**Book Proposal**

“Palestinian Memory and Identity in Modern Children’s Literature”

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**BACKGROUND**

The proposed book deals with the representations of folk culture in Palestinian children’s literature from 1967 to the present day. I track Palestinian authors’ use of motifs and elements from popular culture in Palestinian children’s literature and examine their purposes and influence on both the character of Palestinian children’s literature and the construction of national identity and consciousness among young Palestinians.

Palestinian society went through a process of national renewal, the rebuilding of national identity, and renewed emphasis on collective memory in the twentieth century. It saw the reconstrual of the past as an important tool in fostering the national identity and realizing a future in which the younger generation, freed from the trauma of the past, would have a central role. Education of the younger generation with regard to the past is viewed as essential for an examination of the present and planning its future.

The past is mobilized for the needs of the present in Palestinian children’s literature. Imaginative and aesthetic pleasure connect ancient elements and motifs with the traditional imagery to build new identity. Therefore, this literature not only reflects social and cultural changes but also participates in their formulation. The book analyzes how this literature has mediated between tradition and narratives of the past on the one hand and modern reality and new values on the other, while also being important for education and social change.

My book adopts an analytical approach based on an in-depth reading of literary texts for children. I rely on critical and theoretical sources from several researchers in the field of children’s literature, such as Zohar Shavit, Peter Hunt, Christine Wilkie Stibbs and O’Sullivan Emer.

[INSERT PARAGRAPH(S): SEE NOTES]

The book focuses on the representations of folk culture in Palestinian children’s literature by Palestinian authors, from both thematic and stylistic-linguistic perspectives. I examine many works that make use of the representations of popular culture published after 1967, including diverse works by writers from Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora.

[INSERT PARAGRAPH: SEE NOTES]

**THE AUTHOR**

I obtained my PhD studies at the University of Tel Aviv in 2017 and have been a lecturer at the Sakhnin College for Teacher Education in northern Israel since 2011. I specialize in research on children’s literature and teach a course on that topic at the college. I was also a member of the “Alfanoos” book selection committee for the Arabic-speaking population.

The subject of the book is very close to my heart because, even though I define myself as an Israeli citizen in all respects, I also belong to the Palestinian minority that was born and lives in Israel and which strives to preserve its heritage.

**AUDIENCE AND POTENTIAL MARKET**

**Book’s Contribution to the Current Debate**

My proposed book aims to redress the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, there are no academic books written in English that deal with the subject of Palestinian children’s literature. There are also no books in English that discretely analyze literary texts by Palestinian writers who live inside Israel, those who live in the West Bank and Gaza, and those who live in the diaspora. No scholarly books that deal with the Palestinian collective identity and its representation in children’s literature either. Given the volume and diversity of such literature, this is an unsustainable gap in literary criticism that urgently needs addressing and which my book can make a foundational contribution to. It will appeal to academics engaged in the field of children’s literature and literature generally as well as undergraduates and postgraduates. There is also a significant community within Palestinian society involved in children’s literature, the preservation of oral heritage and folklore who will find this book illuminating. Internationally, the book should attract those engaged both in cultural and sociological study as a seminal case study in the issues in very particular and yet diverse circumstances.

The book aims to address key questions in its chosen field, including:

1. What has motivated Palestinian writers to draw on folklore in texts intended for children?
2. What are their aims and purposes in doing so?
3. What criteria have they relied upon when choosing folkloric elements to draw on?
4. How have they adapted, reformulated, simplified the original texts for children, and how they were formulated to make them suitable?
5. What methodologies have they used to do so?
6. [ADD MORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS: SEE NOTES]

Narrating the past plays a central role in creating a sense of unity among the different sectors of the Palestinian people: in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora. This narrative is based on shared Palestinian sentiments in relation to the loss of homeland, the dream of return, the experience exile, and so on. Because of this narrative’s unifying role, authors have mainly eschewed criticism of the past, and have even tried to reinvent the past as a lost paradise. The representations of popular culture in Palestinian children’s literature, expressed through drawing on stories, poems, proverbs, characters, and folk games passed down from generation to generation, combined with the unique character of the Palestinian dialect, has allowed this literature to promote the adoption of the Palestinian past and to build Palestinian national identity.

