

Violence in Arab Children's Literature: Themes, Psychological Insights, and Cultural Reflections

Mahmoud Na'amneh¹, Jamal Assadi², Khaled Sindawi³

Abstract

*This study examines the representation of violence in Arab children's literature, focusing on its depiction of domestic struggles, political conflict, and societal challenges, and its role in fostering emotional resilience and moral development in young readers. Through key texts such as *Karma's Eyes Are No Longer Sad*, *The Vulture and the Sparrow*, and *The Monkey and the Thief*, the research investigates how these narratives address the realities of Arab-Israeli communities while reflecting cultural values and transmitting moral lessons. The central questions guiding the study are: How does Arab children's literature portray violence, and does it perpetuate or challenge societal norms around conflict? By exploring these questions, the study evaluates the genre's strengths—its ability to engage with complex themes and nurture empathy—alongside its limitations, such as an over-reliance on fantasy and insufficient emphasis on long-term conflict resolution. The findings underscore the genre's dual role as a cultural artifact and a pedagogical tool, with recommendations for creating stories that better balance cultural authenticity with universal moral lessons. This research contributes to the field by offering insights into how Arab children's literature can empower young readers and foster resilience, cultural pride, and critical thinking in the face of evolving societal challenges.*

Keywords: *Arab Children's Literature, Cultural Resilience, Representation of Violence, Empathy and Moral Development, Conflict Resolution and Education.*

Introduction

Arab children's literature holds a distinctive position as a cultural and pedagogical medium, reflecting the unique socio-political realities of Arab communities while fostering the emotional and intellectual growth of young readers. Within the context of Israeli Arab society, this genre plays a pivotal role in addressing the complex and multifaceted theme of violence. As a recurring motif, violence appears in its various forms—domestic, political, emotional, and societal—reflecting not only the immediate struggles of the audience but also deeper cultural and psychological dynamics. These narratives do not merely portray violence as an external force; they engage with it as a lived reality and a moral dilemma, weaving it into the stories that shape children's worldview.

Children's literature has long been recognized as a formative tool for shaping values, behaviors, and identities. It operates as both a mirror of societal experiences and a canvas for envisioning alternative futures. As Bettelheim (1976) observes, stories—particularly those addressing themes of conflict—serve as vehicles for catharsis, allowing children to process fears, frustrations, and anxieties in a symbolic and safe environment. Within Arab children's literature, this function takes on heightened significance, as the narratives are often set against a backdrop of historical dislocation, ongoing political struggles, and cultural preservation. This dual purpose—reflection and aspiration—positions Arab children's literature as a critical space for negotiating the tensions between lived realities and moral ideals.

The depiction of violence in children's literature is a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Some, like Kradger (1974), argue that violent themes in literature reflect humanity's inherent nature, portraying individuals as either perpetrators or resisters of aggression. Others, such as McMahon (1992) and Oaklander (1988), emphasize the therapeutic potential of conflict-driven narratives, which can help children develop coping mechanisms and foster resilience. In the Arab-Israeli context, where systemic discrimination and political conflict are pervasive, children's literature emerges not only as a tool for education but also as a site for

cultural resistance and psychological healing. These narratives often seek to balance the need for cultural authenticity with the imperative to foster empathy, nonviolence, and critical thinking among young readers.

This article seeks to answer two central questions: How does Arab children's literature depict violence, and what cultural or psychological insights can be drawn from these portrayals? Moreover, does this literature reinforce societal norms surrounding violence, or does it challenge these norms, offering alternative visions for understanding and resolving conflict? Addressing these questions requires an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on psychological theories, literary analysis, and cultural studies to unpack the narratives' deeper meanings and implications.

At its core, this study argues that Arab children's literature uniquely captures the complexities of violence, offering a nuanced exploration of its causes, manifestations, and resolutions. By analyzing key texts, the article demonstrates how these works function both as mirrors of societal struggles and as tools for fostering resilience, empathy, and moral growth. As Edward Said (1997) reminds us, literature is deeply intertwined with its cultural and historical context, reflecting and shaping the collective consciousness of its time. In the case of Arab children's literature, the portrayal of violence becomes a lens through which young readers can navigate their identities, confront challenges, and envision a future grounded in empathy and understanding.

Research Questions

How does Arab children's literature depict violence, and what cultural or psychological insights can be drawn?

Does this literature perpetuate or challenge societal norms about violence?

Thesis Statement: Arab children's literature uniquely reflects the complexities of violence, offering both a mirror of societal struggles and a tool for fostering resilience, empathy, and understanding.

