3 Folk Heritage and Its Forms

Abstract

This chapter examines notions about the development of 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 past in order to rebuild this heritage.

This chapter also introduces the historical background on popular culture among the Arabs.

Folk Heritage

The Definition

In order to focus on the importance of folk heritage on Palestinian children’s literature, we must first define “folk heritage” in general and “Palestinian folk heritage” in particular before reviewing the most important types of folk heritage under examination. The term “folk heritage”[[1]](#endnote-1) commonly refers to the material and moral heritage, both private and scholarly, inherited through a community’s ancestors.[[2]](#endnote-2) The scholar Ibrahim Mahawwi includes within folk heritage all the activities that typically represent daily nonverbal arts, such as folk music and dance, as well as verbal arts, like folksongs, poetry, stories, legends of saints, riddles, jokes, and handmade folk crafts (Kanaʾina *Man Nasiya* 16–17). Heritage is considered a vital means for linking past and present nationalism. In his book *Interpreting Folklore*, the anthropologist Alan Dundes maintains that heritage represents a fundamental element of the cultural identity of all peoples and plays a prominent role in consolidating the different conceptions linking people’s lives, history, and the meaning of their existence. Dundes adds that heritage serves to identify a group of people (regardless of their racial, ethnic, or religious background) that shares commonly recognized traditions (Dundes 101).

Roland Barthes views heritage as a scholarly and spiritual remnant from the past from which to draw inspiration for interpretation to reflect modern meanings. Literary modernity cannot continue without turning to heritage (65).[[3]](#endnote-3) According to anthropologist Shelagh Weir, heritage represents the backbone of national identity or patriotism, and, without it, people lose the essentials of their being, as well as the rationale for their existence as a people. Thus, heritage becomes a symbol of national identity within every population and culture (Weir 273).

Despite the multiplicity of concepts of heritage and the curricula for its study, there is a consensus among scholars and researchers that heritage must be linked to the present while also applying a modern vision to it that gives rise to suggestive dimensions expressing the present (Mabruk 17).

Interest in Folk Heritage: Its Origin and Directions

Researchers agree that the scientific study of folklore emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a result of the romantic and nationalistic movement in Europe.[[4]](#endnote-4) This movement came to be known as the Romantic Nationalistic School and its approach was focused on folk heritage. Thus, writers gravitated toward compiling folk stories, songs, and customs that reflect the past, subsequently enabling the reconstruction of ancient life by comparing folkstories and customs (al-Jawhari “Al-Turāth” 48–58, al-ʿAnatil *Bayn al-Fulklūr* 11–27).

Jacob and William, the “Brothers Grimm,” are credited as the first folklorists who emerged during Germany’s romantic period (1785–1859) and played a pioneering role in compiling folklore. They aimed to set national classics for the German people and preserve German identity during Napoleon’s conquests. With the aim of distinguishing German identity from that of the neighboring populations, they published a collection of German folkstories under the titles *Kinder und Hausmarchen* (1812) and *Deutsche Mythologie* (1812–15) (von der Leyen 44–156).[[5]](#endnote-5)

With this, the study of folklore became exclusively linked to the peasant class. Indeed, Dundes confirms that the work of the Brothers Grimm marked the beginning of the study of folklore (2–9). At that time, folklore was considered a branch of sociology influenced by modern anthropology and, according to the British researcher Edward B. Taylor, by evolution as well. This approach posited that human evolution underwent several stages found in the folk life of communities whose traditional beliefs survived the advanced stages of human evolution and perhaps through which those older stages can be reconstructed.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Furthermore, it is worth noting that at the turn of the twentieth century, interest in folklore grew among the leading anthropologists responsible for establishing a branch of anthropology focusing on the study of folklore. From their focus on folk beliefs and legends,[[7]](#endnote-7) a new definition of the term “folklore” emerged: “oral transmission,” through which customs and traditions were passed on from one generation to the next without the need for orthographic documentation (Khuri *al-Fulklūr* 19). Drawing on this new definition, researcher Khuri maintains that folklore consists not solely of remnants from earlier ages, but is actually a live performance of individuals, evolving along with society’s development. Thus, folklore represents that persistence of humanity, thereby rendering folklore accessible to all (*al-Fulklūr* 20–21).

The study of folklore took a new direction in the 1960s, when researchers began studying heritage through texts in line with the work of the Russian folkloric researcher Vladimir Propp, who proposed a general theory for the study of cultures in his 1977 book *The Morphology of the Folktale* (see Propp 12–24). This theory had a particularly strong impact on the Narrative School, which focused on the study of linguistics through the analysis of folk texts (Hazan-Rokem 5–13). This subsequently led to the development of formalist theories and curricula as independent studies in and of themselves. Folklore scholarship was strongly affected by this change, as it merged into a postmodernist context and shifted its focus to studying the issue of social identity among minorities.[[8]](#endnote-8) Investigating the historical details of these European schools and the theories of the study of various schools folklore is beyond the scope of the present. Instead, the primary focus of this study is the influence of their adherents on the evolution of the study of folklore, especially the study of Arabic folklore.

