Conclusion

Palestinian children’s literature has developed in parallel with political, social, and cultural events that have influenced its course. Palestinian writers have revived their popular heritage through modern methods that diverge from traditional forms of writing. They have done this while also reviving the spirit of that folk heritage, creating a new type of literary text for children. Modern writers have creatively incorporated contemporary perspectives into classic, traditional templates of children’s literature, melding their preoccupations with folk tradition. The examples we examined demonstrate that the primary influence on Palestinian writers was their own cultural heritage, which was infused with new symbolic meanings of contemporary experiences. These writers have not only imitated folk artifacts but they have also reshaped them in complex ways that are suitable for the way children think today.

This phenomenon became particularly evident in the early 1980s, reaching its apogee during the 1987 First Intifada, itself the highpoint of the Palestinian national movement. Portents of unity among Palestinians emerged almost immediately after 1967, but their most public manifestations occurred after the First Intifada when Palestinian identity faced the grim prospect of dissolution. Palestinian writers have recognized the importance of preserving their popular heritage and collective memory, reinforcing Palestine’s cultural identity, particularly among the new generations who are immersed in the reality of occupation and diaspora. From the First Intifada onwards, literature that drew on folk heritage reinvented itself with an explosive energy imbued with profound symbolic power.

The study is divided into two main sections. The first section deals with theoretical matters, while the second section deals with applied matters. The theoretical section provides the conceptual basis for the applied section. The theoretical section consists of three chapters. The first of these provides an introduction to theorization on children’s literature, explaining the theory of intertextuality as it pertains to children’s literature, as distinct from adult literature. It also discusses the particular dynamics of intertextuality present within children’s literature, including the relationships between the writer, text, reader, and context.

The second chapter outlines the historical background to the development of modern Palestinian children’s literature since the British Mandate. We divided the development of Palestinian children’s literature into three distinct, historically related categories: Indigenous children’s literature after 1948, literature in the diaspora after 1948, and literature in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967. In this chapter, we observed the increasing awareness of and interest in folklore, which was intertwined with political forces and societal events that influenced the development of Palestinian children’s literature. The section divisions in this chapter highlight the varying effects of the writers’ locations on the nature of their literary output.

We observed these differences emerging after 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel. Local Palestinian writers were subject to military diktat until the early 1960s, meaning their writing was confined to children’s schoolbooks. The Israeli authorities took control of education and established educational policies that were aligned with their goals. This made it difficult for children to write outside of these policies. Palestinian children’s literature in Israel remained isolated from the wider developments in the Arab world and underwent little change over that long period, as Palestinian authors focused on adult audiences. As a result, nothing of note was published for Palestinian children until the early 1970s.

After the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Arab world saw an expansion in the provision of children’s literature. This led to Palestinian society’s perspectives on the home, children, and the nature of childhood evolving. Writers became increasingly preoccupied with childhood-related issues. An indigenous literature that addressed local realities and associated issues was increasingly being called for. The examples we examined from Palestinians in Israel illustrated how some authors sought to document local realities. They highlighted nature, rural life, and respect for family elders, along with the customs and traditions wrapped up in those. Mustafa Murrar gained prominence by writing stories inspired by the Palestinian countryside and pre-1948 Palestinian realities. Murrar’s use of vernacular expressions in his stories for children reflected the importance he placed on the past.

In the early 1980s, Palestinian writers began to feel that their folk heritage was under threat and called for an “uprising” to counteract it. This led to the emergence of a political movement. At this time, ʿAbd-al-Latif Nasir’s writings appeared and had a distinctly political tone. A burgeoning interest in Palestinian folklore and its use in children’s stories were features of these times because of that fear on the part of Palestinian writers that their heritage was on the brink of extinction, subsumed under the Hebrew language. This led Palestinian children’s authors into using the spoken vernacular in their tales, inspired by Palestinian folk culture characterized by easy verbiage and popular narrative styles. This trend can be dated to the early 1990s.

During this period, there were many social, economic, and cultural transformations within Palestinian society inside Israel that led to a significant increase in interest in children’s literature. Palestinian children’s writers overcame their inhibitions about using colloquial language in their stories, and their interest in patriotic matters and longing for past life grew. The authors aimed to reflect their strong affiliation with the Palestinian heritage by linking the past to the present. Their desire to make use of Palestinian folklore in their stories, while maintaining the spirit and particularities of the original sources, also notably expanded. Their aim was to foreground Palestinian identity and reinforce a sense of it among children in order to keep it alive.