The Role of Children's Literature in Arab Societies

This section explores the role of children's literature in Arab societies, examining its various merits and contributions to cultural, educational, and moral development. To establish a foundation for this discussion, we will first clarify key definitions and boundaries of the field.

Definitions and Boundaries

Children's literature occupies a significant space in both global and Arab societies, serving as a cultural artifact, a developmental tool, and a medium for shaping young minds. Defining children's literature has always been challenging due to its diverse formats and fluid boundaries. Peter Hunt (1996) notes that it spans picture books, fairy tales, fables, and oral traditions, while works like *Harry Potter* blur the lines between children's and adult literature (Smith, 2000). Nancy Anderson (2006) refines the definition to include books written specifically for children, while Chevalier (1989) and Hatfield (2006) expand it to formats like comics, reflecting their cultural significance.

In Arab societies, children's literature has its roots in oral traditions such as folktales and proverbs, which conveyed lessons of morality and resilience across generations (Arbuthnot, 1964; Lerer, 2008). Early written works like *Kalila wa Dimna*, translated into Arabic in the 8th century, combined ethical instruction with entertainment (Abu Fanna, 2001). The genre gained prominence during the 19th-century Arab Nahda, when figures like Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Ahmed Shawqi adapted literature to suit children's developmental needs (Marjeh, 2001). Kamel Kilani, hailed as the father of modern Arabic children's literature, further advanced the genre in the 20th century by blending oral traditions with contemporary challenges (Khalaf, 2007).

Today, children's literature in Arab societies fulfills vital functions, including cultural preservation, linguistic pride, and the transmission of historical values. Stories such as *The Fisherman and the Genie* and modern works by Mustafa Murrar balance tradition with modernity to foster resilience and empathy in politically charged environments (Nawfal, 1999; Yahya, 2004). In Arab-Israeli communities, it also serves as a tool for resistance and cultural solidarity (Goldberg, 1963).

By evolving with societal needs while safeguarding cultural identity, children's literature remains a powerful force in shaping the minds and values of future generations.

Pedagogical and Cultural Significance

Children's literature plays a pivotal role in early childhood education and development, offering immense value in fostering cognitive, emotional, and moral growth. It promotes empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, shaping personal development and cultural understanding across generations (Ismail, 2023). Spanning diverse genres such as fairy tales, novels, picture books, and short stories, children's literature has both lasting benefits and the potential to imprint ideological biases, requiring careful scrutiny to ensure its appropriateness for young minds.

Language Development and Cognitive Growth

Children's literature significantly enhances language acquisition by exposing young learners to rich vocabulary, diverse sentence structures, and linguistic patterns. According to the *Rupandehi Campus Journal* (2024), linguistically rich texts create engaging learning environments, encouraging group discussions, role play, and creative writing. Such texts foster communicative competence, reasoning skills, and creative thinking. Şen (2021) emphasizes that integrating children's literature into pedagogy helps students understand their world while improving problem-solving abilities. Its narrative structure further enables learners to follow stories, make predictions, and grasp cause-and-effect relationships.

Emotional Development and Empathy

Children's literature fosters emotional development by allowing readers to process complex emotions through relatable narratives. Aristotle's concept of "catharsis" illustrates how engaging with stories promotes resilience and social awareness (Abu Fanna, 2001). Bouley and Godfrey (2008) observe that stories featuring characters facing challenges develop compassion and empathy in readers. Particularly in marginalized contexts, literature provides a means to explore identity and process trauma, while also confronting issues like oppression and social justice in a non-threatening way.

Cultural Awareness and Preservation

Culturally, children's literature preserves collective memory and identity across generations. Stories like *The Fisherman and the Genie* or *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* impart values of resilience, ingenuity, and justice (Abu Fanna, 2001; Marjeh, 2001). Modern authors such as Mustafa Murrar blend traditional motifs with contemporary challenges, helping young readers navigate their realities while maintaining a connection to their heritage (Yahya, 2004). In multilingual environments like Arab-Israeli communities, children's literature safeguards the Arabic language and promotes cultural pride, addressing challenges posed by globalization (Goldberg, 1963; Nawfal, 1999).

Social and Moral Development

By presenting ethical dilemmas and diverse perspectives, children's literature nurtures moral reasoning and critical thinking. According to Ismail (2023), these stories shape young readers' moral compasses while introducing the complexities of human experiences. Narratives incorporating themes of social justice, as noted by Bouley and Godfrey (2008), encourage children to question inequities and embrace inclusivity.

In summary, children's literature continues to play a transformative role in intellectual and cultural development, ensuring its relevance for future generations.