Arab Interest in Folk Heritage

Modern scholars’ interest in the question of heritage began in the Arab countries after examining modern European cultures and opening up to Western civilization. This interest crystallized during World War II and its aftermath and during the 1950s, when the Arab world began to achieve its political independence as the era of colonialism was coming to a close. Al-Barghuthi explains that the delay of Arab interest in heritage stemmed from their fear of colloquial Arabic’s tyranny on Standard Arabic and, consequently, the Holy Qurʾan (10–24).

Serious interest in folk heritage thus received a new impetus, especially after a series of defeats suffered by the Arabs, which were followed by the political and intellectual transformations that led to an emergence of republican regimes and the collapse of monarchial rule. These transformations encouraged the interest in heritage, which began to serve as an important source of inspiration due to its link to real life as an important patriotic legacy (Khuri *al-Fulklūr* 60). This is evident in the increase of specialized scientific studies which started to emerge in some Arab countries, as can be seen in Ahmad Taymur’s (1871–1930) 1953 (posthumously) published book *al-Amthāl al-ʿĀmmīya wal-Kitābāt al-ʿĀmmīya wa-Khayāl al-Ẓill wal-Laʿb wal-Tamāthīl al-Muṣawwara* (Colloquial Proverbs and Writings and Imagination of the Shadow, Playing, and Photographed Statues). Ahmed Amin’s (1886–1954) 1953 book *Qāmūs al-ʿĀdāt wal-Taqālīd wal-Taʿābīr al-Maṣrīya* (The Dictionary of Egyptian Customs, Traditions, and Expressions) also evidenced an interest in heritage. After the Culture Directorate took over the Ministry of Education in 1945, patriotic motivations prompted the establishment of what came to be known as al-Jāmiʿa al-Shaʿbīya (The People’s University), which aimed to spread culture to the masses via lectures and symposiums. It also spurred a movement to translate important literature in the field of heritage into many languages.[[9]](#endnote-9) Conferences were held that called for collecting and preserving heritage, as well as exploring how to form scholarly bodies at the national level (such as institutes for Arabic folkloric studies and national archives) and convene international and Arab meetings on folk heritage (ʿAlqam 32–33).

It should be noted that the 1960s are considered the period in which Arab countries became officially interested in heritage because of the increased challenges these countries faced, whether economic, social, or cultural in nature. This led to increased material and moral support for local efforts to preserve cultural, indeed, civilization identity of Arab society, as reflected in the emergence of local official foundations to preserve local heritage, as well as the founding of different museums in various Arab countries.[[10]](#endnote-10) This newfound emphasis on heritage arose from the region’s fear of losing part of its history, as studying the traditional practices prevailing in the region shed light on the social, intellectual, and political history.[[11]](#endnote-11)

In the early 2000s, calls for the preservation, verification, and recording of heritage increased—perhaps globalization was the driving force for this increased interest, in addition to the pursuit of collecting and defining it as a means of preserving cultural identity (Ismaʾil 253–66). Furthermore, interest in heritage became more nationalistic after having been an Arab national interest.

Palestinian Folk Heritage and Its Importance

Folk heritage is one of the most important sources of identity for Palestinians, especially in light of the political situation that often threatens their very existence. This deep connection throughout history enables them not only to endure the difficult circumstances they may presently face, but it also gives them faith in the future. Thus, heritage is important to Palestinians, supporting their unity as a people despite differences in gender, age, religion, and location (Mahawwi 2000 16–17).

In the twentieth century, the Palestinian community endeavored to reconstruct its national identity and collective memory. In the past, Palestinians saw the past as an important tool in creating a national identity and attaining their vision of the future in which the young generation played a large role. In this respect, al-Barghuthi observes that society’s education of its young about its cultural heritage is vital for the society itself, which is searching for its identity in the present and planning for its future (40–43). If we examine the historical development of interest in Palestinian heritage, we can see that scholars divided it into six stages (Kanaʾina *Man Nasiya* 35–53 but compare with al-Mutawwir 20–25). However, since this study confirms that beginnings of interest in heritage in children’s literature increased noticeably after 1987, we prefer to divide it into four separate stages, as explained in the sections below.

