopedia amongst other things. By offering up such storylines the animation defines children as producers as well as consumers of knowledge, and hence presents a rare construction of childhood in Arab programming. As opposed to the magazine programmes analysed, the animation constructs children as active agents rather than passive consumers. While this construction is much-needed in the Arab world, the addressing of children as ‘consumer-citizens’ and constructing childhood as a market category has the potential of alienating children living in less affluent parts of the Arab region. While children in the West Bank may be able to consume the text, the world created by the text is out of the reach of most. While Palestinian programmes like the didactic *Bait Byoot* offer little room for children to participate in a meaningful way, they do however, as compared to pan-Arab programmes directed at a wider audience of Arab children, provide a space for Palestinian children to see themselves and their local culture and traditions.

In all three texts analysed for this study, it was established that the identity construction is not synonymous with either Islamic or Arab identity and that while the Palestinian *Bait Byoot* depends on a very localised and politicised sense of belonging, the two other Arab programmes *Mansour* and *Anbar* rely on a ‘glocal’ sense of time and place that deploys techniques of consumer loyalty to capture children’s imagination. Despite using Modern Standard Arabic and calling on Arab children to imagine each other, there are minimal references to Arab nationalism or Islamic belonging in Jeem TV’s *Anbar*. In

contrast to the regional print magazines for children, such as *Majid*, which used sentimental language and played on notions of Islamic and pan-Arab belonging to widen its readership (see *chapter 3*), there is no evidence that Jeem TV is attempting the same. Similarly, *Bait Byoot* uses the local Palestinian dialect, national imagery and symbols to create a sense of belonging to the Palestinian homeland and there was little evidence of pan-Arab rhetoric about nationalism and solidarity in any of the episodes analysed. This, however, contrasted with what the researcher experienced in the field.

Being Arab (or being perceived as Arab) opened many doors for me and I was allowed access by simply knocking on doors and introducing myself in Arabic. Negotiating access and building rapport and trust was a relatively straightforward process in almost all cases. Moreover, being female was also an advantage, which contradicts popular perceptions of the dangers to female travellers and researchers in the Arab world. Not only was I treated with respect; I also felt very protected and accepted by the community. There were, however, sites of power and decision-making that I was unable to access – for example at Palestine TV. The secrecy over something as simple as television schedules, left me feeling excluded, and strengthened the view that getting insights into the meso-level of decision-making is a big challenge for researchers. The methodology section (see *chapter 4, section 3*) stimulated a broader discussion into issues of ethical concerns, sensitivity, reflexivity and subjectivity in participatory methods. Issues of access and secrecy were raised, and media-centric frameworks were countered by showing that prioritising socio-political, cultural and economic factors is pivotal in understanding television culture in contexts where practices and attitudes are vastly different from western experiences.

Framed in the context of discourses of gender and pan-Arab solidarity present on the ‘Arab street’, if not between Arab governments, reflections from the field demonstrated the benefits of applying an opportunistic and flexible method of gathering data to suit the circumstances. The goal was to build an empirically informed argument, and the conclusions are driven from a reflexive place, as the focus is on the production of meaning and the ways in which it is constructed, negotiated and circulated. While accepting that fieldwork is a deeply personal experience, reflections from the field provide a useful window into the broader social context.

9.4. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This is the first research that has studied Palestinian children's media in such empirical depth. It combined an exploration of the production ecology with analysis of children's texts, to get an understanding of the media experiences offered to children in Palestine. Focusing on policy and industry perspectives, the research of necessity, has tended to focus on adult definitions of childhood and adult objectives about media provision for children. Since an audience study is outside the scope of this research, children's voices are once again 'muted' and absent. Since this study focuses on how children's media use is impacted by the economic, social and political environment of the societies they inhabit (Buckingham, 2009: 134), it does little to increase our understanding of how Palestinian children use and understand media. However, this study does not view meaning as something effectively delivered to passive audiences. As such, it provides a good starting point for further research that explores the ways in which Palestinian children perceive and receive media content – that is local, regional and global. Moreover, since the study focused mostly on television, this research can also be used as a starting point to examine Palestinian children's viewing experience in the context of a multi-platform world. This thesis focused on television production, as television viewing remains high in Palestine and it is the most prevalent platform for children, especially children living in rural areas and less privileged environments. However, as children are increasingly viewing content on different devices (phones, tablets) and across many different platforms, television viewing in Palestine is changing immensely, meriting further analysis.

