6 The Use of Popular Songs in Palestinian Children’s Literature

Abstract

This chapter shows the disparity in the employment of the popular children’s songs in the texts in the first period. The songs were used as a metaphor that conveyed a clearer meaning to the readers than did their original 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 popular songs achieved several goals, some of which were related to the contents of the text.

This chapter discusses the use of popular song in Palestinian children’s literature from 1967 to the present and is divided historically, as in the previous chapters. The way popular songs, like the other art forms examined, were used in children’s stories varied from one writer to another and sometimes changed from story to story with a single writer. At the same time, all the writers examined also used a variety of methods to introduce popular songs into their works. Writers provided a tangible representation of the affirmation of national identity by making use of themes identified in popular songs. They used the texts in three primary ways: by making direct allusions to their contents, stylistics, and objective significance; by imitating their melodies to provide background for their own work; and by intermingling popular song lyrics with their own in a way that related their texts to what the song articulates.

I will explore the techniques Palestinian writers employed as well as analyze how they have referenced Palestinian folksongs to express their creative vision, their awareness of their popular heritage. In addition, I will categorize the folksongs according to their themes and various popular occasions in order to identify the themes of the songs chosen by writers in their works for children. I rely on Nimr Sirhan’s 1977 *Mawsūʿat al-Fulklūr al-Filasṭīnī* (Encyclopedia of Palestinian Folklore) and Musa ʿAllawish’s 2001 book *Al-Aghānī al-Shaʿbiya al-Filasṭīniya* (Palestinian Popular Songs), and draw on Jaris Khuri’s 2013 study *Al-Fulklūr wal-Ghināʾal-Shaʿbī al-Filasṭīnī* (Folklore and Palestinian Popular Song).

The Use of Popular Songs in the Period 1967–87

During this first period, the use of popular songs in texts varies significantly, ranging from close to direct invocation to a more aesthetic use. Other texts reference segments from well-known popular songs simply to reflect the folkloric context without any other narrative function. These texts use popular songs to achieve multiple goals, including those related to the textual content and those that express something about their characters. Writers drew on these in their works because they relate to all social classes and to individuals in a variety of social positions. The status of these popular songs in their stories varies between being fundamental to the narrative and merely serving their content.

*Allusion: Using the Names of Popular Songs and Their Associations in This Period*

The most common technique that writers in this period used to demonstrate their awareness of folksongs’ significance and artistic value within children’s fiction was allusion, using the names of popular songs. Mahmud Shuqayr made more allusions to the names of popular songs than any other writer in this period, even if for mainly superficial purposes in the text. Shuqayr used the name of a popular song in his 1987-published short story “Ughniyat al-Ḥimār” (The Song of the Donkey), albeit fleetingly and with limited impact on the narrative:

The donkey began his song in his low, melodious voice: “Haaaw!” The customers joyfully swayed from side to side, expecting to hear one of the latest tunes. This spurred the donkey on to sing it again but more harshly: “Haaaaw!” The music grew louder and louder while the customers enjoyed themselves more and more so the donkey, seized by self-confidence sang over and over: “Haaaaw! Haaaaw!”

(*Ughniyat al-Ḥimār* 2)

Sirhan Mawsūʿa (561–73) discusses the many and varied topics of popular songs and the occasions they are sometimes used to mark. According to Khuri, “The popular song gains its vitality through the live and visceral reality that envelops it. There is no life in popular songs divorced from real life activity and the real, psychological effect of that upon the people it affects” (*Al-Fulklūr* 102).

Palestine is a land that has been predominantly agricultural since ancient times, with its people having worked the land for generations, perfecting their craft. Popular songs are a particular feature of the harvesting, olive picking, and other seasons. Here again, Shuqayr refers to songs that are related to the seasons in his 1987-published tale “Ughniyat al-Ṣarṣūr” (The Song of the Cockroach) in the same anthology (highlighted passage in bold).

The cockroach was not demanding, saying that he only wants to make sure his family didn’t starve during the days of winter and to persuade the ant, who always dubbed him lazy, to stop doing once and for all: **He sings to the harvesters** to stir their zeal and hard work.

(*Ughniyat al-Ḥimār* 5)

Tawfiq Ziyyad was also interested in curating folklore heritage and using it in his poetry. Invoking folktales, folksongs, customs, traditions, and folk proverbs, he drew upon Palestinian folk heritage in his poems, which were of great significance in bringing folk heritage to the fore. Folk heritage, in his view, was a popular creative expression that had been shaped and altered over generations. However, it was threatened by extinction and required preservation, curation, and recording. He believed that it was essential for younger generations to learn about their heritage so that they could absorb the humane and patriotic traditions. This explains why he turned to writing for children in this period. In his 1975-published short story collection Ḥāl al-Dunyā (The State of the World), he reworked the tale of Abbas the hunter and the partridge in the story of that name. Drawing on popular heritage in the tale, he specifically mentions the *dabka*, the folk dancing that is an important feature of weddings traditionally. The writer conjures up images of the traditional wedding in his tale while combining both local vernacular and Classical Arabic (CA) linguistic forms:

Cheers would burst out everywhere and, with them, genuine human joy. At the end of the occasion, everyone would gather around him, offering him sweet things and drinks. ***Dabka* circle dances, songs**, meat, and rice would be laid on for the rest of that day.