Many books deal with the relationship between children’s literature and folklore, some of which are listed below, but I have not found any in English that cover Palestinian children's literature.

Bacchilega, Cristina. (1997). *Postmodern Fairy tales, Gender and Narrative Strategies*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin. (1996). “Defining Children’s Literature and Childhood,” in Peter Hunt (ed.) *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature.* London, New York, NY: Routledge.

O’Sullivan, Emer. (2005). *Comparative Children’s Literature.* Translated by Anthea Bell. London: Routledge.

Shavit, Zohar. (1989). *Poetics of Children’s Literature*, London: University of Georgia Press.

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The book is divided into two main parts. The first part is the theoretical part, and the second part is the applied part, comprising three chapters each.

**PART ONE**

**Chapter One**: **The theory of children’s literature**

This demonstrates how relevant theories of intertextuality have a distinct application in relation to children’s as opposed to adults’ literature. The relationship between the components of intertextuality in children’s literature (writer/text/reader-text/reader/context) has distinct characteristics children’s literature because [INSERT OUTLINE OF YOUR ARGUMENT FROM HERE]. My theoretical framework sees children’s literature as autonomous. It operates within the constraints of children’s culture, but responds to society’s moral and educative demands. Society’s preoccupation with children’s literature stems from importance ascribed to the development of collective identity among children, their internalizing of hegemonic narratives, and the way they are passed on intergenerationally. There is also a preoccupation with them among those who promote subversive rather than hegemonic narratives.

Zipes emphasizes the importance of folk heritage in strengthening the connection between individuals and society and in strengthening the sense of belonging, especially among children. Therefore, the use of folk culture representations in children’s literature, especially those geared to the developmentally crucial five to nine-year-old stage, not only greatly contributes to children’s psychological, emotional, and social development, but also develops in them a sense of national and communal belonging, collective identity, and connection to the past.

My discussion of representations of folk culture in children’s literature examines the three key stakeholders in the process: The author, who shapes heritage according to current needs and according to his educational, ideological and cultural vision; The child and its psychological, emotional, and educational needs; and the children’s text, built on the delicate balance that exists between the objective and the attractive in representations of folk culture.

**Chapter Two: Historical review of Palestinian children’s literature**

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

Until 1948, children’s literature expressed a predominantly pan-Arab narrative and broader Islamic and Arab heritage. Up to 1948, the conflict with British Mandate occupiers and the Zionist movement encouraged Palestinian national aspirations that were expressed in Palestinian writing for children. Palestinian authors, notably poets such as Khalil al-Sakakini (1878–1953), As’af al-Nashashibi (1885–1948), Iskandar al-Baitjali (1888–1973), Ishaq Musa al-Husayni (1904–90), and Ibrahim Touqan (1905-1941), wrote original, didactic works for children.

In the first decades after the establishment of the State of Israel, very few original children’s books were written by its Palestinian populations. Institutions encouraged the publication of original and translated works that preached good neighborliness and peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs. In contrast, communist and nationalist circles tried to offer an alternative by editing folk tales from Palestinian heritage and emphasizing the Palestinian character of the narrative. In the Palestinian diaspora, political and ideological messages that highlight the traumatic Palestinian past, the harsh experience of displacement and exile, longing for the homeland and so on were also emphasized in children’s literature at that time.

Following the war of 1967, the preservation of national heritage was perceived by the Palestinians as a crucial means to protect their land and their national identity. In this period, the number of original works intended for children in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora significantly increased. Among the Palestinian authors who stood out in this period in Israel were Mustafa Murar (1930–), Salim Khoury (1934–91), and Abdel Latif Nasser (1944–90). Of those who lived outside Israel, Samiha Khalil (1923–99), Ali El Khalili (1943-2013), and Ruqaya Farch Al-Hudhud (b. 1948) were significant.

