

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

FINDING HOMELAND: LEBANESE NATIONAL
IDENTITY AS REFLECTED IN CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE

by

SALPI BOULGHOURJIAN SIMITIAN

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of English
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
May 2016

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by
SALPI BOULGHOURJIAN SIMITIAN

Approved by:

Roseanne Khalaf [Signature] R Khalaf
[Dr. Roseanne Khalaf, Associate Professor] Advisor
[The Department of English]

Adam John Waterman [Signature] [Signature]
[Dr. Adam John Waterman, Assistant Professor] Member of Committee
[The Department of English]

DR. SYRINE HOUT [Signature] [Signature]
[Dr. Syrine Hout, Professor] Member of Committee
[The Department of English]

Date of thesis/dissertation defense: [April 20, 2016]

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Roseanne Khalaf. She has accompanied my journey since my undergraduate years. Her academic and personal advices have been indispensable in my pursuit to achieve my aspirations. Dr. Khalaf will always be a mentor and friend. I would like to express my immense gratitude.

I would also like to thank Dr. Adam John Waterman as the first reader, I am grateful for his recommendations of sources that were invaluable in writing this thesis.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Syrine Hout her course about Post-War Anglophone literature in Lebanon was not only a tool in analyzing my own writing, but an insight into the torment of a society that has not yet healed.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my children Anahid, and Harry. To my two lovely nieces Mary Anne and Alexandra. To my sister Choghik, and brother Vatche for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without you. I love you immensely! Thank you!

TO MY PARENTS

Melkon and Anahid Boulghourjian

Who instilled in us a profound love and dedication to Lebanon

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Salpi Boulghourjian Simitian for Master of Arts
Major: English Literature

Title: Finding Homeland: Lebanese National Identity as Reflected in Children's Literature

This thesis explores the cultural markers in children's literature that indicate national identity. The research will focus on Lebanon as a case study and will attempt to discern whether children's literature in Lebanon promotes a sense of belongingness and identification with Lebanese society and the geographic space or the nation. The paper draws upon primary sources, children's picture books published by mainstream publishing houses to study views of the meaning of nationhood.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“The picture book is a key element of the cultural fabric of any society”

Martin Salisbury – Interview: On the history, make-up and psychology of picture books

(Hellige 162).

In his essay “*A Glimpse into the World of Children’s Books*” Walter Benjamin describes how children immerse themselves in the stories they read and the transformative power of stories in children’s imaginations and lives. He illustrates how children maneuver the stories they read, just as they play with their toys, blocks, and dolls. Children are not very fond of didactic stories, Benjamin stresses; they prefer texts that humanize animals and nature. They create ideal spaces in their imagination where they rehearse events vis-à-vis the realities they face. Eventually children realize the power of the text over their imaginings and use words to find innovative solutions to overcome obstacles presented in real life. The cumulative effects of a child’s readings shape the self (Bullock & Jennings 407-408).

According to Maria Tatar, scientists are intrigued by how children are absorbed in the stories they read, such that they intensely care about the characters and the spaces they occupy. The wonder and awe that children experience through reading and beholding colorful images cannot be rivaled by any other type of media. The power of storybooks on children’s imaginations eventually guides them in real life situations (91).

According to sociologists Schafer and Lamm, culture is the sum of values, art, customs, ideas, loyalty and bond to certain conventions, and ethics. Sharing cultural values, and common behavioral patterns determine a particular group (67). Hence, culture, history, and national identity and belongingness to a group and a geographic space are essentially connected. Benedict Anderson states that national identities and nationalism are not necessarily the deliberate association of political ideologies with the consciousness of the members of the group, but rather the “cultural systems” that produced the group (12).

Cultural and historic markers that a society communicates to its children give them a sense of national identity. Current trends in education supplement textbooks with picture books that convey cultural markers and history. The inclination to use picture books to expand the scope of discussion and understanding of any given topic during the different stages of the elementary years has been popular among educators and has a tendency to endure. “Such books are powerful tools, often highly superior to textbook material for involving students in an interactive way” (Turner, Broemmel, Wooten, 20). According to Maria Tatar, children read about characters in storybooks that are adventurous, and more interesting and that dare to advocate change. They also love to imitate characters they read about and admire, which is how literature is used to mold young minds (21).

Teaching history at schools is the established method that governments use to communicate legacy, culture and legend to their young citizens. By learning about historic events, and heroes and characters from history that were part of national movements that had contributed to the building of the nation, children link themselves with the events and identify with the historic figures, and the nation as a whole (Barton

& Levstik, 49, 50). Examining the choices educators make in deciding which literary text to use in the classroom, Carl Leggo writes, “Literature is a significant means by which all of us are constructed as social beings” (2). He further explains the interaction between reader and text, and by the process of constructing meaning through reading the text, “this understanding comprises part of the reader’s ideology about society, culture, and history” (5).

Art and literature are actually the outcome of the dynamic interaction between the leading ideologies and the beauty in the imaginations of the artists. The product could be a reflection of the dominant ideology, or a rebellion against its tenets. Children’s literature as an aesthetic expression does not escape this exchange, and institutional choices in literary works to supplement the mainstream school curricula are made within this context.

The dilemma in Lebanon, however, is that there is no consensus on, or a unified narrative of a common history for school textbooks. Also, Lebanon is comprised of eighteen sects and numerous political parties, each with a different perspective of the unfolding of national history. Kamal Salibi describes the deep schisms between the different religious denominations with regards to the history of Lebanon. “Since the 1930s each minority has reciprocally contested textbooks published by the other minorities. This is due to an intense disagreement in the unfolding of history and the nature of national identity of Lebanon” (Salibi, 202, 203).

The mass student demonstrations in 1967 are considered one of the incidents and preludes that led to the Lebanese civil strife. As part of their demands, students had called for integrated school textbooks (Traboulsi, 169). The indecisiveness in forging a unique Lebanese identity through the instruction of history, and an educational system

polarized between different principles, religious, and political orientations that lacked the ability to transmit a spirit of belongingness and responsibility toward the nation, was partly the brewing ground for the constructed enmities that led to and fed the Civil War, or the 1975 events. In the course of fifteen years, the violent civil strife diverged in various directions, at times unrelated to the initial sources of the conflict, and became “a struggle over the “indivisible” and more contentious principles of communal identity, cultural heritage, national sovereignty, pluralism, and sectarian coexistence” (Khalaf, 231).

By defining Lebanese identity as Arab and belonging to the larger Arab Nation (Salloukh, 638), the 1989 Taif Agreement intended to heal the long rooted historic rifts. The agreement also called for a revision of school curricula such that it promotes “national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness.” Nevertheless, the Lebanese are well aware that interpreting history in classrooms remained a charged issue, contingent on the religious and political alignment of the school and the instructor. This has contributed to a generation of “confused and constrained youthful engagement with the past” (Larkin, 61).

The first publication for children in Lebanon was with the introduction of the printing press in 1734 Khenchara. Maronite bishop Germanos Farhat published the first children’s book to teach Arabic. Later publications contributed to the 19th - century Arabic literary renaissance movement or *AnNahda* (Salameh, 17-19). In line with this, Benedict Anderson maintains that the introduction of print technology and the spread of languages propagated the emergence of new “imagined communities” who shared linguistic homogeneity, and the development of the nation as an idea (46). Anderson further gives brief examples of different nations “Maronites and Copts, many of them

products of Beirut's American College (founded in 1866) and the Jesuit College of St. Joseph (founded in 1875) were major contributors to the revival of Classical Arabic and the spread of Arab nationalism" (Anderson, 75).