(Ziyyad *Ḥāl al-Dunyā* 70)

The Use of Popular Song in CA in This Period

The authors of this period avoided writing in colloquial language and instead chose to convert the folksong vernacular into the CA equivalent. However, they found that identifying CA equivalents for vernacular words and phrases required tremendous effort on their part. This is, indeed, the most difficult thing to do. We return to Shuqayr, who exemplifies the use of traditional rain songs (*aghānī al- maṭar* or *aghānī al-istisqāʾ* as they are also known) in his 1986-published tale “Al-Ghayma al-Kabira” (The Big Cloud). Rain has had a special status in both ancient and modern Palestinian society and has always been a source of inspiration for writers. The words of *aghānī al-istisqāʾ* are all imprecations to God’s power. They are integral to the land and exemplify how folksongs are the most genuine expression of folk heritage. In this instance, the song is a direct appeal for rain, and the children are imitating adults and their most authentic expressions of experience. The voices of these children resound in supplication to God for relief. They sing in in joyful, optimistic hope of rainfall as they dance and play:

The cloud said: “I will send rain to the earth that will wash the trees clean and irrigate the fields, so the crops will sprout, and the grass will grow.” ʿIsam concentrated on what the cloud was saying, but then the rain began to fall, so ʿIsam started cavorting in the rain, singing: “Rain and more rain/Our house is iron” [*Amṭarī wa-zīdī/Baytu-nā ḥadīdī*]. Other children came to play in the rain with ʿIsam while the big cloud watched over them tenderly as drizzled its soft rain down that washed the trees and irrigated the fields.

(Shuqayr *Al-Jundī wal-Luʿba* 1)

The writer cites the opening line of the rain song:

What are you waiting for, my world and my increase,

Our house is iron,

Our uncle ʿAbdallah,

God has blessed us.

(Sirhan *Mawsūʿa* 48)

The Use of Popular Songs in the Period 1988–2015

During this period, writers became increasingly interested in Palestinian folksongs and developed new methods and techniques for deploying them within texts. Children’s writers were familiar with all types and styles of Palestinian folksong, and demonstrated this by seeking new ways of using them. They showed audacity by using these songs in their vernacular dialect and by imitating folksong stylings. Muhammad Badarna emerged as one of the distinguished writers who consciously incorporated popular songs into his stories’ narratives and structured them with patriotic and humanitarian messaging. There are at least nine examples of him quoting or reshaping folksongs and using them in his stories.

Allusion to the Names of Songs and Their Associations in This Period

Writers’ methods and techniques went beyond using phrases from popular songs, such as the *mawwals* (lyric folksongs) *yā layl yā ʿayn* [Oh night! Oh eye!] and *awf* used for expressing powerful emotions. Badarna used *yā layl yā ʿayn* in his 1993-published short story “Qamar al-Amawwara al-Samawwara” (The Moon of al-Amawwara al-Samawwara) to express the pain and sadness the girl character feels after the sun sets and she remains alone in the night darkness: “And al-Amawwara cries and bawls and screams, with no companion but the wind, and she can’t make sense of things, now complaining then crying, and oh night, oh eye, oh peace!” [*yā layl yā ʿayn yā salām*!] (*Qamar* 20).

In his tale in the same collection titled “Al-Jadd al-Ḥādī wal-Ḥafīd Shādī” (The Grandfather al-Hadi and the Grandson Shadi), Badarna also uses the familiar expression *awf* to express the misfortune the winds caused. *Awf* serves to lend a folk lyrical quality to the tale in a symbolic way that emphasizes his commitment to and love for his homeland, Palestine. The grandfather defends his homeland—“*al-karam*” the vineyard—from the enemy—“*al-rīḥ allatī lā tuʿrif al-raḥma*” the wind that knows no mercy—but is too weak to face the wind alone: *Hādha al-karam huwa abūnā wa ummu-nā qadd zaraʿtu-h bi-sawāʿidī maʿ jaddī mundhu sittīn ʿāman* (this vineyard is our father and mother; I planted it with my own hands, along with my grandfather, 60 years ago). Nonetheless he seeks his grandson Shadi’s help to beat back the wind: “Grandfather and grandson reached the olive vineyard, so the grandfather cried out tenderly: ‘*Awwwwwf awwwwwwf awf* oh my father, oh my kin, oh people, oh people, oh nearest and dearest!’” (*Qamar* 28).