This was also true for Palestinian writers forced to leave their homeland for life in the diaspora after 1948. The majority of writers were compelled to flee to neighboring Arab countries, where they were absorbed into the category of “émigré author,” and were subject to the prevalent educational and intellectual norms in their host countries, regardless of the differences between them or any contradictions with their own. Palestinian writers continued to publish despite their new situations, with varying degrees of ability, leading to the emergence of a new diasporic generation. Due to the exigencies of lives lived far from their homeland, there was little production of children’s literature in this period.

Due to the political situation, a large proportion of diasporic authors turned to writing for adults after the June 1967 defeat, which had a clearly detrimental impact on Arab literature for children. The establishment of Dar al-Fata al-ʿArabi in 1974 was a springboard for Palestinian children’s literature in the diaspora, as we saw. Palestinian writers started focusing on childhood and youth literature, leading to a reconsideration of all areas of life. Our reading of many of Dar al-Fata al-ʿArabi’s publications convinces us that it is decidedly interested in supporting literary production that addresses matters of freedom and patriotism. The majority of its stories depicted the Palestinian predicament and the use of force through symbolic means.

These were the makings of diasporic Palestinian writers’ interest in and allusion to Palestinian folklore in their work. The political circumstances of the time made them preoccupied with patriotic values and they sought to re-present new ideas in their stories. These ideas included the racial discrimination imposed by the occupier, the values of homeland and the resultant deepening of belonging, and the constituents of heroism and the will to achieve liberation.

These precursors meant that, by the early 1980s, Palestinian authors were maintaining their interest in the Palestinian folk heritage they had carried with thim from the homeland. They took it upon themselves to document the Palestinian past for fear of it becoming lost. The First Intifada sparked Palestinian writers’ desire to embody Palestinian suffering in their works by turning their attention to Palestinian folklore content within children’s stories, publishing tales from the Intifada’s history, and shaping heroic tales for children out of the realities of that uprising. We found that the writing of that period showed an obsessive nostalgia for and longing to return to the homeland. There was also a concern to familiarize Palestinian children with the Palestine of before 1948 in the hope that they would one day return to it.

The development of Palestinian children’s literature in the West Bank and Gaza was directly influenced by sociopolitical events, which were paralleled by the lived reality of occupation and oppression experienced by Palestinians. The examples we examined showed how Palestinian writers resumed their literary activities at the end of the 1970s. Writers were preoccupied with documenting Palestinian realities and sufferings through realistic stories marked by a boldness in dealing with real issues, either directly or through symbolism. The stories were aimed at children in a way that sought to contribute to change. The national issue was a major preoccupation in real life and was filled with tragedy. These tales contained echoes of war, enemy combat, jihad, and other like matters. The Palestinian authors themselves were part of the suffering that was exacerbated by the outbreak of the First Intifada, and those who wrote for children reflected this in their tales. We examined two notable features of children’s stories published in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: the emphasis on childhood and the direct conflict with the Israelis, which was characterized by violence. After the First Intifada, the conception of children’s literature took another turn. Palestinian writers of children’s stories infused their work with their philosophies, political ideas, and many martial themes, such as martyrs, occupation, arrests, and resistance. These stories also depicted children’s confrontations with the occupation, focusing on images of violent occupiers versus Palestinian victims, heroes, and resistance fighters. The Palestinian writers’ primary objective was to portray the personalities and psychologies of children as the heroes of the resistance in their stories.

During this period, writers also emphasized the significance of preserving Palestinian collective memory, which was drawn from the national, social, and religious realities of Palestinian life, through children’s literature. The symbolic associations of belonging and the integrity of national identity were conjured up through imageries of land.

During the early 1990s, the exploration of Palestinian folk heritage increased, coinciding with the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Palestinian writers for children’s opinions emerged from what they wrote and the notion of “the other” began to exert its presence in many tales, especially among local Palestinians and those returning in the wake of the Accords. Writers therefore wanted to portray a new image of Palestinian children as bright, tolerant, open to the world, and as lovers of nature. Several educational institutions encouraged Palestinian writers to focus on folk heritage. They chose works that presented Palestinian issues in a way that contributed to Palestinian children’s personality development, cultural depth, citizenship values, and patriotism as appropriate for children. In the late 1980s, our study showed that Palestinian folklore took on a modern guise as it became integrated into the text and the artistic standards were raised. Palestinian writers saved popular heritage from extinction and gave it new life. This was conveyed to Palestinian children through their writing.

The theoretical section’s final chapter traced the development of folk heritage from its origins to its various directions. We observed that the academic study and curation of folklore began in the early nineteenth century due to the emergence of the romantic and nationalist movements in Europe. This was a reflection upon the past and an attempt to reconstruct former ways of life. During the 1960s, there was an increasing interest in folklore that was inspired by the study of texts through the prism of popular cultural theory developed by the Russian folklore researcher Vladimir Propp. The application of narratology to the study of popular texts was particularly influenced by this theoretical trend. Propp’s approach led to the development of formalization theories and methodologies. The study of folklore was integrated with theories of postmodernism and, thus, folklore followed a new direction in pursuit of issues of group identity from the point of view of minorities.