According to Mathilde Chevre, modern Arab children's literature is Pan-Arab, and there is no specific literature attributed to one Arab country (27). Two main themes dominated the content of children's books published during the 1970s. The first had a political, ideological, and religious agenda as well as didactic instruction to the Arab child regarding manners and behavior required to contribute to the Arab community (77). The second theme focused on pedagogical, sociological, and psychological poetic literature that questioned the child's place within the world and society (77). During the 1970's, authors and illustrators were actively engaged in creating the "Arab" in literature with the Palestinian cause at the heart of the publications. The main presentiment of the books was that the future identity of the community at large rested on the shoulders of the child (78).

The 1980s marked a period of decline in children's publications. One of the reasons is the escalation of the war in Lebanon. Moreover, in 1982 the Dar al Fata al Arabi publishing house started publishing from Cairo. Where there was a shift in the themes that it published, it renounced its ideological and political themes and focused more on literary and pedagogical topics (Chevre, 83-84). Abd el Aziz Al Makaleh harshly criticizes the "stagnancy period" of the 1980s in Arab children's literature and questions its existence: "While a quarter of a century ago the literature was undergoing an existential crisis, nowadays it's going through a crisis of quality." (my translation, 36-37). He further condemns the people involved in the field of children's literature and culture, as being caught up in the current of literary and linguistic distortion of the

literature. He calls for a national and humanistic movement aimed at forging the new Arab citizen similar to the ideals created in the 1960s and 1970s (Al Makaleh, 36-37).

While the 1970s marked a period when themes focused on an external enemy posing a threat to the Arab world and a call to resist, writings in the 2000s became more symbolic, focusing on respecting international law, peace, and retracing the historical facts of the war in Palestine, specifically using history to denounce the injustices perpetrated against the Palestinian people. The content of the 2010s focused on the Arab revolutions, the enemy became internalized while radical social transformation brought new hopes (Chevre, 78).

Unfortunately, I was not able to find a comprehensive examination of the history of children's literature in Lebanon. During the course of the thesis I will also mention the challenges in finding sources pertaining to Lebanon. Connecting Pan-Arab causes to the Lebanese context is controversial. On the one hand, arousing empathy with Pan-Arab causes is required in order to inspire solidarity with neighboring countries and fellow Arabs. On the other hand, Lebanon, like other Arab countries, has its specific culture and heritage and it is necessary to convey cultural peculiarities to children in order for them to have a sense of belongingness, security and responsibility to maintain and contribute to the country. One of the reasons why Lebanese publishers use Pan-Arab themes is to cater to a larger market. Most Lebanese publishers face dire difficulties if they accommodate solely the Lebanese market. During a casual conversation with a publisher who specializes in children's literature, she mentioned that she could dedicate a whole thesis or volumes concerning the challenges that publishers face in Lebanon. Later, while writing this thesis I contacted her and three other publishers that publish for children with a set of questions as follows, why do

Lebanese publishers find it necessary to cater to a Pan-Arab audience? How are choices made for using standard Arabic vs. the Lebanese dialect? What is the ratio of publications for entertainment vs. purely quality literature? The print runs? a- for the Lebanese market and b- for the Arab World? Do Lebanese cultural indicators hinder sales in other countries? How are choices made to decide which foreign books to translate? And how are cultural differences resolved in translation? Writing about the Arab World in general, Sabeur Mdallel writes, "Children's literature in the Arab World is a powerful political propaganda tool in the hands of politicians and decision-makers." ("The Sociology of Children's Literature in The Arab World." Alice's Academy. 2004. Web. Sept. 20. 2015). To what extent is this true in the Lebanese context? Three publishers declined to reply to email; However, Jinane Gemawi from Hachette Antoine was very frank in her answers. She acknowledged that catering to a Pan-Arab market is problematic because of cultural differences, and at times issues are as mundane as choosing to use Hindi or Arabic numbering. She further elaborated that most Arab publishers altogether avoid controversial subjects such as religion, race, and gender, and focus instead on praising virtues, honesty, generosity, etc. Even condemning vices such as lying and stealing can become controversial. Publishing in spoken Arabic or the Lebanese dialect is rare and most publishers use "Standard White Arabic" which is the simplest form of Standard Arabic. The 2002 UNDP Arab Human Development Report announced that with a population of 280 million the Arab World represents five percent of the world population. 38 percent of the population is between the ages of 0 to 14 (35-36). According to Gemawi, the print runs depend on the potential marketability of the titles, the average is 1000 to 2,500, a meager quantity compared to the size of the population. Concerning Mdallel's observation about children's literature in the Arab

World being “a powerful propaganda tool” she maintains that in the Lebanese context, publishing houses are completely independent, there is no state censorship. The content will definitely have ideological predispositions if the publishers are affiliated to a certain political party (Gemawi, Jinane. Kahwaji, Pascale. email interview. 10 March 2016).

Writing about publishing in the Arab world in general and Lebanon in particular, Samar Abou-Zeid explains that low book sale rates in the Arab world has been consistent, and is attributed to high illiteracy rates and low purchasing power (94). The 2002 UNDP Arab Human Development Report found that 65 million Arab adults are illiterate. Two thirds are women, and ten million children between the ages of six to fifteen are out of school. The report warned that if the trend continues it is estimated that there will be a 40% increase in 2015. However, more recent data is unavailable to confirm this estimate (UNDP, 22).

Lebanon and Egypt publish 80% of the Arabic books found on the Arab market. Around 3000 new titles are published annually in Lebanon and there are around 321 bookshops, the highest number in the Arab countries (Abou-Zeid, 95). Children’s books, mostly sold to educational institutions, are the third most sold books after religious books and novels respectively (100, 101). Censorship has a particular impact on the creativity of children’s books. Although there is no censorship in Lebanon, one of the largest markets is KSA with a population of 28 million, and publishers are wary of publishing any themes, images, or references that might be a reason for the book to be banned from Arab markets (97).

Although the themes of children’s books are Pan-Arab, censorship and distribution laws are very different in each Arab country. This implies that there are

fundamental cultural differences in each country. By publishing for the Pan-Arab audience, Lebanese publishers are forced to craft restrained or bland content and confusing cultural markers in children's books.

Children develop a sense of self through the books they read, relating to the characters of the stories and finding a sense of place in the description of space and in the landscapes depicted in the illustrations. Amidst contested views of history, and the fragmentation of the nation, and society during and the post-war period, how do Lebanese children find a sense of place, belongingness, and national identity? How do children's picture books published in Lebanon contribute to forging a sense of national attachment to the geographic space and belonging to the society in order for children to feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to the betterment of society and the nation?

This thesis will explore the extent to which picture books contribute to the above-mentioned concerns. The research questions are as follows:

- a- To what extent does the portrayal of landscape and cityscape in picture books written for Lebanese children present a unique sense of place?
- b- What are the textual and pictorial elements in Lebanese picture books that reflect a sense of Lebanese national identity?

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONALE

In order for children to be engaged in their reading, they need to empathize with the text and images. According to Patricia Enciso, engaged readers are absorbed in the text in such a way that they carry their cultural and social preconceptions to give new meaning to the text and draw imaginative nuances that sustain them throughout their social and personal interactions (172). “Engagement, then, was defined as a complex interplay of personal, emotional, visual, and evaluative experiences and perceptions that are typically felt privately but also may be expressed publicly among a community of readers who share a variety of purposes, interpretations, and interests in reading.” (Enciso, 172-173). Enciso’s description is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s characterization of children immersed in reading and the interaction between text, image, and children’s imagination as “dances with words” (Tatar, 137).