This allusive technique reaches its apogee in Badarna’s 1989-published short story “Al-Ṭāʾirāt al-Waraqiya Tasquṭ al-Ghayūm al-Ramādiya” (Kites Fall through Gray Clouds) when he uses popular song references such as *al-dabka al-shaʿ biya* (the traditional *dabka*) and *al-mawwāl* for expressions of joy, even though the mawwal as a folksong form is normally associated with melancholy and sadness:

And the heavy clouds accompanied the kites again, **singing and intoning** [*tughnī wa tarnadaḥ*]: “Goodness is on its way, is on its way,” so the peasants and their children soared with joy, and they **danced the *dabka*** [*dabakū*] ecstatically. The girls’ and boys’ **mawwals** (*mawāwīl*) rang out and delight erupted in their melodies.

(*Al-Ṭāʾirāt al-Waraqiya* 40)

We have cited many examples from Murrar’s work in previous chapters, which demonstrated his influence and deep knowledge of folklore and his desire to have it memorialized in children’s tales. In this context again, he uses the expressions *al-ʿitābā* and *al-mījnā*, two styles of folk singing (Khuri *Al-Fulklūr* 107–14; see also Sirhan *Mawsūʿa* 72 and ʿAlawwish 102–77), in the tale “Shirāb al-Mulūk” (The Drink of Kings) in his 1989-published short story collection *Wa Lam Tufriḥ al-Thaʿālib* (And the Foxes Were Not Happy), to reinvoke the world of traditional wedding songs in a clear expression of his admiration for the Palestinian popular song, his respect for folklore material, and his desire to preserve it and to pass it on to children. The most common genre of Palestinian folksongs is that of wedding songs. The writer describes for us some traditional wedding customs, combining popular expressions, such as the word *al-quwwayl* (the little talk), with CA vocabulary:

At the same time, a horse race was taking place not far away, and the sound of ***al-quwwayl*** with ***al-ʿitābā*** and ***al-mījnā*** arose, mostly celebrating the wedding host, his family, and the chief guests. The jockeys heard ***al-zaghārīd*** [the ululations], but they were from the mouths of the peasant women, and all the women’s singing and all the dancing in the groom’s house was by the peasant women.

(Murrar *Wa Lam Tufriḥ* 79)

In the same tale, Murrar uses traditional symbols and the atmosphere of folk weddings to express sentiments of joy and the word *al-quwwayl* again, but this time explaining its meaning. *Al-zajjāl* is a singer of folk tunes in colloquial language, whether composed by him or someone else (Al-Barghuthi 69): “Suddenly, the revelers’ voices cried out a greeting and *al-quwwayl* of *al-zajjāl* rang out to celebrate the wedding” (?).

We return again to Badarna’s short story “Al-Jadd al-Ḥādī wal-Ḥafīd Shādī,” as Badarna uses the word *al-ḥādī*, a word used for someone who sings a type of folksong called *al-ḥidādī* (see Sirhan *Mawsūʿa* 64), in the story five times in the space of three pages, including in the title. This expression evokes memories of gloomy popular songs, especially chants and lamentations. The author uses CA expressions with a folkish stamp, repeating them until they become a foundational narrative motif in what is called *al-ilmāʿ al-mukaththaf* (intensive allusion). This can be seen in the use of the word *al-ḥādī* in these examples:

* “Grandfather Abu Ali *al-ḥādī* sang an authentic folk melody that brought joy to the olives and the palm trees” (Badarna *Al-Jadd* 22).
* “The grandfather’s eyes met his grandson’s, and that eye-to-eye conversation took place between them again. The grandfather then rushed over to hug Shadi and his voice of *al-ḥādī* rose into the air” (Badarna *Al-Jadd* 32).
* The smile returned to Shadi’s face, and he became a peasant and a *ḥādī*, and *al-ḥādī* began singing to the trees while the birds soared in the air (Badarna *Al-Jadd* 34).

The Use of the Popular Song in the Vernacular Form

During this period, writers became more daring by incorporating popular songs into their texts in colloquial language forms. This primarily indicates that writers were opening themselves up to new experiences when writing for children and had a desire to express themselves in different ways. This helped to elevate their creativity. Writers in this period tended to foreground their local vernacular, using new techniques, quoting either all or part of the folksong. The most popular song that we found quoted during this period is “Al-Dalaʿūna,” widely played at traditional weddings (Khuri *Al-Fulklūr*). Badarna preferred allusions to this popular song over every other folksong in his stories due to its unique features and close and exclusive associations to Palestinian territory. Badarna quotes “Al-Dalaʿūna” in “Al-Jadd al-Ḥādī wal-Ḥafīd Shādī” more than once, for example:

To *al-Dalaʿūna* and to *al-Dalaʿūna*, the olives of my country are the most beautiful there are, the olives of my country my greatest love, they generously draw me in with a “come here!” so let’s be joyful. In their joyful uniforms..., my country’s olives are the most beautiful they are, my country’s olives, my greatest love, he called me with his kindness, “Come here,” and in his golden uniform, let’s make *manqusha* and feed our loved ones in this neighborhood!