Pedagogical Significance for Teachers and Caregivers

The pedagogical value of children's literature extends to educators and caregivers as well. Şen (2021) found that teachers who align their teaching practices with children's literature observe positive outcomes, not only for their students but also for themselves. These books help teachers connect with their students on a deeper level, fostering mutual understanding and personal growth. The incorporation of children's literature into teaching practices can transform classrooms into spaces of empathy, dialogue, and creativity, benefiting both educators and learners.

Imagination and Creativity

The imaginative dimensions of children's literature further enhance its impact on young readers. Stories with vivid illustrations and fantastical narratives foster creativity by allowing children to explore new worlds and scenarios. This imaginative play, as noted by Şen (2021), supports the development of storytelling abilities and innovative thinking. Bouley and Godfrey (2008) similarly emphasize that imaginative literature helps children envision alternative realities, enabling them to approach their challenges with creativity and optimism.

Challenges and Ideological Implications

Despite its many benefits, children's literature is not without its challenges. Ismail (2023) highlights that the ideological underpinnings of these texts can influence young readers' worldviews in unintended ways. Authors' biases and cultural norms embedded in the narratives may reinforce stereotypes or perpetuate inequities. Therefore, educators and caregivers must critically evaluate the content of children's books to ensure that they align with values of inclusivity and equity.

Children's literature serves as an indispensable tool in early education, offering cognitive, emotional, and cultural benefits while fostering empathy, creativity, and critical thinking. Its ability to preserve cultural heritage, promote language development, and address social issues makes it a powerful medium for shaping the next generation. However, as Ismail (2023) and Şen (2021) suggest, it is equally important to raise awareness among educators and caregivers about the ideological implications of these texts. By carefully selecting and integrating high-quality children's literature into educational practices, we can ensure its positive and lasting impact on young learners.

Historical and Cultural Context

Children's literature has evolved significantly, shaped by societal changes and shifting perceptions of childhood. In its earliest forms, it consisted of spoken stories, songs, and poems, primarily used to educate and entertain children while imparting moral and cultural values (Nikolajeva, 1995). These oral traditions laid the foundation for later written works but lacked the distinct genre characteristics developed in the 18th century.

Philippe Ariès (1962) argued that the concept of childhood as a unique stage of life emerged relatively recently. Prior to this, children were often viewed as miniature adults, with few texts tailored specifically to their developmental needs. The 18th century marked a turning point as societal attitudes shifted, leading to the creation of literature designed for children's moral and emotional development (Shavit, 2009). Early children's books, such as conduct manuals and ABC primers, often included illustrations and anthropomorphic imagery to engage young readers while emphasizing didactic goals (Lyons, 2011).

While Ariès highlights the absence of a distinct canon before this period, other scholars argue that pre-modern societies produced instructional works aimed at children, bridging oral traditions and written texts

(Wilye, 2008). These works represent the foundational steps in the development of children’s literature as a unique and evolving genre.

The Development of Children’s Literature in Arab Societies

The evolution of children’s literature in Arab societies parallels global developments but remains deeply rooted in the region’s oral traditions. Stories such as *Kalila wa Dimna*, an 8th-century collection of fables translated into Arabic, combined entertainment with ethical instruction. Originally intended for adults, these narratives were shared with younger audiences, reflecting the intergenerational nature of storytelling (Abu Fanna, 2001).

In the 19th century, during the Arab Nahda (intellectual revival), the concept of childhood gained prominence, and a dedicated body of children’s literature began to emerge. Figures such as Rifa’a al-Tahtawi and Ahmed Shawqi crafted stories aligned with children’s developmental and moral needs, blending traditional Arab values with universal themes (Marjeh, 2001).

The early 20th century brought significant advancements with Kamel Kilani, often called the father of modern Arabic children’s literature. Kilani adapted classical tales and wrote original works like *Sinbad al-Babri*, emphasizing moral clarity, cultural authenticity, and accessibility (Khalaf, 2007). His contributions bridged traditional storytelling with modern educational philosophies, shaping the genre for future generations.

Arab children’s literature continues to educate, entertain, and preserve cultural heritage, drawing from oral traditions and the literary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries to shape young minds.

Violence in Children’s Literature: Thematic and Psychological Dimensions

Violence in children’s literature is a complex and multifaceted theme that reflects both societal realities and inner psychological struggles. It serves as a narrative device to address conflict, teach moral lessons, and explore resilience, but it must be handled with sensitivity to its impact on young readers.

First, we will define violence, explore its various forms—physical, emotional, structural, and cultural—and examine its preventability, setting the foundation for understanding how it is represented in children’s literature.

Understanding Violence: Definition, Forms, and Preventability

Violence is a complex issue that profoundly impacts individuals and societies. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation” (WHO, 2011). This definition highlights violence’s physical, psychological, and societal dimensions.