From her teaching experiences Shelby Wolf extrapolates that children’s engagement with literature can be increased enormously if we consider certain concepts about children and literature (15). Foremost to her concepts is to consider the intelligence of children, and put an end to our preconceptions about the naïveté and vanity of childhood (16). During times of distress, children turn to literature to find answers, and delve into an imaginary world to find comfort from the otherwise grim surroundings. Providing them with text that demeans their curiosity with superficial and plebian work will daunt their interest in literature. On a further note, if we deprive children of sincere answers to their questions and interests and degrade their inquisition

we would be reinforcing the perception about their naïveté. Shelby Wolfe quotes Perry Nodelman, “Deprived of the experience of anything more than the little we believe them capable of, children often do learn to be inflexible, intolerant of the complex and the unconventional” (16).

Writing *The Little Cedar Tree* in 2011 was partly an attempt to meet the needs I had as a child for a story that satiated my nostalgia for the homeland I had left because of the war. It tells the story of The Little Cedar Tree, the protagonist who witnesses some of the major historical events that have shaped Lebanon, as well as deforestation and how different civilizations used the timber of cedar trees for their prosperity and progress. The story is a panoramic view of Lebanese history and an opportunity to introduce children to historiography, devising the *Longue Durée* as a tale. The ending of the story is conditional; if one cares for the environment it will regenerate just as a country will revive through collective effort. Only during coursework for Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Narratives with Syrine Hout did I further analyze the text. Roseanne Khalaf calls the return of authors to their pasts through their narratives “sorting out the past;” through writing children’s tales, authors return to their childhood to explore and perhaps comprehend what bruised their childhood (Khalaf, 15). Similarly, the three stages of Syrine Hout’s “belatedness” concept can be applied to the text (85-87). The first stage is about authors who belonged to a generation that felt robbed of experiencing the heyday of Lebanon, a generation that only heard about the era through the nostalgic narrations of their elders. Descriptions about the historic events during those times reflect similar nostalgic sentiments, and a yearning for their return. Meanwhile, the second stage concerns the sense of not belonging; as authors who travelled back and forth during the war had a sense of alienation or detachment in

the safety of other countries, along with a yearning to return to the “bleeding” homeland. Although the *The Little Cedar Tree* does not implicitly indicate this thought, the ending does leave the reader with a responsibility to make choices in contributing or making a place better instead of leaving it in times of unrest and violence. Finally, the third stage of belatedness, according to Hout is the author’s consciousness of wartime trauma and of the belatedness in finding closure or “achieving catharsis” through narration. *The Little Cedar Tree* is written from a child’s perspective; as the emotions and curiosities attributed to the cedar tree are those of a child and intended for an audience of the same age group that I belonged to during the war. The age factor, the content of the story, and the nostalgic style of narration have a way for me to achieve closure on a phase in life that was incomprehensible to me as a child at the time.

I have been invited to read my book in schools across Lebanon and found deep emotional fulfillment in the heartfelt responses that I received from my audiences. This made me realize that children in Lebanon are essentially interested in texts that narrate the history of the country from a child’s perspective in a creative way.

I embarked on writing this thesis in September 2015; the sky was red and brown. A rare sandstorm had engulfed Lebanon. The dust along with the toxic stench of uncollected burning garbage, and power cuts led to a self-imposed house arrest.

Fall was meant to be happy. The season for sharpening pencils, laminating book covers, apple cake for lunchboxes, crisp weather, crisp fresh air for the children. UNICEF reported that due to the regional violence and conflicts, 13.7 million children have no access to schools. “Middle East wars deprive 13m children of education – UN.” (BBC: 2015. Web. 3 Sept. 2015). A generation lives in fear, destitution, and hopelessness.

To research and write a thesis about children's literature has been in my heart like a favorite song that one repeats and hums like a mantra. A song that I wanted to learn the complete lyrics of, and know that singing it correctly would provide comfort. It started after I had read three specific works; the UNDP Arab Human Development Report, *Enchanted Hunters* by Maria Tatar, and *Raise Your Kids Right* by Michelle Anne Abate. The three works are not directly related; *Enchanted Hunters* discusses the power of stories in children's imagination and hence their lives. It is also the study of various classic children's tales. Meanwhile, *Raise Your Kids Right* explores how children's stories are used to indoctrinate right wing ideologies among children in the U.S., and a part of the UNDP report reviews the intellectual stagnancy in the Arab World. The relation between the three prompted me to propose the following question: Since literature read during childhood has such a profound impact on one's social and intellectual development, can children's literature serve to broaden social perspectives at an early age and reinforce the desire for understanding and peace in young readers?

My goal in attending the Graduate English Literature Program at AUB was to acquire the theoretical foundation crucial to substantiating my approach to children's literature. The readings assigned during my coursework and the preparation for the comprehensive exam provided me with the theoretical bedrock to pursue my thesis and reinforce my thoughts on the transformative power of literature.

Since my acceptance in the program, and while writing my thesis, the situation in Lebanon grew grimmer. Every event that incrementally deteriorated ordinary life, widened the gulf between ruler and ruled, deepened the mistrust of the leadership in the country, and, again and again, highlighted the notion that after almost two decades since the end of the civil strife in Lebanon, citizens as well as leaders, had not overcome the

divisive principles of the conflict that dictated life in wartime chaos. In fact, they continue to live under its heavy shadow. How does one build a sense of belongingness to a society and a geographic space? The bleakness and overall dismal situation often discouraged my efforts and enthusiasm to pursue my thesis, and at times the song seemed to belong to a faded past, to a naïve idealism.

It was during this time that I received an invitation to attend a fundraising concert dedicated to street children and orphans. The Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra performed the world premiere of *Drake Passage*, a symphonic poem composed and conducted by Vartan Melkonian. He had meticulously chosen the program and after each piece he paused to tell the audience why he had chosen that particular piece and to narrate his personal story. After playing Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 Pastoral, he recounted how as a three year old orphan he was taken to the Bird's Nest orphanage in Byblos, Lebanon. Maria Jacobsen, a Danish missionary, who had originally started the Center for Armenian Genocide Orphans, continued to maintain, greeted him with a warm hug and a language he couldn't understand. He thought it was the language of angels. She used to listen to Beethoven's symphony and ask the children to listen with her. Melkonian had to leave the orphanage – for unknown reasons – and live on the streets of Beirut. Years later, in the early 1970s, he found his way to London. He is now the conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Humanitarian Ambassador to the UN for street children. For the finale of the concert he conducted his composition *Drake Passage*. During the summer Jacobsen would take the children to a nature retreat, gather them together every night, and tell stories about her seafaring uncle. She once told them how her uncle thought that a sailor's experience would not be complete without sailing through the rough seas of Drake Passage – the water passage between

South America and Antarctica – Jacobsen’s stories had inspired in Melkonian the will to go on, and he composed the symphonic poem based on his childhood imaginations!

Hope.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The markers that are communicated as a result of the synthesis between culture and history gradually shape the mindset, the behavior, and the construct of children. This necessitates a critical exploration of the context of past events and their impact on the present.