Since the late 1980s, we have witnessed a surge in writing of, translation of, research on, and distribution of children’s literature by institutions and organizations founded for these purposes in Israel and the West Bank. The events of the Intifada (1987) redressed flagging resistance, sacrifice, and steadfastness and this was reflected in Palestinian children’s literature. The need to preserve the embers of cultural heritage to unify Palestinians was also important in this regard. Key authors in this period in Israel are Nabihah Jaberin (1950–), Fawzi Ali (1953–), and Mohammed Badarneh (1955–). Significant contemporaries of theirs outside Israel are Mahmoud Shakir (1941–), Abdul Rahman Abad (1945–), and Liana Badr (1951–).

**Chapter Three: Popular culture**

This chapter examines notions about the development of the popular culture and examines how the scientific study of folklore began at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the emergence of romantic and national movements in Europe, given their emphasis on popular culture. European writers started archiving popular stories, songs, and traditions that reflected the pastin order to rebuild this heritage.

This chapter also introduces historical background on popular culture among the Arabs. This study found that political factors, especially after defeats of experienced by Arab countries, encouraged writers to take an interest in and be inspired by their heritage due to the esteem it is helfd in from a national consciousness perspective and because of its connection to real life.

Finally, the chapter also defines the most important forms of popular culture and its characteristics, and discusses the predominant forms of Palestinian popular culture that are common in Arabic literature in general, and children’s literature in particular.

**PART TWO**

This part applies the theory elaborated to texts of Palestinian children’s literature. It demonstrates that the deployment of Palestinian popular culture in children’s literature increased after the First Intifada (1987), and became very common at the beginning of the 1990s because of the political and social changes in that period.

**Chapter One**: **Palestinian folktales**

This, the longest chapter, introduces my argument that Palestinian folktales are the most important source that has inspired the Palestinian writers in the period I examine and scrutinizes the unprecedented and remarkable way Palestinian writers returned to the roots of popular tales and adapted them for children.

The chapteraddresses whether and, if so, how these modern stories benefit, in form and content, from drawing on popular and folklore culture and the way they reconstruct/deconstruct traditional narrative structures and styles. It addresses issues of repetition and stereotyping label? I examine selected examples that show how Palestinian writers have rewritten Palestinian popular tales without interference in the text, except in specific and limited cases.

The book corpus includes about 30 diverse works from about 30 Palestinian authors from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora. They were selected as a representative sample of Palestinian children’s literature after 1967. Together they show how Palestinian children’s underwent many thematic and stylistic changes over the years, with distinct periods observable between 1967–87 and from 1987 to now. I have sought to give a fair representation of the different and the different representations of popular culture, such as stories, poems, proverbs, games, and so on. The key focus is on the folk tale, due to its prominence in Palestinian popular culture. I have also sought to provide a balance of works from within Israel, from the West Bank and Gaza, and from the Palestinian diaspora. I have also sought to provide a balanced picture of the literature across the various age groups.

**Chapter Two: Palestinian popular proverbs**

This chaptershows that the employment of the Palestinian popular proverb is limited to the first period identified.Writers have not shown much interest in employing popular proverbs in their stories for children. Most probably, the writers in that period were not aware enough of the importance of the employment of popular culture in children’s literature. Some writers even chose to use only standard Arabic in their writing, thinking that spoken Arabic was at a lower level than standard Arabic, especially if the receiver was a child.

That said, some writers have deployed popular proverbs in their stories, but not to serve the story in a conscious way. It is noticed that retrieving the popular proverb in that period was not well-developed as it was in the second period.

**Chapter Three**: **Palestinian popular songs**

This chapter shows the disparity in the employment of the popular song in the texts in the first period.The song appeared as an image that was closer to retrieve than it was to employ in its artistic meaning. Several texts included some segments of well-known popular songs that fit in with the narrative context only, but without performing any other function in the story. However, with regard to this phenomenon in that period, employing the popular song achieved several goals, some of which were related to the contents of the text.

I show that, during the second period examined, Palestinian writers showed much interest in the Palestinian popular songs and increased their employment of popular styles and popular singing techniques in their texts.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion draws together the main themes and ideas buy showing how social and political factors have influenced the consciousness of Palestinian’s writers for children in a way that has encouraged them to draw on element of popular culture, song, and folklore. It has shown how the experiences of Palestinians, partly depending on where they have lived and what social traumas they have been through but that, ultimately popular culture has served as a crucial unifying element for identity in Palestinian society.