Violence takes many forms, each with unique consequences. Physical violence involves force that causes injury, disability, or death. Emotional or psychological violence includes verbal abuse, intimidation, and humiliation, causing mental harm. Sexual violence refers to non-consensual acts like assault or rape, resulting in severe trauma. Political violence uses force to achieve political aims, while structural violence stems from systemic inequalities that disadvantage groups through social or institutional discrimination. Cultural violence legitimizes harmful behaviors via societal norms against marginalized communities.

Many forms of violence are preventable. Research links violence to factors like poverty, income and gender inequality, harmful alcohol use, and the absence of nurturing relationships (Krug et al., 2002). Addressing these root causes can reduce violence. Effective interventions focus on modifying contributing factors, fostering healthier behaviors, and mitigating risks.

Violence is a persistent threat to societal harmony and individual well-being. By understanding its forms and focusing on prevention strategies, societies can work toward creating safer and more equitable communities.

Psychological Insights: Violence in Children's Literature as a Reflection of Inner Conflicts and Societal Struggles

Violence in children's literature often reflects both psychological conflicts and broader societal struggles, offering young readers a lens to process fears and engage with complex themes. Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a framework for understanding such narratives, suggesting that violence often symbolizes the tension between the id, ego, and superego. For example, threatening figures in fairy tales, such as the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*, externalize internal fears. The resolution of these conflicts provides catharsis, helping children confront and symbolically overcome anxieties (Freud, 1920).

Albert Bandura's social learning theory highlights another dimension, emphasizing that children learn behaviors through observation and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Stories depicting violence within moral contexts can model positive coping strategies when protagonists overcome adversity with courage. However, Bandura warns that narratives normalizing or glorifying violence risk fostering aggression in children, underscoring the importance of framing and resolution.

Contemporary research extends these insights by examining how violence in children's literature allegorizes societal issues such as inequality and systemic oppression. For instance, dystopian novels like *The Hunger Games* portray violence as a consequence of societal division, encouraging critical engagement with themes of justice and resistance (Collins, 2008). Such stories empower young readers to navigate societal challenges while fostering empathy and critical thinking.

By addressing personal and societal struggles, violence in children's literature serves as both a reflective and transformative tool for young readers.

Duality of Violence: Harmful Norms vs. Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

The representation of violence in narratives holds a dual role, capable of perpetuating harmful norms while fostering resilience. Context, framing, and resolution are crucial in determining its effect on readers. On one hand, narratives may normalize or romanticize violence, portraying it as a legitimate means to achieve dominance or justice without addressing its moral or psychological consequences. Traditional fairy tales and action-driven stories often glorify violent conflict resolution, potentially desensitizing readers and reinforcing harmful power structures (Zipes, 2006). Furthermore, the lack of nuanced exploration of violence's aftermath strips these stories of ethical depth, perpetuating cycles of aggression.

Conversely, violence can serve a transformative purpose by fostering resilience and providing coping mechanisms. Characters who endure and overcome violence, such as Harry Potter, demonstrate perseverance and moral responsibility, while *The Book Thief* juxtaposes trauma with acts of kindness, showcasing humanity's capacity for resilience (Rowling, 1997; Zusak, 2005).

Violence also functions as a vehicle for catharsis. Aristotle's concept of catharsis suggests that experiencing intense emotions through literature helps readers confront fears and traumas in a safe environment (Aristotle, trans. 1987). For instance, children exposed to narratives about bullying or familial discord may find comfort in seeing characters navigate similar challenges, fostering emotional growth.

Contemporary authors increasingly use violence to critique societal norms and explore systemic issues. Such narratives emphasize empathy, dialogue, and restorative justice as alternatives to aggression (Zipes, 2006). Ultimately, violence in storytelling reflects societal struggles while offering opportunities for resilience and healing. Its dual role requires critical engagement to maximize its positive impact and address its potential for harm.

Domestic Violence in Children's Literature: Educational Value and Limitations

Children's literature serves as a powerful medium for reflecting societal realities and shaping young minds. In the Arab sector in Israel, this literature addresses critical issues such as domestic violence, a pervasive problem with significant implications for children's emotional, psychological, and social development. The inclusion of domestic violence themes in children's literature not only mirrors lived experiences but also raises awareness, fosters empathy, and provides tools for resilience and healing.

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence, is defined as "an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationships and after separation." It encompasses physical and sexual violence, threats, intimidation, emotional and social abuse, and economic deprivation (Australian Law Reform Commission and New South Wales Law Reform Commission, 2010). While domestic violence predominantly affects women, its impact on children is profound, as they experience harm directly or indirectly, shaping their worldview and developmental trajectory (Hester, 2010; Edleson, 1999).