In *Teaching History for the Common Good*, Barton and Levstik emphasize the importance of the study of history as an indispensable proponent in having a complete and an in-depth understanding of present-day society, including politics, economics, and culture. It is only through tracking origins and developments of the past that one can fully understand the present institutions, attitudes and cultural patterns. The authors explain, “This perspective on historical analysis is firmly rooted in academic scholarship, even if not all historians would subscribe to it unconditionally” (71).

The authors quote Leibniz who, in the 17th century, acknowledged the advantages of studying history in identifying “The origins of things present which are to be found in things past; for reality is never better understood than through its causes” (71). Eminent scholars from the 20th century also share similar views scholars like Frederick Jackson Turner who asserts that the purpose of history “is to know the elements of the present by understanding what came into the present from the past” (71). Turner further claims that the study of history without aiming to connect it to the present is merely antiquarianism and not history.

Barton and Levstik further substantiate with examples when they write that: “David W. Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* examines how popular perceptions of the Civil War were shaped in the 50 years after 1865 [...] it derives its importance precisely from the role of these perceptions in framing enduring national debates” (71).

The authors then state how this approach of using history as a tool to study the origins and developments of the present has been used in schools in the United States. “This focus on national history results not only from the need to create a community of identification [...] but also from the assumption that the nature and functioning of U.S. society today can best be understood by tracing its origins.” They further elaborate: “The eras of the American Revolution, the ratification of the Constitution, and the Early Republic figure so prominently in school history both because they serve as our own “origin myth” and because developments in these periods are assumed to be crucial to understanding the current political structure of the United States” (72).

In *Essentials of Children’s Literature*, Lynch-Brown and Tomilson state the values of historical fiction for children. These include the awareness of the readers on how their lives have been shaped by people who lived before them, and a realization that their actions will be affecting future generations. In addition, children see the human side of history and comprehend that people like themselves make history. May also learn how people at different historical times lived and this helps them recognize the universality of human needs. This way they attain a sense of time and progressively begin to understand the sequence of events that happened in the past. This allows children to appreciate and acquire an interest in the study of social sciences. Finally, children learn about their origins and national heritage (138-139). This study

particularly focuses on the capacity of history in children's literature to offer readers a sense of empowerment; that children themselves are capable of attaining the responsibility to control, shape and contribute to the societies in which they live.

At a time when the terms globalization and glocalization are casually being used to describe societies, and the trend is in finding new theories about identity formation with regard to geographic spaces, there is a strong tendency to redefine national identities in children's literature.

In *Canadian Picture Books: Shaping and Reflecting National Identity*, Bainbridge and Wolodko write how Canadian identity has been branded as a combination of indistinct French, British and American values and cultures. Since the 18th century, Canada has been facing tension between its French-speaking and English-speaking cultures. With this in mind, Canadian nationalists, at both ends, have recognized the challenges in producing a common national identity with a culturally divided society.

In the early 20th century, English-speaking Canadians identified with the British Empire, and ultimately its most decisive relationship developed with the United States due to strong economic ties. This caused Canada to be suspended between Britain and the United States. The development of Canada's national identity coincided with the establishment of a Canadian national canon in the late 20th century. Grants from the federal government permitted the rise of national literature, first for adults and later for children. Quality picture books began to be widely published in the 1980s. The authors write that "today, picture books are the fastest growing segment of Canadian children's literature, and they reflect an interesting perspective on Canadian national identity [...]"

these works in turn help to shape the notions readers develop about being Canadian and about who Canadians are” (2).

Bainbridge and Wolodko further identify Canadian picture books as multicultural literature where “Canadian authors and illustrators present their own stories to the world, and in the process, they celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of their heritage.” They then quote Sarah Corse, author of *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*, who asserts that national literatures are “consciously constructed pieces of the national culture.” In conclusion “what authors and illustrators choose to represent through literature and what publishing houses are willing to publish are always political and economic decisions” (8-10).

Diverse societies fragmented further by colonialism have resorted to children’s literature to forge a distinct national identity that unites the different factions or minorities within their societies.

Christina M. Desai writes how Malaysia as a former colony with “arbitrary boundaries, diverse ethnic groups, large immigrant populations, and a wide variety of languages, religions, and lifestyles” was faced with the challenge of building a nation with a people that had no “common history, culture, or political symbols.” Malaysian authors thus began to rewrite history “in a good light” aiming to “reverse the colonial legacy of pejorative characterizations.” Desai further quotes Edward Said who characterized this revision or alteration as a “search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes, myths, and religions.” According to Desai: “Several children’s books on Malaysian history demonstrate these tendencies as they attempt to define national values and ideal citizens and to promote unity” (7-8).

Similarly, nations that have experienced collective trauma utilize children's literature to attenuate the sufferings and reverse past themes of national consciousness that had scarred civic unity. In *Chilean Children's Literature and National Identity: Post-Dictatorship Discourses of Chileanness Built through the Representation of Indigenous People* Isabel Ibaceta argues, "The growth of children's literature featuring indigenous peoples is linked to the emergence of new national identity discourses in Chile, which appeared after the sixteen-year dictatorship ended in 1989" (54). Consequently, the books published from 1990 to 2010, dealt with the theme of national or cultural identity according to Ibaceta, . "Ecology, preservation-diffusion of the native heritage, multiculturalism, and the process of growing up" were the common underlying themes used to spread the themes of national identity (56).

Ibaceta focuses on myth and legend, explaining "myths are used by past and current societies to deal with their historical needs and worries" (57). She then studies one particular Chilean children's book and recognizes its depiction of different northern indigenous groups, including their different "cultural practices, such as languages, architecture, traditional dishes, clothing, music, and rites" (57).

Ibaceta further demonstrates that the large body of children's books from 1990 to 2010 adamantly explored national identity to erase the former national identity concepts of the dictatorship era. The governments following Pinochet's oppressive regime strove to promote their political discourse of "diversity and the value of minority and human rights." The governments further established regulations to legitimize first people groups and further strove to promote national identity by including teachings on the indigenous groups within the schooling programs. In addition, the government

economically supported the publishing of children's books and children's editorial houses that focused on native themes (60).

Finally, Ibaceta writes: "these narratives attempt to establish and legitimize the essence of a new identity that breaks with previous signs of national identity linked to dictatorship and to racial, cultural and ideological intolerance" (61).

In a similar vein, Williams writes how the story of *Broucci* by Jan Karafiat contributed to the development of national identity. Williams says "Karafiat was a Protestant village priest, and his book about a family of fireflies, while it may seem heavily didactic to a modern reader, clearly captured the national spirit" (47). The use of fireflies as the main characters of the story strategically casts a common insect common to Czech summers usually seen on weekends spent in the countryside. *Broucci*, therefore, uses the fireflies as a powerful representation of the Czech countryside. In addition, Williams elaborates that the use of the family of fireflies signifies a "rural family of the nineteenth century" (47). The story also marks the seasons and reflects "the traditional Czech way of life." Furthermore, as mentioned in Ibaceta's text, Czech culture and heritage strongly dominates the story with passages referencing Czech cuisine, architecture, and fundamentally, a "strong religious presence" recurrently stressing the importance of being obedient to God (48).

Seth Lerer further analyzes the role of children's books in Eastern Europe after the Second World War with a specific look at Czechoslovakia's renowned artist Voitech Kubasta, who produced vibrant movable pop-up books. The author affirms that "the bustle of Kubasta's pop-ups seem to be the dreamscapes for a gray post-Stalinist world." The aesthetic of the books during the mid-twentieth century also relied on vivid

colors to contrast the monotonous and dull city. Thus, Lerer justifies the purpose of the books was to “exorcise nightmares” (327-328).