Palestinian Folk Heritage in the Orientalism Stage (Until 1948)

Foreign researchers became interested in the Arab countries in the aftermath of colonialism,[[12]](#endnote-12) and it is in this context that the Orientalist Movement[[13]](#endnote-13) began in Palestine. While they were in the region, European Orientalists collected a considerable amount of folk heritage. However, among the many books and articles these European scholars published, Palestinian folk heritage was mentioned only fleetingly, as their work focused far more on the Torah and the Gospels (Al-Mutawwir 21, Kanaʾina *Dirāsāt* 145). Later, as the elements of the study of folklore started to become defined and crystallized, some Orientalists began showing an interest in Palestinian heritage. Finnish researcher Hilma Granqvist was at the forefront of folklorists who conducted in-depth and comprehensive studies of Palestinian society between 1925 and 1947. Her research yielded three publications: *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs*, *Child Problems among the Arabs*, and *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (see Kanaʾina *Man Nasiya* 159–72, Al-Mutawwir 21–22).

Between 1928 and 1942, German scholar Gustav Dalman published seven volumes of a work entitled *Arbeit und Sitte in Palastina* (Work and Customs in Palestine), in which he describes all aspects of Palestinian daily life. He also published another book containing research and descriptions of folksongs in Palestine, Jordan, and Syria entitled *Palastinischer Diwan* (Palestinian Collection)*.* During this period, European Orientalists continued their studies on Palestinian folk heritage and life. According to Kanaʾina, only a small number of Palestinian researchers joined these Orientalists,[[14]](#endnote-14) publishing their research in the *Journal of Palestinian Oriental Society.*[[15]](#endnote-15) Kanaʾina further asserts that the reason for the Palestinian researchers’ lack of interest in this topic during that period stemmed from their fear of Classical Arabic (CA; Kanaʾina *Man Nasiya* 47–53, Al-Mutawwir 25).

For the present discussion, we are primarily concerned with the Palestinian researcher Tawfiq Kan’aan (1882–1964) and his role in compiling and studying Palestinian folklore. According to Kanaʾina, Kan’aan’s greatest contribution was perhaps his collecting of heritage and how he employed it, as his motivations were both the advancement of scholarly documentation and nationalistic. This enabled him to accomplish a quantum leap in increasing the interest in Palestinian heritage. Thus, according to researchers, Kanaʾina’s works and writings make him “the undisputed spiritual father and founder of the Palestinian folkloric movement” (Kanaʾina *Man Nasiya* 175**–**82). He published his studies in English in the *Medical Journal of Palestine*, where he focused on myths, folk medicine, seasons, holidays, shrines of saints, folk proverbs, and the traditional Palestinian home.

After al-Nakba (1948–67)

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and its first two decades of state-building, many Palestinians sought refuge in neighboring countries, taking their heritage with them. This heritage, as Kanaʾina states in the introduction to his book *Man Nasiya Qadīma-h Tāh* (He Who Has Forgotten His Ancient Past Is Lost), was a source of strength and resilience during this time (24). Thus, awareness about Palestinian identity increased, especially among the Palestinian diaspora, as they resorted to deepening their attachment to their homeland and heritage, as well as recreating their homeland in the refugee camps. Palestinian folkloric research became a means of defending Palestinian identity, especially in the wake of the formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 (al-Munasira 8–9, Kanaʾina *Dirāsāt* 393–99). However, the Palestinians who remained in Israel were cut off from the rest of Palestinian society after the mass exodus, leaving them a minority, despite having been the overwhelming majority prior to the establishment of Israel. Furthermore, they were subject to military rule, which forbade them from leaving their cities and villages without permission from the military.

After al-Naksa (1967–86)

Kanaʾina asserts that the War of 1967 marked the start of a new stage in the history of the development of the Palestinian folkloric movement, adding that it coincided with the expansion of the national liberation movement as well as the establishment of several Palestinian nationalist foundations, many of which focused on the conservation of Palestinian heritage (al-Munasira 52). The Jamaʿiyat Inʿash al-Usra (Family Revival Association) in al-Birah was the most important of these foundations, with reviving, preserving, and protecting Palestinian folk heritage at the forefront of its mission. It branched into the Lujnat al-Abhath al-Ijtimaʿiya wal-Turath al-Shaʿbi al-Filastini (Committee of Social Research and Palestinian Folk Heritage),[[16]](#endnote-16) which was founded in 1972 and published the magazine *al-Turath wal-Mujtamaʿ* (Heritage and Society)*.* This journal, still in print,[[17]](#endnote-17) is considered one of a kind in its focus on studying and analyzing Palestinian heritage (Rabiʿ 28–58).