Children's literature in the Arab sector reflects the cultural and familial complexities surrounding domestic violence. It explores how children are "affected by" violence, whether as victims or witnesses of its aftermath. Research shows that children who witness violence endure similar negative psychosocial outcomes as those directly abused, including heightened stress, fear, and disrupted development (Kitzmann et al., 2003). In this context, narratives often address themes like the disruption of safety, secrecy, and the stigma of addressing familial violence (Edleson, 1999; Humphreys et al., 2008). These stories break silences, offering young readers relatable narratives that provide hope, agency, and strategies for coping with difficult circumstances.

A key example is *Kashkash Against Violence*, which highlights the importance of societal intervention. The story uses a metaphorical bird as an active bystander to encourage children to speak up and seek help. However, such stories often focus on short-term intervention, neglecting long-term solutions such as addressing structural issues or exploring recovery strategies for victims.

By addressing domestic violence, children's literature in the Arab sector creates a platform for dialogue, empowering young readers while advocating for systemic change. These narratives emphasize resilience and healing, demonstrating the transformative potential of storytelling as both a reflection of societal challenges and a catalyst for empathy and awareness.

Educational Value

Kashkash Against Violence takes a community-oriented approach, centering on a bird that intervenes upon witnessing acts of domestic violence in the home. The story uses the bird as a metaphor for collective responsibility and the necessity of societal intervention. It encourages children to speak up and seek help from trusted adults if they or others are experiencing violence. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the role of societal and environmental influences on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By presenting the bird as an active bystander, the story instills the importance of advocacy and collective action in addressing domestic abuse.

Despite its educational value, *Kashkash Against Violence* focuses heavily on short-term intervention while neglecting the structural issues and long-term complexities associated with domestic violence. For instance, the story does not explore systemic barriers that perpetuate abuse, such as economic dependency, deeply rooted societal norms, or insufficient legal protections. The use of metaphor, while engaging for children, oversimplifies the multifaceted nature of domestic violence and the broader strategies needed for sustainable change.

This limitation reflects a broader trend in children's literature on domestic violence: an emphasis on hopeful, intervention-focused narratives rather than nuanced explorations of recovery and systemic reform.

While this approach is understandable given the target audience, it risks leaving readers with an incomplete understanding of the challenges faced by victims beyond immediate intervention.

Kashkash Against Violence highlights the importance of raising awareness and advocating for action. However, future narratives could adopt a more comprehensive approach by incorporating long-term solutions. These might include coping strategies for trauma recovery, systemic reforms to address the root causes of abuse, and fostering resilience in young readers. By balancing immediate intervention with a focus on sustainable change, children's literature can play a pivotal role in shaping a generation better equipped to understand, address, and prevent domestic violence.

Political Violence in Children's Literature: Symbolism and Impact

Children's Literature and Domestic Violence in the Arab Sector in Israel

Children's literature in the Arab sector in Israel addresses societal issues like domestic violence, a pervasive problem with significant implications for children's emotional and social development. By including themes of domestic violence, such literature raises awareness, fosters empathy, and provides tools for resilience and healing.

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is defined as "an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationships and after separation," encompassing physical, emotional, and economic harm (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2010). Its impact on children, as direct victims or witnesses, profoundly shapes their worldview and development (Hester, 2010; Edleson, 1999).

Children's literature in the Arab sector reflects these complexities, addressing themes such as disrupted safety, secrecy, and stigma while offering young readers relatable narratives of hope and agency (Edleson, 1999; Humphreys et al., 2008). Stories like *Kashkash Against Violence* use metaphor to encourage societal intervention and empower children to seek help. However, such narratives often emphasize short-term solutions over systemic reforms or strategies for long-term recovery.

By tackling domestic violence, children's literature in the Arab sector plays a transformative role in fostering resilience, promoting dialogue, and advocating for systemic change, while helping young readers develop empathy and critical awareness.

Symbolic Representation of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In *The Vulture and the Sparrow*, the titular birds symbolize power dynamics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The vulture represents dominance and oppression, while the sparrow reflects vulnerability and resilience. This allegory captures the struggles of marginalized groups striving for identity and autonomy, emphasizing survival and resistance under systemic oppression (Darwish, 1984).

Sami and the Tank takes a direct approach, portraying a boy's life in a war-torn environment. The tank symbolizes military occupation and the loss of innocence, highlighting the psychological toll on children in conflict zones. Sami's interactions with the tank reveal complex emotions—fear, defiance, and curiosity—while his resilience offers hope amidst adversity (Karmi, 2006).