We also explored the historical background that led to the interest in Arab folklore. The study demonstrated how political factors influenced this, particularly after the series of defeats suffered by the Arabs. Political and intellectual transformations encouraged an interest in heritage as an important source of inspiration that is inextricably linked to real life and the values of patriotism. We examined the mounting difficulties encountered by Arab states during the 1960s, which prompted these states to provide more financial and moral backing for localized and on-the-ground initiatives aimed at safeguarding Arab cultural and civilizational identity. Folk heritage became a resource to stem the threat to that identity. We identified the most significant forms and characteristics of folk heritage and highlighted those forms of Palestinian heritage that are common in Arabic literature, especially in children’s literature.

In the applied section of the book, we tested the theoretical perspectives we had developed to affirm that using Palestinian folklore elements in children’s literature increased markedly after the First Intifada and even more so from the early 1990s due to the political and social transformations of the time. For this reason, we also divided the applied section into three chapters.

The first chapter in Part Two described how Palestinian folktales became very important sources of inspiration to Palestinian writers, leading them to make unprecedentedly extensive use of their motifs and tropes. We attempted to answer several questions, the most important of which was whether modern stories benefit from their association with traditional techniques in form and content by deconstructing traditional narrative structures and counterposing their own methods to them. Or does this approach lead to narrative monotony, repetition, and stereotyping? We attempted to answer these questions by examining properly selected examples. Palestinian writers were found to re-present Palestinian folktales with little alteration. Writers searched for the origins of folktales and adapted them for a modern young audience. Nimr Sirhan was very focused on reformulating Palestinian folktales and their features in children’s stories. He worked to dovetail his own work with these tales in a cohesive way. We observed how he employed numerous stylistic devices, including conventional folktale introductions and conclusions, with the objective of revitalizing the folktale, repurposing it for modern generations, and, as a result, preserving the image of the homeland and reestablishing collective memory. His stories had a thoroughly traditional flavor due to his use of familiar openings like “Once upon a time, O listeners to these words, there was...” and closings like “And the bird flew, may God bless all those here with goodness.”

Palestinian writers also showed a tendency to use popular Palestinian expressions in their narratives during this period. The stories of the first period were reformulated from folktales, imbuing them with a folkloric atmosphere and contributing to a greater narrative realism. In the second period, the writer’s methods for drawing inspiration from and using traditional stories diversified, leading to new directions in the deployment of folktale tropes in children’s stories. Rawda al-Hudhud was pre-eminent among the writers who preserved the folktale’s structure unadulterated. Others retold Palestinian folktales with the aim of reinvigorating them and instilling within them the spirit of the times, by changing their content. Some also attempted to create stories that imitated folktales in new literary forms that were simple for children to read, replacing the customary task of parents in passing down folktales orally. Sonya Nimr excelled in this regard. I devoted a large portion of my study to her work and explained the reasons for the modifications she made to the narratives in order to clarify her motives. This same motivation can be discerned in Dima Sahwil’s drawing on Palestinian folklore and imitation of conventional folk narrative styles that lent an orality to her tales redolent of the past.

Another folktale trope we discussed was the character of the clever boychild figure Hasan al-Shatir, one of the most important and frequently cited characters in children’s stories. During this period, children’s storywriters showed great interest in this legendary figure. Palestinian authors used him to symbolize the spirit of adventure and depict the perils he encounters with the *ghūl*. We discovered that authors did not use a single approach to allude to making a feature of this character in their stories, but instead used many and varied approaches. Among such authors, Sonya was prominent in using the character to retell folk heritage in a new way. In my opinion, Mahmud Shuqayr made excellent use of Hasan al-Shatir as a character by transforming him from past to present times, allowing him to interact with contemporary protagonists of his tales. This gave the character a new and unique capacity to express new realities and articulate the author’s ideas, creating a form of communication between the past and the present. Shuqayr used this character in contemporary circumstances to delineate the contours of contemporary reality, set out his perspectives on current events, and discuss his issues and ideas.

In the second period, there was an increase in the use of folktale narrative structures, and a distinct narrator voice was particularly noticeable. The technique distinguishes the narrator from the narrative. The narrator tells the story in order to tell another, then reverts back to the original plot. Mahmud ʿAbbasi used this technique extensively in his texts to create a modern story while also evoking popular heritage in a reshaped form that fits the modern stage. His aim was to create an interactivity between the past and the present.