Interest in heritage increased after 1967, at the behest of the PLO, which by then had become the effective representative of the Palestinian people. At the same time, Palestinians were convinced they could achieve national liberation only by taking matters into their own hands and making their own destiny rather than relying on Arab states (Kanaʾina *Man Nisiya* 50–51). Some studies on Palestinian heritage were published in the late 1960s.[[18]](#endnote-18) Palestinians in Israel viewed their situation as a Palestinian minority in their own homeland as a threat to their existence, spurring their ambition to preserve their identity and heritage. Viewing this route as an alternative to political activism, they chose to express themselves through heritage, *dabka* troops, dancing, folk music, folkloric festivals, seminars, and conferences.[[19]](#endnote-19)

In 1984, Salih Baransi (1928–99) founded the Markaz Ihyaʾ al-Turath al-ʿArabi (Center for the Revitalization of Arab Heritage) in the al-Tayba al-Muthallath area of Israel. This center initiated the convening of heritage conferences and festivals, the most important of which was the Jerusalem International Conference for Palestinian Folk Heritage in 1987. It also founded the heritage museum in the town of Sakhnin and published several studies about heritage. Tawfiq Ziyyad (1929–94) was also interested in compiling heritage, expressing his motivations in his book *Ṣuwwar min al-Adab al-Shaʿbi* (Pictures from Palestinian Folk Literature, 1974) and more precisely in “Li-Nanqiḏ Adab-nā al-Shaʿbī min Khaṭar al-Ḍiyāʿ” (Let’s Save Our Folk Literature from Getting Lost). He considered heritage a creation of the people themselves that is always open to modification from future generations. As a result, it is also in danger of being lost, hence the importance of compiling and recording the Palestinian folk heritage in writing.

In Ziyyad’s view, the younger generation must learn their heritage in order for them to absorb and build on their national and humanitarian traditions (Ziyyad *Ṣuwwar* 10). Ziyyad wrote a series of articles about Palestinian heritage between 1967 and 1970 that were published in the Haifa-based journal *al-Jadīd*. He also published studies entitled *ʿAn al-Adab wal-Adab al-Shaʿbī fī Filasṭīn* (On Literature and Folk Literature in Palestine, 1970) and *Yawmiyāt Naṣrawī fil-Sāḥa al-Ḥamrāʾ* (Nasrawi’s Daily Life in the Red Square, 1973), as well as a collection of stories from Palestinian heritage entitled *Ḥāl al-Dunyā* (The State of the World, 1975).

Tawfiq’s employment of heritage in his poems represents a semantic phenomenon with significant qualitative and quantitative significance, as can be seen in the use of heritage in stories, folksongs, customs and traditions, and folk proverbs (Ziyyad *Ṣuwwar* 10). Palestinian writers in Israel (e.g., Emile Habibi (1921–96), Jamal Kawar, Tawfiq Fayyad, Samih al-Qasim (1939–2015)) were inspired by heritage, using it to express national issues (Khuri *Al-Maṣādir* 26–33). Kanaʾina asserts that the Palestinian folkloric movement belongs to the Palestinian national liberation movement, and that the success of the folkloric movement in the aftermath of the 1967 war reflects the success of the national liberation movement’s efforts to create a national identity (Kanaʾina *Dirāsāt* 151).

From after the First Intifada to the Present

The First Intifada erupted at the end of 1987, increasing patriotic and nationalistic sentiment, especially among Palestinian writers. Thus, interest in Palestinian heritage also increased, as well as the call to collect and preserve it (Khuri *al-Fulklūr* 98), as Palestinians perceived the Intifada as a new, clearly defined phase in their struggle against the occupation, seeing it as new way of living and thinking (Kanaʾina *Dirāsāt* 87). The Intifada was the peak of the Palestinian national movement and Kanaʾina maintains that evidence of the formation of the unity of the Palestinian people began in practice after 1967, although this unity first emerged only after the First Intifada.

As Kanaʾina observes: “Today, Palestinians are confronted with the danger of the decay and loss of Palestinian identity. The danger is not that of physical genocide or the loss of land, but rather that of dissolution resulting from the loss of identity” (*Dirāsāt* 155). Subsequently, Palestinian writers became seriously interested in the importance of preserving the Palestinian heritage of that period. In this spirit, the researchers Ibrahim Mahawwi and Sharif Kanaʾina compiled Palestinian folkstories and published them in English in a book entitled *Speak Bird, Speak Again* (1989), which was translated to Arabic in 2001.