Impact on Young Readers

These stories provide accessible insights into political violence, fostering empathy and understanding. For example, *The Vulture and the Sparrow* prompts reflection on systemic oppression and coexistence, while *Sami and the Tank* humanizes the experiences of children in war zones, emphasizing resilience and hope. Such narratives help young readers develop coping mechanisms and critical thinking skills (Bandura, 1977).

However, these portrayals may cause emotional distress, particularly for readers with personal connections to similar conflicts. Authors must balance raising awareness with providing emotional support, ensuring stories empower rather than overwhelm young audiences.

By blending symbolism and resilience, *The Vulture and the Sparrow* and *Sami and the Tank* offer valuable educational opportunities, fostering understanding of political violence and its human impact while highlighting the importance of hope and resistance.

Violence Against Animals

Children's literature often features anthropomorphized animals to explore human emotions and moral dilemmas, yet the recurring depiction of violence against animals—especially by children—remains underexamined. These portrayals raise ethical and psychological questions about human-animal interactions and their influence on young readers.

Studies in animal and childhood studies reveal that children and animals share spaces of marginalization under adult-dominated power structures, reflecting societal views on control, violence, and compassion (Flegel, 2017). While animals are frequently used in children's literature to teach moral lessons, the theme of violence invites deeper analysis of interspecies relationships and their ethical implications (Feuerstein & Nolte-Odhiambo, 2017).

A central tension in these stories is the juxtaposition of civilization and wildness, often embodied by the child and the animal. Depictions of child-perpetrated violence, whether literal or symbolic, explore themes of power and empathy, raising questions about the child's role in hierarchies and their capacity for cruelty (Borgards, 2015). Stories such as Ernest Thompson Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* or Jack London's works reflect historical attitudes, portraying animal violence as survival or necessity, but also prompt reflection on their impact on young readers' views of animal welfare (Haraway, 2007).

In the Arabic sector in Israel, children's literature mirrors cultural, historical, and sociopolitical dynamics. Human-animal relationships, shaped by rural traditions and religious practices, often intertwine themes of compassion and violence. Stories like *Kharbusha and Her Kittens* and *The Eid Sheep* emphasize animals' utilitarian roles and cultural significance, offering insights into how ethical values are conveyed to children. These narratives reflect a balance of empathy and tradition, highlighting how cultural norms shape attitudes toward animals across generations.

The Role of Animals in Rural Life: Kharbusha and Her Kittens

In *Kharbusha and Her Kittens*, the narrative is deeply rooted in the rural context, where animals are integral to daily life but often occupy a precarious position. Kharbusha, the cat, is portrayed as both a source of comfort and a creature at the mercy of human actions. The story illustrates how children, while forming attachments to animals, may also inadvertently harm them due to lack of awareness or the influence of cultural norms.

Through the interactions between the children and Kharbusha, the story subtly critiques the casual acceptance of animal suffering in traditional settings. The children's mixed actions—ranging from care to harm—serve as a mirror to societal attitudes that oscillate between compassion and neglect. The narrative raises questions about the moral responsibility of children and adults in fostering empathy and care for animals, encouraging readers to reflect on their own behaviors.

This story's cultural setting underscores the tension between traditional norms and modern ethical concerns regarding animal welfare. While the narrative does not explicitly advocate for animal rights, it offers a platform to discuss how cultural practices can evolve to promote more compassionate treatment of animals, especially as these values are imparted to children.

Religious and Cultural Significance: The Eid Sheep

The Eid Sheep is set during Eid al-Adha, exploring a child's emotional journey as they bond with the sheep chosen for sacrifice. The story juxtaposes the cultural and religious significance of the ritual with the child's developing empathy, highlighting how children process loss and moral conflict within cultural traditions.

While respecting the ritual's religious importance, the narrative encourages critical reflection on its ethical dimensions. It balances cultural preservation with modern ethical considerations, particularly as children grapple with compassion and moral responsibility.

In Arabic children's literature, stories like *The Eid Sheep* and *Kharbusha and Her Kittens* reflect societal attitudes toward animals, portraying both compassion and violence. These narratives invite young readers to question norms, consider alternative perspectives, and reflect on their responsibilities toward animals as sentient beings.

By addressing the tension between tradition and modernity, such stories provide a platform to explore how cultural practices, like animal sacrifice, can evolve to align with contemporary ethical concerns while preserving cultural heritage.