(Badarna *Al-Jadd* 26)

At first glance, this song appears to be spontaneous in the text. It is also distinctive in its arrangement of musical and lyrical stylings. The folksong clearly makes a significant contribution to the artistry that harmonizes with the spirit of the narrative and emotive situations depicted and contributes to the aesthetic construction. Badarna seeks to dovetail the folksong with the text again in the “Qamar al-Amawwara al-Samawwara” tale, again quoting “Al-Dalaʿūna”:

Once upon a time, long ago, al-Amawwara al-Samawwara and four children, Ibtisam, Ahmed, Sami, and Imad. They met at the olive tree, near the apple and lemon trees and, dancing right and left, the group of them sang the sweetest song: “To *al-Dalaʿūna*, why do you pamper me? You knew me when poor, why did you take me? [*ʿAlā dalaʿūna wa laysh dallaʿtīnī ʿariftīnī faqīr laysh akhadhtīnī?*].”

(Badarna *Qamar al-Amawwara* 4)

The folksong contains colloquial lexemes that help to convey the folkloric sentiments, consciousness, and reality. The word *laysh*, a vernacular term, shares the same meaning as the CA word *limādha*. The writer chooses to use *laysh*, which has popular connotations and is related to the popular consciousness, especially since the song is expressive of a special occasion.

The writer’s use of vernacular forms of popular songs increases the degree of quotation and intensifies the presence of folklore material in the text. Murrar notably quotes “Al-Dalaʿūna” in its colloquial entirety in his 1997-published story “Yawm al-Batīkha” (The Day of the Watermelon):

*ʿAlā dalaʿūna wa ʿAlā dalaʿūna hawwā al-shamālī ghayyir al-lawnā*

yammā yā yammā mā aḥlā al-ʿishāba

kull yawm al-ṣubh bishūf aḥbābī

li-kulli al-ḥalq mā aʿmal ḥisābī

wa ghayyir-ik mā bakhidh yā asmar al-lawnā

[To *al-dalaʿūna*, to *al-dalaʿūna*, the northern air changed the colors.

Mother, oh mother, what beautiful greenery!

Every morning, I see my loved ones

For all creation, I do not make for my benefit

I won’t take anything else from you, my brown one]

(Murrar *Yawm al-Batīkha*)

Murrar successfully quotes this folksong in a way that is congruous with the narrative atmosphere and content, which is folkloric, vernacular, and pre-1948 in character and setting.

Fatima Dhiyab (1951–) used a technique of quoting folksongs that made it inseparable from the rest of the text in the 2007-published story “Fustān al-ʿĪd” (The Eid Dress). The story tells of a girl named ʿAbla who lives with her father and wants to buy a new dress for Eid.

And the birds of the forest flocked and went to the nearby orchards, gathering rose petals and sweet basil, sewing new sambac and jasmine, and hastening toward ʿAbla singing:

We’ve come, come, come

We’ve got the dress and we’ve come

For the sake of your eyes, ʿAbla

Let’s go to Eid, come join us.

[*Jīnā wa jīnā wa jīnā*

*Jibbnā al-fustān wa jīnā*

*Ka-rimāl ʿayūnik ʿAbla*

*Khallī al-ʿīd yulāqīnā.*]

We have already noted that writers became bolder in their colloquial citation of folksongs in children’s stories in this period. Lullabies and rain songs, as well as children’s songs created spontaneously and those made up by adults for their children, are considered a part of a folk heritage of children’s tunes. These songs are integral to adult folk heritage, with continuities in meaning, content, and musical form. They are also simplified to be appropriate for a child’s aesthetic and intellectual abilities.

Folksongs are a crucial aspect of Palestinian social unity, and children’s songs are an essential cornerstone of this tradition. In all their meanings, values, and symbols for children, these songs blend the same nuances, meanings, and values into something that meets the needs of Palestinian society. The symbolic connotations of rain songs, both religiously and economically, form the basis for children’s tunes.

In the 2007-published story “Waṣīlat lil-Khallāṣ” (A Means to an End), Murrar quotes part of a popular children’s rain song, and separates it from the text using quotation marks. The text is written in CA, and a children’s choir repeats the song within the tale:

Rain, rain, go away, Come again another day, Little Johnny wants to play.

Fall and increase our house is iron

Our uncle ʿAbdallah broke the jar.