*Speak Bird, Speak Again* is an important reference for Palestinian folktales. In the book’s introduction, the researchers state that by collecting these stories, they aim to preserve the collective memory of the Palestinian people and strengthen their cultural identity, especially among the younger generations who live either under occupation or in the diaspora, as both groups are alienated from their society’s traditions.[[20]](#endnote-20)

British researcher Shelagh Weir published her book *Palestinian Folk Costume* in 1989 through the British Museum. In 1992, the Center for the Revival of Arab Heritage in Taibe, in Israel, adopted an initiative to preserve a collective Palestinian identity. In 1994, the center held a conference in Jerusalem, the First International Conference on Palestinian Folklore, with the aim of conveying “the voice of the Palestinian folkloric movement and consequently the voice of the Palestinian people to the rest of the world” (Kanaʾina *Dirāsāt* 166). Interest in Palestinian heritage continued with the declaration of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian government and its national institutions that also took responsibility for preserving and maintaining interest in Palestinian heritage. Indeed, the Palestinian folkloric movement can be said to be part of the Palestinian national liberation movement, in that they both faced the same problems and difficulties.

Forms of Folk Heritage

Here we will shed light on the most important types of folk heritage, summarizing the most popular forms found in literature in general and more specifically in Palestinian children’s literature. After reading many compilations of children’s texts, we found that the authors had drawn on the most important forms of folk heritage, namely, folktales, proverbs, and folksongs. While they did turn to other forms of Palestinian literature as well, they did so only occasionally, and thus this does not contribute to the aims of the study. Thus, here we will simply summarize the findings that are applicable to this book, as there are many studies that provide detailed explanations of the various genres of folk heritage (see Khuri *al-Maṣādir*, *al-Muṣṭalaḥ*). This chapter’s unique contribution is in its focus on defining Palestinian folk heritage.

The Concept of Folktales

Before explaining the concept of folktales, we should first clarify that this study distinguishes between fairy tales and folktales (Hassuna 119, see also Khuri *al-Maṣādir* 43). In order to prevent confusion, we will explore only the features of folktales. Folktales are considered among the oldest known forms and are a form of social expression through which a people’s reality and dreams are expressed (Hassuna 80). According to Nabila Ibrahim, folktales are pieces of information that connect past events and transmit them orally from one generation to the next, thereby creating the collective imagination connecting important events, people, and historical sites (Hassuna 106). As folktales have a flexible structure, they are open to omissions, additions, or substitutions, thus enabling stories to change according to social and cultural factors.

It is this flexibility that enables the folktale’s function to remain constant. According to Hassuna, “stories may differ in subject matter from place to place, and the details and purposes of the tale may change when it moves from one country to another” (80). Folktales are considered a means of human expression and are a literary device through which people can convey their thoughts, beliefs, and philosophies. Furthermore, the entertainment and suspenseful qualities of these tales, combined with their linguistic simplicity, aid in their preservation. Folktales represent cultural and spiritual aspects of life, offering significant glimpses into the past (al-Ashhab 7).

Features of Folktales

The artistic structure of folktales has semi-fixed components. These components, known as “Olrik’s Narrative Laws,” were set forth by Danish researcher Axel Olrik in 1909 after he carried out his research on European and Scandinavian folktales in particular (Dundes 123–233). The researcher Aliza Shenhav asserts that these rules are also applicable to children’s literature (8). The following are the central principles most applicable to our examination:

1. “The Law of Opening and Closing”—In the beginning of every folktale, the narrator attempts to grab the listener’s attention. The introductory phrase “once upon a time” is a customary opening in folktales and most folktales have a happy ending.
2. “The Law of Repetition”—A specific scenario is repeated and emphasized in folktales so that the recipient can relate to the main character.
3. “The Law of Contrast”—Folktales favor good characters over evil ones.
4. “The Law of Two to a Scene”—There are typically three main protagonists in a folktale: a good, a bad, and a neutral one. At the climax of the tale, the neutral character joins forces with the good character to defeat the bad character.

Palestinian Folktales

Palestinian folktales have several influences, the most important of which are historical factors, as these tales have preserved thoughts and facts from ancient eras. Geographical factors also have a strong influence on the structure of folktales, as they all contain elements of the Palestinian natural environment. Religion and the political and economic situations in Palestine have also influenced the content of the tales. Thus, it can be said that whatever shocks and afflictions the Palestinian people experienced left their mark on Palestinian folktales (al-Ashhab 40).

Through the course of history, Palestinian folktales have depicted various social stages, and they came to serve as a representation of social changes involving the Palestinian people’s right to freedom, ownership, and expression of free will. Hassuna emphasizes that folktales are one of the fundamental elements highlighting the historical and vital link to the Palestinian people (al-Ashhab 40). He adds that the obvious employment of Palestinian Arabic is one of the most important characteristics of Palestinian folktales.

