Methodology

The book proposal is based on a theoretical framework that sees children's literature as a separate and autonomous system. On the one hand, it operates within the constraints and limitations of children's culture, and on the other hand, it responds to societal demands that seek to see it as an integral component in society and in the education system. Interest in children's literature stems from the central role of children and adolescents, who society designates as the preferred target audience for shaping the new social identity, internalizing hegemonic narratives, and adopting and passing them on to future generations. However, not only hegemonic groups took interest in children and adolescents. In certain cases, marginal groups tried to recruit them to spread subversive messages.

One of the important researchers in children's literature, Jack Zipes, emphasized in his research the importance of the folk heritage in strengthening the connection between the individual and society and in strengthening the sense of belonging, especially among children. Therefore, the use of representations of folk culture in children's literature, especially among five to nine-year-olds, not only greatly contributes to their psychological, emotional, and social development, but also develops in them a sense of belonging.

Zipes emphasizes that one of the most important goals of representing folk culture in children's literature is to inform children about their history and heritage, and to deepen their sense of national belonging, collective identity, and connection to the past. This was indeed the practice of the great children's authors in Europe, such as Charles Perrault (1628-1703), Francis Osborne (1593-1659), Robert Samber (1745-1682), Hans Christian Anderson (1805-1875), Jacob Grimm (1863-1785), Wilhelm Grimm (1859- 1786), and others.

The discussion on representations of folk culture in children's literature must take into account three important components: a. The author who designs the heritage according to current needs and according to his educational, ideological and cultural vision; b. The child's psychological, emotional, and educational needs, according to his age, determine what is suitable for him from the heritage; c. The children's book is built on the delicate balance that exists between the objective and the attractive in representations of folk culture.

These three components require a deep thematic and stylistic analysis that will examine the extent and nature of the use of representations of folk culture in children's literature, its goals, its educational and emotional consequences for children, and its effects on the content and style of children's literature. Also, other research tools can be used, such as interviews with children's authors, to understand the higher goals of using representations of folk culture.

Historical Background

Until 1948, children and youth books that expressed the pan-Arab narrative and the historical Islamic and Arab heritage were brought to Palestine from Egypt and other Arab countries. However, there is no doubt that during this period, the conflict with the British Mandate and the Zionist movement encouraged local national aspirations that were expressed in Palestinian writing for children. Palestinian authors, mainly poets such as Khalil al-Sakakini (1878-1953), As'af al-Nashashibi (1885-1948), Iskandar al-Baitjali (1888-1973), Ishaq Musa al-Husayni (1904-1990), and Ibrahim Touqan (1905-1941), wrote original, didactic works for children.

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

Following the war of 1967, the preservation of national heritage was perceived by the Palestinians as a crucial means to protect their land and their national identity. In this period, the number of original works intended for children in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora significantly increased. Among the Palestinian authors who stood out in this period in Israel were Mustafa Murar (b. 1930), Salim Khoury (1934-1991), and Abdel Latif Nasser (1944-1990); and outside of it: Samiha Khalil (1923-1999), Ali El Khalili (1943-2013), and Ruqaya Farch Al-Hudhud (b. 1948).

Since the late 80s of the 20th century, we have witnessed a surge in writing, translation, research, and distribution of children's literature by institutions and organizations founded for these purposes in Israel and the West Bank. The events of the Intifada (1987) increased, on the one hand, the flagging of resistance, sacrifice, and steadfastness in Palestinian children's literature, and on the other hand, also strengthened the need to preserve the embers of cultural heritage, establishing the unity of the Palestinian fate. Among the Palestinian authors who stood out in this period in Israel were Nabihah Jaberin (b. 1950), Fawzi Ali (b. 1953), and Mohammed Badarneh (b. 1955); and outside of it: Mahmoud Shakir (b. 1941), Abdul Rahman Abad (b. 1945), and Liana Badr (b. 1951).

The Book Corpus

The book corpus includes many works from Palestinian children's literature, which make use of representations of popular culture, published after 1967. The corpus includes about 30 diverse works by about 30 Palestinian authors from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora. In order for these works to serve as a representative sample of Palestinian children's literature after 1967, they were selected according to the following considerations:

a. The stages of development of Palestinian children's literature after 1967, which changed its face and underwent many thematic and stylistic changes over the years. Special consideration should be given to the distinction made by many researchers between two main periods in the development of this literature: between 1967-1987 and then from 1987 to the present day. Between these two periods there are noticeable differences in terms of the identity of those engaged in children's literature, the frequency and quantity of its publication, the way it is distributed, etc.

b. The status of the authors and their importance in the eyes of researchers, critics, and the target audience, as well as their productivity and their ability to influence the development of this literature over time.

c. Giving a fair representation to the different genres existing in this literature, while taking into account the fact that the fiction genre is considered a popular genre among children's literature writers and also among the target audience of this literature.

d. Different representations of popular culture, such as stories, poems, proverbs, games, etc., will be addressed, although the main focus will be directed at the folk tale, both due to its extensive use in children's literature, and due to its prominent presence in popular culture.

e. In my opinion, it is appropriate to give a fair representation to the different sectors of the Palestinian people, therefore the sample will include authors from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora.

f. The different age groups to which children's literature is directed also deserve a fair representation, and certainly a distinction should be made between children's literature and youth literature.

The Book Hypothesis

The past narrative plays a central role in creating a sense of unity among the different sectors of the Palestinian people: in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian diaspora. This narrative is based, on the one hand, on Palestinian agreements: loss of homeland, dream of return, experience of refugees, etc.; and on the other hand, on the popular cultural heritage that connects and unites the different parts of the Palestinian people.

Because of the unifying role of the Palestinian past narrative, the authors tried to avoid criticism of the past, and even tried to invent the past as a lost paradise. The representations of popular culture in Palestinian children's literature, which were expressed in the use of stories, poems, proverbs, characters, and folk games, passed down from generation to generation, combined with the unique Palestinian dialect, allowed this literature to serve as a tool for adopting the Palestinian past narrative and building the Palestinian national identity.