[*Shattī wa zīdī baytunā ḥadīdī*

*ʿAmmunā ʿAbdallah kassar al-jarra.*]

Boys and girls returning from school, dancing, and singing in a big circle, not caring about the downfall from above. Even when the rain falls heavily, they run around rejoicing (Murrar *Wasīla*).

Zakaria Muhammad also quoted a popular rain song that children sing. In the story “Mughannī al-Maṭar” (The Rain Singer), published in 2010, the author tells us about a little donkey who longs to sing but is reluctant to do so because he thinks his voice is ugly. Every creature longed for rain and prayed to God for it because it had not rained for some time. When the little donkey finally does sing, it is not a song about anger and exhaustion that people expect, but one about rain. As soon as the little donkey begins singing his beautiful song, rain showers begin too.

Oh my Lord, a shower, a shower! One that lasts two-and-a-half months.

No sprinkle, no dribble, Oh Lord, drop after drop,

Lubricate the cat’s throat, Oh Lord, with spray and splatter

Sooth the donkey foal’s throat.

[*Yā rabbī zakhkha zakhkha ṣār la-hā shaḥrayn was nuṣṣ*

*mā bakhkhat wa lā bakhkha yā rabbī nuqṭa nuqṭa*

*tanrawī ḥalq al-qiṭṭa yā rabbī rashsha rashsha*

*tansaqī ḥalq al-jaḥsha*] (Muhammad 15)

Muhammad uses this song at two other points in the narrative. His repeated invocation of this tune, especially this part of it, is not random, but is born of his conscious, consistent desire that folksongs be preserved and remain important for children. The reason for this is the song’s importance to children. The author is motivated to deepen the preservation of a popular heritage that he is keen to revive. We see this desire embodied in his repeated use of the song, reinforcing it through repetition. The song’s repetition means that it is not merely a tune. Rather, it has taken on connotations from life’s core realities and has a profound influence on the soul, in addition to its aesthetic pleasures. Muhammad modifies the lyrics slightly to express his desired ideas from the original, which traditionally commences:

Oh Lord, drop by drop let’s water the cat’s grass

Oh Lord, why are we, your creation eating vetch stalks?

Oh Lord, why the upset when we eat sorrel stems? (ʿAlawwish 224)

The writer uses symbolism in this passage and prays to God to send rain to irrigate the lands that have soaked all the water into themselves. However, he changes the ending because the folksong contains expressions that are not suitable for his story’s themes.

Folksongs, including what are known as cradle songs (*aghānī al-mahd*) that women sing to lull their child to sleep, are present in one’s life from birth. Nadir Abu Tamir used this type of song in his 2002-published story “Rāmī la Yushbih Aḥadan” (Rami Doesn’t Look Like Anyone). Throughout this tale, the writer exposes the reader to folksongs and quotes an excerpt from one that the grandmother character uses to mesmerize her grandson, Rami. The well-integrated quotation in the vernacular language, an act of preservation of the popular heritage, works well with the narrative content and style of the story. It is as if the part invoked from the popular song is integrated with the text of the story:

“Sleep, my love, sleep, and the doves will coo to you” [*Nām yā habībī nām tadhbahulu-k ṭayr al-ḥammām*]: This is the song that the grandmother sings to Rami every night before he goes to sleep. All of sudden, however, Rami no longer likes this song.

(Abu Tamir *Rāmī* 3)

When this type of quotation is used more than once, it has a more distinctive effect, taking it to a higher level. We see this in Samih al-ʿAbushi’s 2002-published tale “Man Yughannī li-Yāsmīn?” (Who Sings for Yasmine?):

Then she puts her to bed and sings her the song she loves:

Sleep, Yasmine, apple of my eye, sleep, [*nāmī yā ʿayn Yāsmīn nāmī*]

and fly with the sparrow and the dove.

Tell the moon in the heavens

to send our people the sweetest peace

and sleep, Yasmine, apple of my eye, sleep, [*wa nāmī yā ʿayn Yāsmīn nāmī* ]

and fly, oh sparrow, with the dove,

and bring a gift for Yasmin with you:

Silvery sugar and Levantine Delight (Al-ʿAbushi)

Amal Kurayyani also used children’s songs in colloquial language in her stories. In her 2003-published tale “Ṭayr wa Huddī yā Firāsh” (Fly Away and Take Me, Oh Butterfly), she quotes the first verse of the folksong, “Rash Rash,” that parents sing to entertain their children. The writer quotes from the vernacular dialect original repeatedly throughout the story, making it a constant and unchangeable motif of structural importance. It appears that she chose to use it to directly appeal to children’s tastes.

The chicken followed the butterfly and sang to it until it came back:

“Feathers, feathers, feathers, Feathers, feathers, feathers

Fly away and take me, oh butterfly.”