In the second applied chapter, we looked at Palestinian folk proverbs. During the first period, the invocation of popular heritage was limited and not done in any particularly salient way. This was likely due to writers at that time being insufficiently aware of its importance and the resource it could provide. Some children’s storywriters chose to write in Classical Arabic (CA) instead of the colloquial language because they believed the latter was inappropriate for a young readership. We observed that some authors utilized folk proverbs in their narratives, but with little intentional aim. During the second period, writers made some advances in this regard, using relatively simple methods such as quoting proverbs verbatim in the colloquial form or making only minor alterations. Mustafa Murrar drew on Palestinian folk proverbs the most, especially in the second period, when there was an increased interest in Palestinian folk heritage and the use of the popular proverb in particular in children’s stories. During the second period, writers showed a greater cultural awareness and were bolder in their use of popular proverbs and vernacular language. The use of folk proverbs took on new and varied dimensions with deeper connotations. This meant that folk proverbs were cited in a new way that reconciled them with contemporary issues, and this gradually became a distinct feature. The way folk proverbs were deployed went beyond previous simple citations to embrace other techniques and forms.

The examination also revealed that Palestinian writers often used popular proverbs in their story titles, which were important paratexts. ʿAbdallah Ayshan was the most prolific author to do so. His literary career is a testament to his particular and devoted interest in Palestinian folklore and its collection during this time. He was passionate about the value of folktales and popular proverbs, and he made them integral to his works in a variety of ways, demonstrating a great awareness of their potency in children’s tales. He demonstrated that an awareness of allusion to folk heritage could serve his aim of communicating directly with children. He often gave folk proverbs new meanings beyond their traditional associations.

In the final chapter on application, we learned that the use of popular songs in texts during the first period was restricted. They were mainly cited without serving any broader artistic or wider purpose. However, they made a contribution in many ways, including serving the narrative content. Shuqayr was prominent in the first period in this regard. His allusions to Palestinian folksongs demonstrate his awareness of their importance to the artistry of producing children’s stories. In the first period, he preferred CA to the colloquial dialect, probably because his awareness of the importance of popular heritage and writing in the colloquial language was not yet fully developed.

In the second period, the interest of Palestinian writers in local folksongs increased significantly. They expanded and diversified the ways in which they used them in their writing. Children’s writers were particularly aware of the range of Palestinian folksong types and styles. They applied new methods and techniques to incorporate these songs into tales aimed at young readers. Palestinian writers became bolder in using folksongs rendered in the colloquial dialect and imitating aspects of their stylings. During this time, Muhammad Badarna became well-known for his innovative methods of deploying popular songs. He incorporated folksongs into his stories, using them to express both patriotic and humanitarian concerns. He brought a more conscious deliberation to their citation beyond the haphazard quoting that had pertained, as we saw through the examples from his works that we examined.

The study also revealed that the song “al-Dalʿūna” was the most frequently alluded to in children’s stories, particularly by Badarna, who understood the song’s unique power and intimate connection to Palestinian lands, making it a central theme in his children’s works. The increased interest in quoting folksongs in the local vernacular by him and others led to a wider range of experiences in tales written for children, a greater variety of expressive energies, and higher levels of creativity. Citing popular songs in texts made the impact more intense and drew the texts closer to popular sentiments and real experiences. As we have shown, this was especially the case in lullabies and rain songs. Children’s songs are a vital part of Palestinian culture, with the ability to convey meaning, values, and symbols to children. These songs have multiple and interacting connotations that address society’s needs. These songs ensure continuity in society, preserving folkloric meaning, content, and musical form, while being simplified to match children’s artistic and intellectual abilities. Murrar was the author who utilized children’s songs the most in his stories.

The study also demonstrated how Palestinian writers were influenced by and imitated popular singing styles, which they used to express Palestinian realities. Badarna was most influenced by this technique and was influential in using it. He wrote seven stories in which he imitated popular singing styles, most notably “al-Dalʿūna.” Jamal Kaʿwar was an eminent figure in this regard. He wrote folksongs in CA into his poems masterfully while imitating them completely in meter, rhyme, and popular words. For example, he wrote the song “al-Jimmāl” into his poem. The aim was to foster a strong sense of connection to folk heritage, linking past and present, and preserving aspects of national identity.

This examination ultimately showed how Palestinian writers used their folk heritage to define the unique aspects of Palestinian identity to the younger generation, and to protect these unique aspects from being lost under the pressures of occupation, displacement, and ongoing oppression. This highlights the significance of heritage as a unifying factor in Palestinian identity, as a fundamental aspect of the Palestinian self, and as a crucial element of its integrity.