The above-mentioned cases illustrate the strategies other nations have applied to establish a strong national identity through children’s books. Yet, the efforts are more fervent in countries that have endured wars and trauma. In *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, Samir Khalaf explains how “the most grotesque attributes of the war became accepted as normal appendages to rampant chaos and fear.” The violence seen during the fifteen-year civil war had a significant effect on children. Khalaf writes: “All their daily routines and conventional modes of behavior – their schooling, eating, and sleeping habits, playgrounds, encounters with others, perception, daydreams and nightmares, their heroes and role models – were inexorably wrapped up in the omnipresence of death, terror, and trauma.” He further elaborates, “Their makeshift toys, much like their fairy tales and legends, mimicked the cruelties of war. They collected cartridges, empty shells, and bullets. They played war by stimulating their own gang fights. They acquired sophisticated knowledge of the artifacts of destruction just as earlier generations took delight in identifying wild flowers, birds, and butterflies” (238-239). One wonders, what has been done to “exorcise the nightmares” of war in Lebanese children?

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This study will explore Lebanese cultural markers represented by text and images in children's picture books published in Lebanon. References to culture, geography, landscape, cityscape, and history will be studied – as part of a literature that encompasses a span of subjective conveyances through metaphors, representations, and affects. Children are aware of and filter these textual and pictorial markers that portray a sense of space and character related to their identity. Hence, it is necessary to detect these markers in order to determine the extent to which the picture books convey a sense of national identity.

For this thesis, picture books were used as primary sources, for they seamlessly incorporate the text with illustrations, both offsetting and reinforcing each other. In contrast, illustrated stories are longer than the average 32-page picture book, with more emphasis placed on the text.

In *Comparative Children's Literature*, Emer O'Sullivan talks of picture books, "the aspect that most clearly differentiates the literature of one country from that of another is "a sense of place. Representations of landscape can function as metonyms for social significance or cultural heritage." O'Sullivan further explains "extra-textual functions of images" which instill a sense of "national identity in the process of socialization to extreme forms such as propaganda, are usually produced by means of contrast." The contrast of foreign images in juxtaposition with local imagery is used to "reinforce awareness of the reader's own cultural identity" (39). In *Picture Books:*

Representation and Narration, Kummerling-Meibauer concludes by explaining Maria Nikolajeva's notion of increasing a child's "ability to read signs and symbols, and to recognize and interpret cultural literary codes" is enhanced and aided by picture books that develop visual literacy. Kummerling-Meibauer further elaborates, "to understand and interpret book collections in picture books is to understand the value of books and book collection have in the culture they are a part of." The author finally concludes, "Book collections are sites where different periods of time and ways of thinking are embedded. [...] It involves becoming familiar with different epistemic entrances to the world, to the questions of being. Learning to read, to collect and to recollect books is the same as learning to live" (210). In Maria Nikolajeva's *How Picturebooks Work*, the notion of visual literacy is further expanded through intertextuality. She explains, "In picture books, intertextuality, as everything else, works on two levels, the verbal and the visual." She adds "Intertextuality presupposes the reader's active participation in the decoding process; in other words, it is the reader who makes the intertextual connection" (228).

In her study, Isabel Ibaceta examines Chilean children's books using two categories from the "National Identity Analysis Tool" (NIAT), "an instrument created to categorize and analyze narrative elements used in children's literature to create images of nation." The two categories include the "Geography and Landscape" and "Culture and Heritage."

The "Culture and Heritage" category includes the study of "habits, traditional social practices, customs, folkloric elements, and rituals." It is further comprised of five subcategories, which include: "myth and legend, tradition and superstition, forms of arts and cultural artifacts, music and dance, and food and drink" (4).

As for “Geography and Landscape”, Ibaceta establishes the importance of constructing an identity and the space. She explains this interconnection through the study of social psychologists Dixon and Durrheim who developed the notion of place-identity: “which makes manifest the relevance that rhetorical dynamics have in giving form to the idea of identity, and also the political implications of representing places and positioning people and groups within them” (5).

The initial intention of the study was to compare children’s publications by political parties and picture books published by the mainstream publishing houses in Lebanon. However, the search for sources revealed a completely disordered corpus of material. Although almost all political parties had a publication at one point, they did not publish consistently. The publications cannot be considered as children’s picture books as defined above, they are more similar to children’s magazines that are just informational and in a few of the pages the ideology of the party is expressed. For example, the Kataeb party published a comic book style magazine about Bachir Gemayel called “*Bacho*.” The Lebanese Forces had also published a magazine for children during the war, but now publish for university students called “Horizon.” Meanwhile, the Marada party publishes a magazine called “*Marada Junior*.” The comic book “A Nations Dream” published by the Ministry of Energy and Water was a one-time publication about the minister Gebran Basil exploring a utopian and futuristic Lebanon with a child. The Hezbollah publishes “*Mahdi*” magazine readily available in most bookstores and online. The Tashnak party publishes through its cultural wing Hamazkayin about Armenian history, legends, and myths, a few modern storybooks and ones that teach the Armenian language.

The consistency of the publications by political parties seems to be related to their political popularity and social prominence. The publications are mostly in the form of general knowledge magazines with scant references to party ideologies. The two reasons why I abandoned my initial attempt to compare political party publications with mainstream publications are as follows. First, there is a lack of consistency: past publications are not readily available and finding samples depends on whether the party maintains an archive and whether they allow access to the archives. Details about the publications are not readily available and most of the information is through word of mouth. The second reason is that this study is about children's literature: although children's magazines could have a similar impact on the formation of the self; a comparative study of magazines would veer from the focus of this thesis.

In finding primary literary sources my initial tendency was to contact the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, the National Library where all Lebanese publications are archived. Contacting them however, revealed that it is closed due to political reasons; specifically, it will remain closed until a president is elected. My search led me to the children's library at the Lebanese American University, school libraries, and bookstores. One of the challenges, however, is that the books are not classified according to genre such as historical fiction, traditional literature – myths, fables, and legends – non-fiction, anthologies and biographies. Going through the stacks and by the recommendations of librarians and bookstore employees I was able to collect a sample of thirty-three picture books. The languages of the books vary between Arabic, French and English, since children in Lebanon are commonly trilingual. See table 1 for a summary of the sample used for this thesis.

The tool used to gauge national identity in children's books will be the National Identity Analysis Tool NIAT (Ibaceta, 4-5). The research questions are as follows;

1-To what extent does the portrayal of landscape and cityscape in Lebanese picture books present a unique Lebanese national sense of place?

The number of times landscape and cityscape are depicted in the picture books. The representation of the Mediterranean, the cedar trees, village landscape and architecture, city streets, and landmarks as spaces that children associate with and relate to the idea of a collective national belonging.

2-What are the textual and pictorial elements in Lebanese picture books that reflect a sense of Lebanese national identity?

What defines this landscape? What phenomena have risen from it? What has shaped it? What values have been stressed as essential to the spirit of this landscape – or necessary for survival in this landscape? Cultural markers will be considered, such as art, folklore, cuisine, loyalty and attachment to customs, principles, music, historic figures and national heroes and references to historic events.

These markers are abridged into nine categories: landscape, cityscape or architecture, history, Civil War, historic figures, folklore, cuisine, and the arts. So that analyses could be better performed in both a deliberative as well as a statistical manner.