[*Rīsh rash rāsh Rīsh rash rāsh*

*Ṭayr wa huddī yā firāsh*]

The rooster saw them both and grew happy along with them, and followed the butterfly and hen singing:

“Feathers, feathers, feathers, Feathers, feathers, feathers

Fly away and take me, oh butterfly.”

[*Rīsh rash rāsh Rīsh rash rāsh*

*Ṭayr wa huddī yā firāsh*] (Kurayyani)

The repeated citation is consistently placed within quotation marks to distinguish the folkloric content from the ordinary narrative.

The Use of Folksongs in CA

During this period, CA folksongs were quoted infrequently, suggesting that authors had become more aware of the importance of popular heritage and the need for children to be familiar with folksongs in their own vernacular dialect. However, the techniques used in the previous period were no longer used when quoting folksongs, and new, more advanced techniques appeared.

Muhammad al-Zahir quoted the first verse of the folk rain song “Shattī wa Zīdī” in his 1995 collection of poetry *Warda lil-Ṣadīq wa Yadd lil-ʿAmal* (A Rose for the Friend and a Hand for Work). This anthology reveals how the children’s poem form has matured into a distinct literary genre. It has a vision of opening up children’s perceptions of the details of daily life, including their rhythms, movements, and interactions. This is accomplished through the use of imagery and imagination to transport them to secret worlds of joy, pleasure, and beautiful, romantic songs, as well as music’s poetic dance rhythms.

In one poem from this collection—“Al-ʿAjūz wal-Maṭar” (The Old Woman and the Rain)—al-Zahir evokes a festive atmosphere through the word of an old woman who tells the children about and, more particularly, joins in with them in celebration of the rain. The rain takes on a symbolic meaning relating to a dream, and the poem plays on childish sentiments saturated with folklore in the children’s rain celebration song. Khuri calls this technique qualitative metonymic allusion (*al-ilmāʿ al-kannāʾī al-nawʿī*; *Al-Maṣādir*), since al-Zahir uses this song to express aspects of the human condition while far from his homeland. The writer was displaced from his homeland, Palestine, after 1948. Despite the distance, people cannot rid themselves of their feelings and the contours of their homeland, especially when growing up far from their families. Nationalist preoccupations emerge in songs that address occasions that haves nothing to do with patriotic matters, such as the song in the following example that originally talks about preparations for rain. The writer’s dream in this poem is symbolic of a return to his homeland. The poem’s sentiments, combined with the use of an excerpt from a folksong and the character’s expression of her psychological pain after hearing it, brings the old woman turns her to memories of her Palestinian homeland:

The old grandmother addresses the rain, saying:

Fall as you wish, oh rain,

[*Ahtil kamā tushā ʾ yā ayyahā al-maṭar*]

wheat is in the fields and fire is within my door.

Fall as you wish, oh rain,

Come near, my beloved children.

Fall as you wish, oh rain,

In the evening, we’ll tell the story of winter.

Fall as you wish, oh rain,

Then sleep while dreams blossom.

Fall as you wish, oh rain (Al-Zahir *Warda*).

The repetition of *ahtil kamā tushā ʾ yā ayyahā al-maṭar* renders it similar to a refrain, and the phrase becomes the poem’s backbone. The repetition of the imperative *ahtil* is driven by the intensity of the need for rain and, by extension, for anything we constantly seek. It alludes to disturbed psychological states overshadowed by basic needs. This repetition adds a special tone to this passage.

Hayat Abu Shumays also uses the technique of quotation in CA while also mixing it in a distinctive way with colloquial *argot*. In her 2004-published story, she quotes a traditional song called “Nām yā ʿAynī Nām” (Sleep, Apple of My Eye, Sleep) which is used to put children to sleep. The story is called “Yāfā, Ḥabībat al-Kull” (Yafa, Beloved by Everyone).

“Oh Lord, Yafa sleeps

**And we fly her a pair of doves** [*Wa nuṭayyir zūj al-ḥamām*]

May you have sweet dreams.” (Abu Shumays)

Yafa is the narrator’s granddaughter and is named after the Palestinian name for the city of Jaffa. This place has a presence and rhythm in the text, and its traditional associations with patriotism are very evident. As soon as a place becomes a symbol embedded in folk memory, it will have immediate resonances once it enters a text.