One of the main findings of this study was that the programmes analysed do not create a religiously defined sense of time and place. However, it is important to note that this is not a generalisation of all Arab content for children, rather these three specific texts at a specific time in history. Since the focus of this research was not on Islamic programming, but on socio-cultural definitions and representations of childhood, religious programmes or programmes aired during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan were not analysed. However, perhaps if one analysed the programmes in the month of Ramadan, a different conclusion could be drawn. Wala'a Battat (2014), the host of *Bait Byoot* explained that she focuses on Islamic themes and messages in the month of Ramadan, during which the weekly programme is broadcast daily. Moreover, there is

also a focus on religious and cultural programming on Jeem TV, which airs titles such as *Qesas Al Insan Fi Al Quraan* (Stories of People in the Quran); *1001 Nights*; *Marvellous Stories from the Quran*, *Kaleem Allah* (Friend of God) (Jeem TV, 2014).

For future research, a qualitative analysis of programmes broadcast in the month of Ramadan as compared to other months would be valuable. Moreover, comparison between programmes broadcast on the Hamas funded Al Aqsa TV (termed ‘martyrdom programming’ by many) and *Bait Byoot*, broadcast on Fatah-backed Palestine TV, would make an interesting study on the ways in which childhood and national belonging is constructed by the secular Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank as compared to the Islamic resistance movement that controls the Gaza Strip.

9.5. FINAL THOUGHTS

In assessing the possibilities of creating high quality and diverse programming for Palestinian children it is difficult not to be pessimistic. The thesis has mainly focused on the many challenges and constraints on local producers. However, it is important to note that there also exist many opportunities. This is a country where media awareness is high. It is a country where every university has a media studies department, and media is one of the most popular disciplines to study (Diyas, 2014). The popularity of locally produced animation *Hokayman and his Friends*, broadcast on Jeem TV in Ramadan 2014, as well as the presence of a highly trained and enthusiastic children’s television community, shows that Palestinians have the capability to make high quality television that is valuable, interesting and relevant to the Palestinian child audience. In an area where most spaces of childhood are ‘occupied’ by adults, television could provide a unique space for children to express themselves and learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Children’s television can provide the space to reflect children’s hopes, desires and anxieties, and a platform where definitions of childhood are based on children’s construction of their own identities, rather than adult aspirations. For this to become a reality, there is a need for a comprehensive media policy on children’s content in

Palestine. A shift in the attitudes of broadcasters towards children's content is also needed. This in turn necessitates a re-evaluation of assumptions about children's emotional and intellectual abilities and a re-imagining of the role of Palestinian children in the public sphere. There needs to be a greater diversity of programming, with compelling content that attracts children's attention and enables their participation in a meaningful way. The Palestinian government could incentivise programming that encourages the construction of children as citizens. Producing news programmes tailored for children could be a starting point as '[...] news media has a critical role to play, providing children opportunities to express themselves publically and to see their interests reflected in the news' (Mendes et al., 2010: 451). Moreover, since animation as a genre is more flexible and allows for the backgrounding of adults (as exemplified in the case of *Mansour*), which is much more challenging in adult-led magazine programmes (such as *Bait Byoot*), investment in local animation for Palestinian children could also prove useful.

As a way of concluding this study, it is important to note that I accept that children are not always active, and that children do indeed need protection from the dangerous environment they live in. I also appreciate that childhood in Palestine is different, and children have witnessed and continue to witness violence and trauma that is not 'normal'. This could not have been made more obvious during the third and latest bombardment of Gaza (2014), which led to the death of more than 500 children (Marszal, 2014). Those who have survived have been left with psychological and often physical wounds and will require psychosocial support. However, I argue that by ignoring the Israeli occupation and depoliticising childhood, current media solutions are simply bandaging the injury rather than dealing with the symptoms. Moreover, I argue that the trauma discourse is not the only lens through which Palestinian childhood can be examined, for despite the inhumane circumstances created by the Israeli occupation, Palestinian children possess the resources to negotiate meaning and find beauty in their daily lives. This resilience needs to be reflected in cultural products for children, which in turn necessitates a big shift in the way Palestinian childhood is defined.

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