The Concept of the Folk Proverb

In her book *Proverbs in Medieval Occitan Literature*, Wendy Pfeffer stresses the difficulty of defining the term “folk proverb,” writing: “It is an integral part of our daily spoken language, and we have grown up hearing it and using it to express our needs, thus making it difficult to construe” (9). Nabila Ibrahim defines folk proverbs as the adages that encapsulate a philosophical concept (*al-Dirāsāt* 154). In his book *Palestinian Personality Traits as Expressed in Folk Proverbs,* Salim al-Mubayyid contends that the folk proverb is the byproduct of a conscious experience balanced by reflection and intellect (7). Khuri, on the other hand, prefers the definition of folklore provided by Mughniya in the preface to his book *Maʿjam al-Amthāl al-Lībiya* (Dictionary of Libyan Proverbs): “A genre of colloquial literature distinguished by its eloquent brevity, simplistic style, and succinct meaning” (Khuri *al-Maṣādir* 26). Hassuna defines folk proverbs as wise, eloquent sayings with deep meanings, spoken easily and simply by the population. They represent the epitome of a deep experience formed over a long time and passed on from generation to generation, reflecting and expressing meaningful and difficult historical experiences (Hassuna 9).

Characteristics of Folk Proverbs

Folk proverbs are the most widespread form of folktale, and thus they play an important role in highlighting the social and economic values in society. Through their circulation, the general public strives to deepen its moral standards, customs, traditions, and views. In this way, folk proverbs serve as forms of modern heritage (Hassuna 9). Chaim Weiss defined the main features of folk proverbs as currency, repetition, the use of old-fashioned words, rhyming, and metaphors. Al-Mubayyid identifies the principal features of popular proverbs as currency, repetition, use of old-fashioned words, rhyme, and metaphor (166–86). Khuri adds other features to this list, namely, didacticism, imparting of wisdom, ease of memorization, and expression of a known truth (*Al-Maṣādir* 123).

Palestinian Folk Proverbs

Palestinian folk proverbs resulted from historical, geographic, literary, material, and economic factors combined with the customs and traditions of both the masses and the intellectual elite. Consequently, folk proverbs express people’s lives and feelings, as they emerge from the reality of their environment. In Abu Janna’s view, Palestinian folk proverbs arise from a specific event or story (121–23). ʿAbbas sees Palestinian folk proverbs as a result of residual echoes in the popular conscience of a record of life experiences, reflecting people’s customs, beliefs, concerns, occasions, and actions at the level of individuals and at the level of the group at the individual and collective levels (16–17). Fatima Shuqayr presents several characteristics distinguishing Palestinian folk problems (54–55), including:

1. The need for continuity in life in light of change being an essential part of life, as expressed in the folk proverb, “nothing is eternal” (Lubani 565).
2. The paradoxical combination of words in the same proverb; “neither tall nor short nor swaddled in bed” (Lubani 677).
3. The reflection of the Palestinian people’s daily life, beliefs, and social lives: “do not talk while eating” (Lubani 676–77).
4. The folk proverbs are distinguished by their eloquence and match the words to the appropriate situation: “it is like being dressed in seven souls” (Lubani 741).

The Concept of Folksongs

Al-ʿAnatil defines the “folksong” (*volkslied)*[[21]](#endnote-21) as a poem of unknown origin with music and lyrics. Folksongs originated among the masses in the past and remained in circulation for a long time (*Bayn al-Fulklūr* 245). They are characterized by a myriad of social phenomena and can often more effectively express folk customs, traditions, and rituals than can more eloquent poetry. This is due to folksongs’ closeness to society on the one hand and their association with social norms and traditions on the other hand (ʿAlawwish 62). In contrast, Hassuna defines folksongs as an offshoot of folk literature, as folksongs are clearly connected to the environment in which they are circulated and to the circumstances in which they are sung before they gain widespread acceptance. Khuri adds that the most important distinguishing traits of folksongs are their direct connection to the melody, vocal performance, and the activation of movement (*al-Fulklūr* 44).

FolkSong Characteristics

ʿAli al-Khalili presents the most important folksong characteristics, namely, the brevity of sentences and the use of old folk melodies, with their distinct communicative style. Within each melody are words relayed in colloquial Arabic. He adds that folksongs rely on their words for impact, with each song having a specific musical style based on the various meters of its poetry. Furthermore, he maintains that folksongs are characterized by their linguistic simplicity and delicate elocution, as they have no known composer or author, nor known date of composition (*Aghānī* 23).

Palestinian FolkSongs

Hassuna defines Palestinian folksongs as an art form within the realm of popular literature that originated in the colloquial Palestinian dialect and were created by one or more conveyors of heritage from the past. These songs resonated among the Palestinians, as they expressed what Palestinians truly cared about. As a result, they spread and were passed down from generation to generation. Ultimately, they were to become anonymous, belonging to the people and expressing their collective emotions (25–26). They are characterized by concise phrases, catchy melodies, and strong rhythms (al-Khalili *Aghānī* 23).