Table 1. Summary of reviewed picture books and study variables (present √ or absent - in these books) to evaluate

			Variables:							
			<i>Landscape</i>	<i>Cityscape Architecture</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>Civil War</i>	<i>Historic figures</i>	<i>Folklore</i>	<i>Cuisine</i>	<i>The arts</i>
List of books:										
<i>Year of publication</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Language</i>								
1987	Illustrated History of The Lebanon	English	√	√	√	√	√	-	-	-
1988	Nada a Beyrouth	French	√	√	√	-	-	√	√	-
2004	Cleo The Hotel Cat	English	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	√
2004	Excavating Beirut	English/French	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	√
2004	Purple and Silk	English/French	√	√	√	-	-	√	-	√
2005	Lebanon 1-2-3	English Arabic French	√	√	-	-	-	-	√	-
2005	The Cedar of Lebanon	English/French	√	-	√	-	√	√	-	-
2006	Olive, Soap, Hammam	English/French	√	-	√	-	-	√	√	-
2006	Cleo Visits Downtown Beirut	English	√	√	√	√	√	-	√	√
2006	Lebanon A to Z: A Middle Eastern Mozaic	English Arabic French	√	√	-	-	√	√	-	√
2007	A Young Person's Guide to Ancient Lebanon	English	-	-	√	-	-	-	-	-
2007	Shou Lawn al Bahr	Lebanese spoken Arabic	-	√	-	-	-	-	√	-
2007	The City of Gebal, Byblos, Jbeil	English/French	√	√	√	-	√	√	-	√
2007	Sea Turtles and Endangered Species	English/French	√	-	√	-	-	√	-	-
2008	Houses of Lebanon	English/French	√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-
2009	Discovering Jeita	English/French	√	-	√	-	-	-	-	-

2009	The days of Mouneh	English/French	√	-	-	-	-	√	√	-
2010	Tyre and its History	English/French	√	√	√	-	√	√	-	-
2010	Glass and Glassmaking	English/French	√	-	√	-	-	√	-	√
2011	Discovering Tripoli	English/French	√	√	√	-	-	√	√	√
2011	The Little Cedar Tree	English	√	-	√	√	-	-	-	-
2011	Zmrrrod Fi Beirut	MSA	-	-	√	-	-	√	√	-
2012	Birds of Lebanon	English/French	√	√	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	Limaza ouhibou watani	MSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2013	Le Tresor des Cedres	French	√	√	√	-	-	-	√	-
2014	Manouchet zaatar	MSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-
2014	Fi Madinati Harb	MSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	Zakirat al Madina	MSA	-	√	-	-	-	-	√	-
2015	Beirut	MSA	-	√	-	-	-	-	-	-
2015	Mughamer min Biladi	MSA	-	-	-	√	-	-	-	-
2015	Bayt Jaddi wa Jaddati	MSA	√	√	-	-	-	-	√	-
Date not available	Kissat al Koussa	MSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	-
Date not available	Madrasati watani	MSA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

In order to analyze the differences in the study variables with regard to language used Modern Standard Arabic MSA vs. English or French, the data was summarized in a 2 X 2 contingency table. Although data for both variables are categorical, the sample size is quite small hence the chi-square is not the appropriate method of analysis. A test that can be used instead of the chi-square, is the *Fisher exact test* and where the following assumptions are made:

- 1) The data consists of A sample observations from group 1 and B sample observations from group 2.
- 2) The samples are both random and independent.
- 3) Each observation may be considered as one of two mutually exclusive categories.

Such that:

Sample table. A 2 X 2 contingency table for the Fisher exact test

Sample	With Characteristic	Without Characteristic	Total
1	a	A – a	A
2	b	B – b	B
Total	a+b	A+B-a-b	A+B

The null hypothesis states that the proportion with the characteristic of interest in group 1 is less than or equal to the proportion in group 2; $p_1 \leq p_2$ and hence the alternative hypothesis states that the proportion with the characteristic of interest is greater in group 1 than in group 2; $p_1 > p_2$.

For this thesis, we rejected the null hypothesis at the 0.025 level of significance.

The above analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the search for titles, my main question to librarians and bookstore employees was to provide me with children's picture books about Lebanon, books that address culture, history, environment, and the arts, regardless of language. The purpose of this study is to find out whether the picture books are instrumental in conveying a sense of place and national identity to children. The generation of children reading these books did not live the horrors of the Civil War, hence their perceptions of space, as well as the societal enmities that had contributed to the fragmentation of the country, are not associated with wartime delineations – which were all but normal for the reality that the authors' generation lived. The necessity to have a corpus of literature that presents an account of the war objectively and forges belongingness and a sense of responsibility to contribute to the internal peace of the nation cannot be understated: literature's battle is essentially to refute the narratives loaded with animosities that children are verbally exposed to through parts of the older generations that still live with the war and with no interest in promoting peace.

The small number of books collected throughout my search was disappointing. As I was not selective in confining my sample according to year of publication or genre, my main concern was to find picture books that are about Lebanon. One of the books in the sample, *Houses of Lebanon* by Youmna Jazzar Medlej and Joumana Medlej is part of a thirteen book series, and all are an excellent illustration of Lebanese culture, history, and the environment. On closer examination, I found that other books that were

recommended did not necessarily address a specific Lebanese issue. Each research question will be answered through the sample of literature under scrutiny.

Research question one:

To what extent does the portrayal of landscape and cityscape in picture books written for Lebanese children present a unique sense of place?

Certain stories in the sample make a strong statement in the depiction of cityscape and landscape, others however portray a generic image of a city.

Nada a Beyrouth was published during the Civil War years, and is an overview of the city landmarks untarnished by war. *Lebanon 1-2-3* is a primer; the text is in English, French, and Arabic. The book has a sequel called *Lebanon A-Z A Middle Eastern Mosaic*, is about the diversity of Lebanese society, tradition, arts, and facts about Lebanon. Both are illustrated colorfully and correspond to the text. *Cleo Visits Downtown Beirut* is a tour of Beirut and the history attached to each space. Written from the perspective of a cat, the story also depicts the lifestyle, and socialization of the Lebanese that the reader identifies with. The illustrations are happy and inspire optimism. It is also the sequel to *Cleo The Hotel Cat*, children reading the text and contemplating the illustrations will realize that the cat is at the Al Bustan Festival. *Shou Lawn Al Bahr – What is the Color of The Sea* written in the Lebanese dialect is a story that addresses the societal diversity of Beirut, and environmental issues. The illustrations convey the heavy density of the city representing the overpopulation and the socio-economic and political situation, which is driving the population to migrate to major cities, and this societal division is exacerbated in the city. *Beirut* is a metaphorical story about the people of the city who are made of metal, and rusted. But the balloon