Community and Property Violence in Children's Literature

Children's exposure to violence, including community violence such as physical aggression, theft, and property destruction, profoundly affects their psychological development, relationships, and mental health. Prolonged exposure to this stress disrupts brain development, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, impairing decision-making, self-regulation, and empathy (Fox & Shonkoff, 2011). Chronic stress responses can lead to generalized fear, heightened anxiety, and difficulty distinguishing between threat and safety. Addressing this violence, even through children's literature, is crucial for fostering resilience and moral development.

Children's literature has the potential to address community violence by teaching lessons in conflict resolution, empathy, and collaboration. While property violence—a common form of community violence—often reflects broader power struggles and resource conflicts, it also offers opportunities to highlight respect for shared spaces and community cohesion (Luthar & Goldstein, 2004). Narratives focusing on property violence can resonate with young readers, especially in contexts shaped by socioeconomic and cultural challenges.

In the Arabic sector in Israel, these themes gain complexity due to sociopolitical dynamics and economic disparities. Stories such as *The Melons and Watermelons* and *The Toy Hospital* exemplify the use of literature to address property violence, promoting empathy, accountability, and collaboration. These narratives reflect both the challenges of community violence and cultural values emphasizing collective responsibility and peaceful coexistence.

The Melons and Watermelons portrays a conflict between neighboring families over farmland. The story begins with the theft of melons, escalating into a broader dispute involving both adults and children. Through the children's perspective, the narrative explores the psychological toll of property violence, including fear, guilt, and insecurity. Ultimately, the children learn to collaborate to protect their farmland, resolving the conflict through dialogue and mutual respect. This resolution highlights the importance of respecting communal resources, fostering empathy, and valuing community cohesion over retaliation.

Similarly, *The Toy Hospital* centers on a young boy who accidentally breaks his friend's toy. Initially afraid of punishment, the boy takes responsibility and, with the help of family and neighbors, repairs the toy. The story emphasizes restitution and reconciliation, framing the repair process as an opportunity for accountability and strengthening relationships. The collaborative effort serves as a metaphor for community support and resilience, reflecting cultural values in the Arabic sector where family and collective action play central roles.

Both stories underscore the value of empathy, resilience, and cooperative problem-solving in addressing property violence. By depicting characters who resolve conflicts through dialogue and collaboration, these narratives provide young readers with alternative approaches to handling disputes. They also reflect the lived experiences of children in the Arabic sector, making the lessons more impactful.

By addressing property violence through relatable scenarios, these stories balance cultural preservation with promoting ethical growth. They encourage respect for shared spaces and relationships, fostering a generation that values empathy, accountability, and community well-being over material concerns (Pohl, 2024).

Educational and Cultural Implications of Fantasy vs. Realism

Fantasy and realism in children's literature serve distinct yet complementary roles in shaping young minds. Fantasy ignites imagination, encouraging children to explore abstract ideas and think creatively, while realism grounds them in relatable experiences, helping them navigate real-world challenges (Roberts & Vijayanand, 2024; Martin, 2024). Together, these elements foster cognitive, emotional, and moral growth by blending creativity with an understanding of human realities.

Fantasy promotes curiosity and problem-solving by presenting imaginative scenarios requiring innovative solutions, as seen in stories like *Coraline* or *The Hobbit*. However, its reliance on magical resolutions or binary distinctions between "good" and "evil" can sometimes oversimplify ethical dilemmas, bypassing the nuanced complexities that realism often explores (Martin, 2024). This balance is particularly important in cultural contexts where storytelling conveys moral values and social awareness.

In the Arabic sector in Israel, children's literature integrates traditional storytelling with modern educational goals. Stories like *The Monkey and the Thief* illustrate this blend, using fantastical elements to entertain and educate. The clever monkey's triumph over a thief emphasizes resourcefulness and justice, engaging children emotionally through anthropomorphism. While these narratives effectively communicate moral lessons, they can also oversimplify real-world challenges, such as the social and economic causes of theft (Syed Mikhail et al., 2016).

Traditional storytelling in the Arabic sector emphasizes communal values, morality, and intergenerational wisdom. Fantastical tales often offer a sense of escapism, providing children with imaginative respite from daily challenges. However, this reliance on fantasy risks underpreparing young readers for complex decision-making in real-life situations. For instance, while the monkey's cleverness inspires confidence, it may overlook the nuanced realities of justice and social inequality.

To maximize its educational impact, children's literature in this context must balance fantasy with realism, ensuring stories inspire creativity while addressing social and ethical complexities. Stories like *The Monkey and the Thief* reflect cultural values and engage young readers, but integrating realistic portrayals of challenges can better prepare children for the world they inhabit.

By balancing imagination and practicality, children's literature in the Arabic sector can foster curiosity, critical thinking, and moral responsibility, equipping young readers to navigate both the wonders of imagination and the complexities of reality.