Khuri notes that Palestinian folksongs have gone through several stages, including the classical, romantic, realist, and socialist realism periods.[[22]](#endnote-22) Between the period spanning 1948–67 during which the Palestinian people witnessed *al-Nakba* and the “setback of June,” Palestinian folksongs conveyed the national struggle, focusing on themes of migration, exile, and yearning for the homeland (Hassuna 376). Nimr Sirhan presents several distinguishing features of Palestinian folksongs, including their prevalence and popularity in Palestinian society, their oral transmission, and their anonymity (*Mawsūʿat* 52–83, but see also ʿAlawwish 11–20 and Khuri *al-Maṣādir* 70–72).

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1. *al-Turāth al-Shaʿbī* (folk heritage) is the Arabic term recommended as a substitute for the famous foreign term “folklore,” which was coined in 1846 when British researcher William John Thoms recommended its use as a name for the field that teaches customs, traditions, practices, legends, epics, and proverbs (Sirhan *Mawsūʿat* 20, Khuri *al-Fulklūr* 19). In order to avoid confusion, this study will use the term “folklore” to denote the scientific study of the field of folk heritage and the Arabic term “folk heritage” to refer to the same cultural materials in the applied study. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. According to al-Munasira, heritage is one level of the national and patriotic culture of a people. This level is related to the formation of emotions and spirituality. It transcends the shifts of folk history, as evidenced in its dialectical literature written by a known or anonymous individual and becoming an essential part of the collective consciousness. Heritage, which people receive from their parents, moves chronologically across the past, present, and future, thereby imbuing it with an immense emotional impact (7–9). Al-Mutawwir defines folklore as comprising the entire formation of ideas, beliefs, morals, laws, and language and encompassing all the tools, instruments, weapons, and other inventions that people find suitable for use in their lives (29–33). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See also al-Jabiri, who ascertains the importance of heritage as a unifying element for identity in Arabic communities and describes it as a component of the Arab psyche and a fundamental element for its unity. According to Al-Jabiri, heritage forms one of the pillars of cultural identity (*al-Turāth* 23). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For more on the study of folklore, see Lowie 12–34. Interest in folklore began in the nineteenth century with the beginning of the industrial revolution and the renaissance movement of that period. The nineteenth century represents an important stage in the development and expansion of the field of humanities (Krappe 112–345). For more on the romantic movement, see Hilal 12–123. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For the patriotic motives of the Brothers Grimm, see ʿor th 5 and Khuri *al-Fulklūr* 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Taylor’s theory was that human evolution went through three stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization (Dundes 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. James George Frazer (1854–1941) is considered one of the pioneers in the study of folklore, mostly notable for his books *The Golden Bough*(1890) and *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* (1918)(al-ʿAnatil *Bayn al-Fulklūr* 161–226, ʿAlqam 1993, 10–11). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. On the late emergence of interest in heritage among Arabic, see Al-Mutawwir 25. In this regard, Khuri says that the Arab nations were under foreign rule for centuries, first Ottoman, and then European colonialism. He adds that, in the wake of their independence, these nations began to recognize the importance of folklore in confirming national identity and some Arab governments took an interest in traditional and folk intellectual and artistic cultural heritage (*al-Fulklūr* 60). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ahmad Rushdi Salih translated Alexander Krappe 1967 book *Folklore*, while Nabila Ibrahim translated James George Frazer’s *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* in 1973 and, in the same year, the German fairytales which were published by folklorist Friedrich von der Leyen (ʿAlqam 29). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The Markaz al-Fanūn al-Shaʿbīya (Center for Popular Arts) was founded in Egypt in 1957. One of the center’s main aims was the compilation of nationalistic heritage from across Egypt and organizing it in a scientific archive. Libya and Tunisia likewise both founded a Majlis li-Raʿayat al-Fanūn al-Shaʿbīya (Oversight Committee for Popular Arts). In Iraq, a special department for the arts and folk culture was founded within the Ministry of Information, and in 1971 a government legislation was passed to found the Center of Folklore which aimed to study Iraqi folk heritage specifically. A Markaz al-Fanūn al-Shaʿbīya was founded in Kuwait in 1965 to compile and organize Kuwaiti heritage. Furthermore, the Culture Directorate which focused on Jordanian heritage was founded in Jordan. The directorate explores folklore, and its most important objectives are to collect aspects of material, social, intellectual, and artistic life (ʿmost 31). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. A folklore museum was founded in Libya and boasted many departments, including folk medicine, music, tools, and folk attire. There are also several museums in Morocco which display folk materials. Syria has a museum of Syrian customs and traditions, and Iraq has a museum dedicated to Baghdadi folk traditions and another to folk costumes. In Kuwait, there is a museum displaying models of material life such as costumes, shipbuilding materials, and fishing methods (ʿAlqam 32). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Or, as Kanaʾina calls it “the beginning of the Arab nationalist ideology stage” (*Dirāsāt* 144). It is also necessary to point out the importance of the Palestinian land and its holiness. Palestine attracted the attention of many foreigners. Visitors wrote diaries and books about what they saw, and researchers in various fields of arts and sciences, especially archaeologists, historians, geographers, and folkloric scholars wrote many books and published many studies about the various aspects of folk life (Bisusu 22). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. “Orientalism” is the name given to the different academic branches dedicated to studying the languages and cultures of the East. An “Orientalist,” on the other hand, is a Westerner who studies the heritage of the East, such as India, Iran, China, Japan, the Arab world, and other Eastern nations (Sa ʿid 2, Haddad 86). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Some Palestinian researchers took an interest in studying everything related to Palestinian heritage. One such researcher was Estefan Estefan (1899–1949) who was interested in Palestinian folktales. ʿArif al-ʿArif (1891–1973) published *al-Qiḍāʾ bayn al-Badūw* (Staying with the Bedouins; 1934), while ʿAmr Salih al-Barghuthi (1894–1965) focused on village customs and traditions. Mustafa al-Dabbagh (1898**–**1989) published *al-Madrasa al-Qarīya* (The Village School, 1935) and *al-Tārīkh al-Qadīm lil-ʿĀlam al-Waṭanī* (The Ancient History of The National World, 1951). Meanwhile, ʿIsa al-Muso (1923**–**2003) was interested in Palestinian folk proverbs (al-Barghuthi 32–40). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The first issue was published in Jerusalem in October 1920 and was released annually until its 19th issue in 1939. The 20th issue was not published until 1946, after nearly a seven-year hiatus. In June 1948, the 21 and final issue was released. The journal boasted a diverse range of studies on languages, literature, history, folklore, and the antiquities of the ancient Near East. Four Palestinian researchers contributed to this journal (most of whom specialized in folklore): Estefan Estefan, Ilyas Haddad, ʿUmar Salih al-Barghuthi, and Tawfiq Kan’aan (ʿAqlam 214**–**15). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. The aims of the committee include compiling everything that was written, photographed, recorded, and said about Palestinian heritage cross-linguistically and archiving it in the Markaz al-Abhath al-Ijtimaʿiya’s (Center for Social Research’s) library that was attached to Jamaʿiyat Inʿash al-Usra. The aims of the society are to publish studies about Palestinian folklore and to translate everything written about Palestinian heritage (in any language) into Arabic. It also strives to found a museum of Palestinian heritage (ʿ The 211–13). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. A visit to this association on December 3, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Among the most notable works of that period are Abd-al-Latif aAl-Barghuthi’s (1928–2002) study “Folk Songs in Jordan and Palestine” (1963); ʿUmar al-Sarisi’s (1938–2013) “Palestinian Folk Tales” (1972); Fayyiz Ali al-Ghul’s story anthologies *The World is Stories*, *Legends from My Country*, and *Tales of the Forefathers* (1964–1968); Nimr Sirhan’s collection of books on heritage published between 1964 and 1974, namely, *Reviving Folklore*, *Canaanite Architecture in Palestine*, *The Encyclopedia of Palestinian Folklore*, *Our Folk Songs in the West Bank*, and *Palestinian Folktales*. Additionally, Yusra Arnita published *Palestinian Folklore* in 1968, while Nabil ʿAlqam published *Introduction to the Study of Folklore* (1976) and ʿAli al-Khalili (1943–2013) published *Introduction to the Study of Fables and Work Songs* (1979). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. There were individual initiatives to establish other foundations dedicated to heritage. ʿAbd-al-Hakim Samara (1959–) published the magazine *al-Masira* (The Path) between 1959 and 1988. He also founded Manshurat Shams (Sun Publications) in 1993 and, in 2004, he founded al-Khabiya Foundation to compile and document Arabic publications (Mahawwi 25–26). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. In the introduction to *Speak Bird, Speak Again*, anthropologist Alan Dundes says that the book is important for an array of reasons, some of which are political. He added that these stories belong to the Palestinian people and that regardless of one’s view toward the erection of an Israeli state in 1948, one cannot deny that it left the Palestinian people fragmented and displaced. He added that it is similar to what colonial states did when they claimed ownership of already inhabited land (1–6). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The term *volkslied* was coined by the German scholar Herder in 1773 and its translation spread to different European languages. Arabs adopted this term and translated it to “folksong” (Khuri *al-Muṣṭalaḥ* 42). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For this and more on Palestinian folksongs, see Khuri *al-Muṣṭalaḥ* 97–173. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)