flies over the city and sprinkles soap and laughter. The illustrations are an attempt to deconstruct the landscape of Beirut. *Zakirat Al Madina – The Memory of The City* is the return of the author to the Beirut of her childhood, nostalgically reflecting on the sounds, scents, tastes, and the people of her neighborhood, corresponding the illustrations to the text. *Le Tresor Des Cedres – The Treasure of The Cedars*, and *Beit Jaddi Wa Jaddati – My Grandfather’s and Grandmother’s House*, both paint idyllic images of the Lebanese pastoral. The thirteen book series that includes *Excavating Beirut, Purple and Silk, The Cedar of Lebanon, Olive, Soap, Hammam, The City of Gebal, Byblos, Jbeil, Sea Turtles and endangered species, Houses of Lebanon, Discovering Jeita, The Days of Mouneh, Tyre and its History, Glass and Glass Making, Discovering Tripoli, and Birds of Lebanon* are an outstanding sample of synthesis of text and image in purveying a heritage and a sense of responsibility toward preserving the natural environment. Both *The Little Cedar Tree* and the series are self-published. At first glance *A Young Person’s Guide to Ancient Lebanon* might seem as a guidebook to the Lebanese National Museum with photography of the museum artifacts, but it is a strong statement in fostering emotions of national belonging. Barton and Levstik state the importance of museums in cultivating unity “The exhibition of historical information is inseparable from interpretation, and museums and historic sites reflect a host of social, cultural, economic, and ideological underpinnings” (121). *Madrasati Watani – My School is My Homeland, Limaza Ouhibou Watani – Why Do I Love My Country, Fi Madinati Harb – There is a War in My City*, all three books depict generic and bland images of the city that the Lebanese child reader would not relate to. In *Limaza Ouhibou Watani* the flag in the illustrations is white, and similarly the passport. *Fi Madinati Harb* ends with a positive message about the value of education, but does

not mention Lebanon, and the illustrations do not incite a Lebanese child to identify with. Although *Mughamer Min Biladi – An Adventurer From My Country*, is about the Lebanese explorer Maxime Chaaia and the text is inspiring, the Lebanese flag is portrayed, but the rest of the illustrations are uninspiring and do not necessarily correspond to the text, or inspire a sense of Lebanese space. Although *Madrasati Watani My School My Homeland* depicts the Lebanese Flag and the Lebanese National Anthem is written at the end, the illustrations are not true to the Lebanese context and are not coherent with the text. *Kissat al Kousa The Story of The Zucchini*, and *Manouchet Zaatar* are stories taking place in Lebanese everyday life that mention the zucchini dish and the thyme bread that are staples in Lebanese homes, but the stories do not necessarily inspire feeling of national identity. *Zmrrod Fi Beirut* is part of a series. In each book, Zmrrod the protagonist visits an Arab country and narrates about an aspect from its past.

Research question two:

What are the textual and pictorial elements in Lebanese picture books that reflect a sense of Lebanese national identity?

In discussions of the textual and pictorial it is essential to return to the definition of picture books as the seamless incorporation of the text with illustrations, offsetting and reinforcing each other. It is also necessary to clarify the frame of the question. How to define Lebanese? What historic events, cultural and social roots define the individual and the society? How have the picture books in the sample pool addressed these issues? According to the descriptions above, the overwhelming majority of children's picture books that convey a sense of Lebanese national identity are written in English or French, as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Cross tabulation of Language (dependent variable) MSA vs. foreign language, by study variables (independent variables) and *P* values using Fisher’s Exact Test:

<i>Language</i>	MSA	Foreign	<i>P</i> for exact significance (1-sided)
<i>Study variables</i>			
“Open” to Lebanese culture	2	22	0.000
Landscape	1	20	0.000
City Architecture	3	14	0.054
History	1	18	0.000
Civil war	1	4	0.450
Historic figures	0	7	0.040
Folklore	1	12	0.013
Cuisine	6	8	0.266
The Arts	0	7	0.040

Table 2 is a 2 x 2 contingency table, is a summary as well as an insight clearly indicating the big difference between books in Modern Standard Arabic and those published in a foreign language. The difference between four markers in particular is highly significant, ($p < 0.025$) indicative of Lebanese culture, landscape, history, and folklore. These markers are very clearly emphasized in the books published in foreign language. This poses further research as to why these markers are standing out. The reasons could be due to the author’s preference in language, or the author’s independence from publishers, or to cater for the Lebanese Diaspora. Moreover, the books are mostly the personal endeavor of the authors and are self-published. This raises questions pertaining to the linguistic choices, language socialization of the children and sentiments regarding national identity, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. In the absence of institutional support, and in order to survive, publishing houses are seeking profits in the Arab World market; this is leading to a corpus of children’s literature that is bland and does not necessarily have character or is reflective of a specific culture of a country in the Arab World.

Jonathan Culler explores the functions of literature. He asks whether literature pacifies readers into accepting and obeying the social hierarchy of a community or whether literature reveals the flaws of ideologies, driving readers to question governing powers. Culler concludes that “literature is the vehicle of ideology and [...] an instrument for its undoing.” Explaining that both of the “diametrically opposed functions” are credible. The author further expands on how “literature has historically been seen as dangerous” since “it promotes the questioning of authority and social arrangements.” He substantiates this view writing “Historically, works of literature are credited with producing change Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a bestseller in its day, helped create a revulsion against slavery that made possible the American Civil War” (39-40). The post-war Lebanese context necessitates the emergence of a literary movement that “exorcises the nightmares” of the Civil Strife and promote belongingness to the nation, commonalities between the members of the society, and peace.

Children’s literature appears as a privileged expression, representing both an instrument and a vehicle that conveys identity. Children’s literature has evolved in a cycle of affecting the children reading it, at the same time being affected by the societies that produce it. Similar to Brian Massumi’s affect theory (Massumi, 27-30), children’s literature has always been at the threshold to change and be changed. This dynamic and continuous process is augmented with every event that the genre encounters affecting the imagination, collective memory, and norms of the readers as well as the societies that produce it. This process might not necessarily add up to a final shape of a children’s literature in Lebanon, but it does reflect the nature of the societies in which it flourished or declined; in other words, it points more to the symptoms of Lebanese society rather

than the evolution of a purpose-driven evolution of children's literature. Benjamin describes old collections of children's books passed down through generations as having "spirit", tangled with the earliest passions lived by their young readers (Bullock & Jennings 406). That "spirit" in the Lebanese case is often the authors' own exorcism of a childhood marred by warfare; it indicates the authors' attempt to disentangle how to exist in a divided country by representing life in the different stages of its history.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In her anthropological study about the post-war generation in Lebanon, Lucia Volk observes how national identity discourses are “outdated in anthropology” (25), but nevertheless, expresses the importance of defining national identity in post-war Lebanon. “A discussion of national identity and its relation to other identities was very much part of the rebuilding process in Lebanon. Where different communities are making efforts to regroup and to heal the wounded social body” (26-27). Delving into national identity discourses in the Lebanese context however, leads to numerous research questions and yet more debates and thinly shrouded tensions, such as the language issue. Writing in English or French instead of Modern Standard Arabic, or the Lebanese Dialect, is problematic when it comes to national identity.

This study reviewed thirty-three children’s picture books in an attempt to find out whether they convey a sense of Lebanese national identity. Since children’s books are an essential tool in communicating sentiments and the eventual shaping of the self of children. The children’s books reviewed for this study revealed that authors are more comfortable at expressing national yearnings and conveying cultural markers through English or French. Arabic books however, express a muted and indistinct national outlook.

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, “language precedes thought” (Schaefer & Lamm, 75). Since children attach meaning to their surroundings with language, the language they utilize to make sense of their world shapes their mind set and worldview. Similarly, linguist Elinor Ochs explains that “language socialization” is the intricate process of acquiring and using language to understand, assimilate, and be part of a certain society. “How

and why young children are apprenticed through language into particular childhood identities and activities and how older children and adults learn the communicative skills necessary for occupational and other community identities” (99-120). The significance in discussing the language used in the books and the languages children use to socialize is the fundamental relation of language and national identity formation. Shelby Wolf emphasizes the importance of language both in the expression of the author and in the child readers who construct meaning as individuals in discussions about the text with their peers. She further quotes Michael Cole who writes that language is the “tool of tools” (94). In a similar vein, Maria Nikolajeva explains how historians of literature categorized national children’s literature according to the nation that wrote and published the book. The author expands the measures used to include “ethnic, linguistic, and cultural criteria.” Nikolajeva writes: “Through language, tradition and cultural values, writers identify with a certain culture. Readers recognize texts as their “own” through language, national mentality, “credible” descriptions and so on.” She further elucidates that these criteria have become harder to measure and define due to the constantly changing boundaries under the influence of many factors. Nikolajeva also ponders the linguistic boundaries rather than geographical borders (20-21).