Alluding to the Style of Folksongs

Some writers may be influenced by the style of folk singing and the rhyming of songs, and may be tempted to use these elements in their writing to emulate the spirit of folksongs. We found this to be a widespread practice in this period, so we have selected just a few examples. We have already seen that folksongs had the greatest influence on Badarna, being featured in seven of his tales during this period. For example, in the story “Al-Jadd al-Ḥādī wal-Ḥafīd Shādī,” Badarna imitates the colloquial folksong style, using “Al-Dalaʿūna” as his template:

To *al-Dalaʿūna* and to *al-Dalaʿūna*, the olives of my country are the most beautiful there are, the olives of my country my greatest love, they generously draw me in with a “come here!” so let’s be joyful. In their joyful uniforms ..., my country’s olives are the most beautiful they are, my country’s olives, my greatest love, he called me with his kindness, “Come here,” and in his golden uniform, let’s make *manqusha* and feed our loved ones in this neighborhood!

(Badarna *Al-Jadd* 26)

Badarna imitates the simple meters of folksong styles in his 1993-published tale “Ḥulm Aḥlām” (Ahlam’s Dream):

“To the house [*bayt*], to the house [*bayt*], its bread, its milk, and olive oil [*khubzuh, labanuh wa zayt*]; to the house [*dār*], to the house [*dār*], come on, clever one, there is a mouse in my mouth [*yalla yā sha ṭṭār, fāt fī ʿubbī fār*].” Little Ahlam sang these words on her way home from school to her home, and the birds in her stomach sang along: “My country, my country, my country! The birds in my stomach are crying out!” [*Bilādī bilādī bilādī! ʿAṣāfīr baṭanī tuṣāṣī!*]

(*Al-Jadd* 24)

We notice here the writer evoking the musicality of the folksong in the local vernacular in a way that seems to want to preserve the folksong in its vernacular environment. The imitation of folksong stylings here appears stylistically distinct from the context, although the writer provides lexical cues like “*Ahlam sang*” to indicate allusion to such popular heritage. The use of colloquial language lends a greater realism to the tale.

This imitating of popular songs reaches its apogee in poet Jamal Qaʿwar’s 2005 anthology *Alḥān al-Ṣighār* (Tunes for the Young). In it, he uses CA consistently, including in dialogue, in the poem entitled “Ughniya” (Song). He used the technique of complete, eloquent imitation in a poem entitled “Song” by taking the traditional song “Al-Jimmāl” (The Cameleer) and turning it into CA, while entirely imitating the meter, rhyme, and colloquial lexical content. Qa’war’s poems create a strong connection to popular heritage, not only through the words he uses, but also in his attempt to link past and present and his desire to preserve national characteristics by citing folk heritage. The collection contains 24 poems for children, including 4 with a title inspired by folklore. We present below examples from this collection of traditional features in Qaʿwar’s poetry. These examples are in the form of intertextuality in its various guises. For comparison purposes, I have set out below the verses of the poem “Ughniya” and the corresponding verses from the Palestinian folksong “ʿAdhdhab al-Jimmāl Qalbī” (The Cameleer Tormented My Heart):

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| --- | --- |
| *Translated Derived Text of “Ughniya”* (Qaʿwar) | *Translated Original Text of “ʿAdhdhab al-Jimmāl Qalbī”* (Labbas *Aghānīnā* 116–22) |
| The cameleer tormented my heart/the day of the call to depart, I, oh cameleer! He struck me/I am sick and in pain | The cameleer tortured my heart/The day he intended to leave, I told him, oh cameleer! take me/ He said: “My course is long.” |
| Bitterly, oh cameleer, and bear my joy away on your camel | 2. I told him: “The cameleer is mount”/He said: “My burden is heavy.” |
| Neither longingly staying awake late nor the feeling of the sand can comfort me | 3. They told the cameleer to go/He said: “Oh, patience is beautiful.” |
| A gazelle has fled me, is lost to my imaginings | 4. I told him: “Lead by your prayers/ He said: “From me a gazelle has strayed.” |
| The fragrance of your cheeks and crescent curls | 5. I asked him: “Describe your gazelle”/ He said “The brow of the crescent moon.” |

We can see here how Qaʿwar drew strong inspiration from the folksong and its styling’s notice, with the very title he chose a pointer to the folksong imagery to follow, with both original and derived texts centrally expressing the pain of separation. Qaʿwar also maintained the rhyme scheme at the end of each stanza and the meter of the source text.

The Use of Folksongs as Titles for Children’s Stories in This Period

Most writers in this period who chose to use folksong allusions in their works placed the references in the title. Shuqayr, for example, chose *Ughniyat al-Ḥimār wa Qiṣaṣ Ukhrā* (The Song of the Donkey and Other Stories) for the name of his short story collection. Similarly, Hanan Juraysi, who wrote a 1994-published children’s story entitled “Makāghā” (Makagha); Nabiha Jabbarin chose the titles *Anshūdat al-Ṣabaḥ* (Morning Song) and *Aghānī Awlādinā Intimāʾ li-Bilādinā* (Our Children’s Songs Belong to Our Country) for poetry collections she published in 2000 and 2010, respectively; and Amal Kurayyani the story *Ṭayr wa Huddī yā Firāsh* already discussed. For the purposes of this discussion, I have limited the focus to titles that share the name of a folksong that also plays a significant role in the narrative content. The two collections I have chosen are Jabbarin’s *Aghānī Awlādinā Intimāʾ li-Bilādinā* and Naʾila Labbas’s 2010-published *Quraymsha Yā Quraymsha*.