Cultural Sensitivity and Social Commentary

Children's literature in the Arabic sector in Israel serves as a vital platform for addressing the challenges faced by Arab-Israeli communities while fostering cultural resilience. Stories like *The Monkey and the Thief* reflect not just moral and imaginative themes but also the socio-political realities of systemic discrimination, displacement, and societal pressures. These narratives simultaneously preserve cultural identity and empower young readers to navigate adversity.

The theme of cleverness in *The Monkey and the Thief* symbolizes the marginalized individual triumphing over systemic barriers, resonating with children growing up in communities shaped by discrimination (Martin, 2024). The monkey's triumph highlights justice and resourcefulness, inspiring children to see themselves as capable of overcoming challenges. Furthermore, the fantastical elements offer a coping mechanism for children to process complex realities like loss and displacement in an accessible and empowering way (Roberts & Vijayanand, 2024).

Such stories also emphasize communal values, such as collaboration and mutual support, reflecting the collective resilience of Arab-Israeli communities. This emphasis not only reinforces cultural identity but also aligns with educational goals to nurture empathy, resilience, and critical thinking in young readers (Syed Mikhail et al., 2016). By emotionally connecting with relatable characters like the clever and vulnerable monkey, children develop empathy and gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of actions, whether acts of theft or kindness.

These narratives also encourage critical thinking by subtly addressing the broader social conditions behind actions like theft. While the fantastical elements simplify moral dilemmas, they prompt discussions about fairness, justice, and responsibility, offering opportunities for educators and caregivers to guide conversations on ethical decision-making (Roberts & Vijayanand, 2024).

By integrating cultural relevance with universal themes of morality and resilience, stories like *The Monkey and the Thief* offer a multifaceted approach to children's development. They reflect the challenges faced by Arab-Israeli communities while equipping young readers with the tools to foster empathy, resilience, and social responsibility. These narratives are invaluable in both educational and cultural contexts, blending imaginative storytelling with grounded social themes to prepare children for an increasingly complex world.

Conclusion

Arab children's literature offers a dynamic and deeply reflective medium for addressing the challenges and realities faced by young readers in Arab-Israeli communities. These narratives skillfully weave cultural authenticity with moral and educational objectives, tackling themes such as domestic violence, political conflict, and societal struggles. Through allegorical representations, imaginative storytelling, and relatable characters, this genre fosters empathy, resilience, and critical thinking, helping children navigate both their personal and communal identities.

The strength of Arab children's literature lies in its ability to reflect the socio-political complexities of its audience while nurturing positive values. Stories like *Karma's Eyes Are No Longer Sad* provide vital insights into issues such as domestic violence, empowering children to recognize support systems and fostering resilience. Similarly, *The Vulture and the Sparrow* and *Sami and the Tank* use symbolism to engage with political violence, helping young readers process collective trauma while cultivating hope and resistance. These narratives do not merely educate; they also preserve cultural identity, offering a bridge between past traditions and future aspirations.

However, limitations within the genre must be critically addressed. The frequent reliance on fantasy as a narrative device, as seen in stories like *The Monkey and the Thief*, can sometimes oversimplify real-world challenges, limiting opportunities for children to engage with the complexities of systemic issues such as inequality and conflict. Furthermore, many stories prioritize immediate interventions over long-term resolutions, leaving gaps in their exploration of recovery, collaboration, and structural reform. While such narratives emphasize moral lessons, they occasionally overlook the importance of teaching non-violent, sustainable solutions to conflict.

Moving forward, Arab children's literature must continue to evolve by balancing cultural authenticity with universal moral lessons. Writers and educators are encouraged to craft stories that delve deeper into the complexities of conflict resolution, emphasizing non-violence, collective action, and long-term recovery. Stories like *The Melons and Watermelons* and *The Toy Hospital* already demonstrate the potential to address

themes of collaboration and respect for property, but there is room for broader engagement with issues of justice, equity, and systemic change.

By integrating these elements, Arab children's literature can continue to serve as a powerful tool for education, cultural preservation, and psychological support. It has the potential to empower young readers with the emotional and intellectual tools needed to navigate their unique challenges while fostering a sense of identity and belonging. In doing so, it not only shapes individuals but also contributes to building more resilient and compassionate communities.

Arab children's literature is more than just a reflection of its audience; it is a vision of what can be—a hopeful, empathetic, and empowered future shaped by stories that inspire growth, understanding, and resilience. By addressing its limitations and enhancing its strengths, this genre can continue to make an invaluable contribution to the development of its young readers and the preservation of cultural heritage in an ever-changing world.

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