Jabbarin addresses Palestinian children in *Aghānī Awlādinā Intimāʾ li-Bilādinā* by using their folk heritage, as she explains in the introduction:

I have tried, in this humble work, to bring children’s folksongs back to life and to clothe them in a new guise decorated with expressions of belonging to the nation and homeland. My ultimate aim in doing so is to expose the young to this type of children’s literature, which eloquently serves their soul’s improvement and refinement and enriching their language and knowledge.

(*Aghānī*)

Jabbarin choses 18 folksongs suitable for children, notable for their vernacular wording and wealth of folklore expressions. She uses these songs to convey the realities behind them, which have been passed down for decades and memorized by some of the young. These songs include “Ḥatti Zayt, yā Ḥajji” (Hajji, Bring Me Olives!), “Shatti yā Dunyā wa Zīdī” (Rain, Oh World, and Bring Growth!), “Bukra al-ʿĪd wa Munʿayyid” (Tomorrow Is Eid and Munʿayyid), and “Al-Yawm al-ʿĪd, yā Lālā” (Lady, Today’s Eid).

Naʾila Labbas is a leading researcher, curator, and classifier of Palestinian folklore. Her work, *Quraymsha ya Quraymsha*, is a direct reference to the general atmosphere of children’s folksongs imbued in the texts. In the introduction to the work, she emphasizes that her aim in recording children’s folksongs is “to serve our children, who are our future and bright tomorrow, what we want that for them and for ourselves” (*Quraymsha* 4). For examination, she chose 14 popular children’s songs recorded in the spoken vernacular.

The two collections have two folksongs in common: “Yalla Al-Ghayth yā Rabbī” (Bring the Rain, Oh Lord!) and “Shatti yā Dunyā wa Zīdī” (Rain, Oh World, and Bring Growth!). Below we compare the texts of “Yalla Al-Ghayth yā Rabbī” produced by both writers with the original text found in Nimr Sirhan’s *Mawsūʿa*. We will try to determine whether the title affects the general character of the folksong and whether the folksong was reformulated to make it appropriate for a child’s level of understanding.

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| *Translated Derived Text* by Naʾila Labbas (*Quraymsha* 25) | *Translated Derived Text by Nabiha Jabbarin* (*Aghānī* 12) | Original Text from Sirhan’s *Mawsūʿa* (Vol. I, 143) |
| Bring the rain, oh Lord!We’ll water our western crops | Bring the rain, oh Lord!We’ll water our western crops | Bring the rain, oh Lord!We’ll water our western crops |
| Bring the rain, oh Eternal One [*daym*]! | Bring the rain, early on [*min badrī*]! | Bring the rain, oh Eternal One [*daym*]! |
| Come, the rain is our rain, lard and honey are our food! | Oh Lord, your blessings, Let us drink from your waters! | Bring the rain, oh Merciful One [*Raḥmān*]Water our grassy meadows! |
| Bring the rain, oh Lord!Put bread [*khabzī qarqad*] in our mouths | Oh Lord, much rain, come fill every well to bursting! | Cultivate our parched wheat, relive us of our burdens! |

The two contemporary writers have invoked the original source in similar ways, although only to a limited degree. After the identical first stanza, Jabbarin’s text adapts the vocabulary to a child’s level, but Labbas includes terminology that goes beyond a child’s understanding, such as *khabzī qarqad*. Both writers lay greater emphasis on the melody and rhythms of the words than the meanings rooted in real life. The repetitions involved are obviously appropriate to a child’s level. In a general sense, both writers succeed in their aim of teaching and reminding the younger generation of their almost forgotten heritage while adapting the material to their level in a way that enriches their language and sense of belonging to their homeland.

Conclusion

During the first period (1967–87), there were attempts to draw on Palestinian popular songs to varying degrees, often only citing them in a way that simply fitted the narrative without performing any other function. The period that followed, however, demonstrated a greater presence of such allusions and a greater vivacity and diversity in the way they are introduced. This broadened their connotations in a way that drew them to children’s psychologies and made them more expressive of their real life and conditions. During this period, folklore becomes the center for the emotional axes of the stories. When a folksong is the starting point, the writer may change the form or content of the song to suit contemporary experience, which sometimes results in more covert imagery.

Palestinian writers used Palestinian folksongs to reveal the realities of the Palestinian people and the history behind them. Their texts were an artistic reflection of their awareness of popular heritage in general, and in particular, folksongs.

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