The use of languages other than Arabic and its implications on national identities, lay bare yet another problematic: a consensus about the past and about a unified history, and the importance of tracing commonalities, historic and cultural, in forging the Lebanese identity. This topic continues to be highly controversial in Lebanon. The sharp differences that existed in Lebanese society prior to the Civil War are now deeper and more complex.

In *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, Samir Khalaf asks:

“1-What dislocations and disparities, both vertically and horizontally, were exacerbated by the changes Lebanon was undergoing during its golden/gilded epoch? What social strata, communities, regions stood to benefit or suffer the most from these inequalities?”

2-What were the issues and grievances that aroused public discontent and mobilized groups in movements of collective protest? What specific forms did such mobilization assume within the various communities? How and why do they differ? Was the protest consistent with the socioeconomic grievances or was it politically and ideologically mobilized by concerns unrelated to indigenous sources of unrest, perceptions of neglect, and relative deprivation? Finally, when and why did grievances and social unrest take more belligerent manifestations? When and why, in other words, did civil violence begin to degenerate into uncivility?" (209).

Khalaf asks these questions as an attempt to understand the link between different social groups and how these divisions were being combined with prominent socioeconomic and political changes and thus emerging through protests and violence. The question is "how can a collective effort forge commonalities to establish a unified identity?" And how can Children's literature be utilized as an essential component in creating and converging the different Lebanese factions to forge unity, belongingness, and a sense of responsibility toward the members of the society and the nation.

There was a time, Khalaf argues, when "Lebanese identity began to assume a "folklorized" character particularly in popular music, folk dance, musicals, and dramatic performances that reenacted village squabbles, heroic affrays, and brawls or else commemorated national and seasonal events." This movement was headed by the Rahbani-Fairuz duo. Khalaf further explains: "This "folklorization" of popular entertainment evolved into a transcending and homogenizing national pastime. It cut across ideological and communal divisions and served to coalesce the Lebanese." Perhaps the postwar Lebanese society needs a revival of this "folkloric" culture to heal. Children's books could be geared towards this "transcending and homogenizing folklore" to contribute to the healing process and forge a sense of belonging to the nation (206). In the final chapter of his book, Khalaf warns of "the garish symptoms of commodification of heritage into kitsch and the

vulgarization of traditional folklore and indigenous artifacts.” He later questions how much of the past must be retained or preserved considering that the memory of the violence associated with the specific place or artifact will continuously revive the recollection of the atrocities committed (306).

In *The Culture of Sectarianism*, Makdisi finds that Lebanon’s sectarian identities remain unchanged and that Lebanon has unceasingly been, since the 1860s, a “metaphor for a failed nationalism in the non-Western world” (3).

According to Makdisi, the 1975 Lebanese Civil War was a rude awakening that interrupted and shattered the optimism and confidence of nationalist historians. After the outbreak of the war, scholars such as Kamal Salibi revised the history of Lebanon in his *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, in which he criticized myths pertaining to nationalism and sectarianism, inviting the Lebanese and Arabs to reexamine their misconceptions pertaining to nationalism and sectarianism. Unfortunately, revisionist studies such as Salibi’s and other writings and discourses of nationalist scholars are not taught in schools and are not integrated into the history textbooks. It is therefore not surprising that the authors of Lebanese children’s books have not ventured into this landscape.

Makdisi says: “I have sought to explain a contemporary problem that can neither be banished to some distant past nor be seen as a mere consequence of colonialism, imperialism, or capitalism.” He cautions that sectarianism has become embedded and far more complex than before, pondering how the state could overcome it with yet “another vision of modernity” (173-174). Along the same lines, In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson concludes that the former colonial countries, including the Arab world and Lebanon, can be read as “nations as projects the achievement of which is still in progress” (114). The process of forging national sentiments and belongingness is a *Longue Durée* as we have seen in the

literature review. Children's literature is a major component in achieving this element in shaping the *Longue Durée*.

This "nation as project" as Anderson dubbed is further expanded in *Memory and Conflict in Lebanon: Remembering and Forgetting the Past*, where Craig Larkin articulates the identity crisis of "Lebanism and Arabism" following independence. Larkin explains that the early power of Maronites helped in shaping a Christian Lebanon whose history intermingled with that of Mount Lebanon. This so called "Lebanism" focused on legitimizing the state as politically, historically, and culturally autonomous, dating back to Phoenician times and therefore independent from Arab and Islamic influences. Alternatively, "Arabism", whose founders were also Christian, aimed to unite both Christians and Muslims to shape a Greater Syria and unite the Arab world. Larkin explains the concept of "Arabism" was a reaction against the artificial state of Lebanon founded by the West (47, 62-63). The question is, "How do the Lebanese see themselves now? Will there be efforts to forge unifying characteristics? Or will we remain a "nation as a project?"

This indecisive and ambiguous perception about the origins and identity of the culture is reflected in children's literature, both in content and the linguistic choices of the authors. The results show that the majority of the stories that pertain to a theme about Lebanese history, cultural markers, and national identity are the personal undertaking of the authors, which shows that they have noticed this gap and are trying to fill it. The linguistic choices however lead to numerous questions, such as education in private institutions established by foreign missionaries, socioeconomic status, or religion. It is evident that the authors of the picture books in this study have "sorted out their past" in the language they are most comfortable in. Since the books are self published and initiated by the authors, they are not bound to the restraints of the publishers. Mainstream publishing houses that are mostly profit driven however produce Arabic picture books that do not necessarily reflect the initial

intentions of the authors. Consequently, the books that are intended to cater to a larger Arab audience are not particular to any specific Arab country. Hence children reading the books do not see reflections of their experience in the stories, nor do they empathize with the narrative. This leads to either an altogether abandonment of reading Arabic picture books, or a deeper disorientation from an idea of a homeland. The lack of linguistic unity, and vague images of a nation further feed into the fragmentation of the society. Indicative of Massumi's affect theory, children's literature about Lebanese identity is affected by the societal fragmentation and economic restraints, and in turn affects the children reading such literature.

Writing about the 1967 downfall of the Nakba in *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon*, Samir Khalaf quotes Adonis who saw the shameful defeat as an indication of the "sterility of a senile and collapsing sand culture" (207). In the wake of the "Arab Spring", and the concurrent political and economic conflicts in Lebanon and the larger Arab World, is indicative of similar sentiments of disenfranchisement. This thesis and its findings on the reality of children's books in Lebanon also uncovered the failure to forge a unique – or unified – national identity in children's picture books.

In the absence of a sincere collective effort to inspire unity, Lebanon will remain a mere colonial "work-in-progress," or in the process of collapse. In order to create a cultural movement that produces children's books that promotes coexistence and peace within Lebanon, a sincere desire to transcend religious and sectarian divisions to endorse a unified Lebanese narrative that transcends a fragmented past. Although embracing commodified pan-cultural and pan-regional generalities becomes a safe commercial outlet, the pursuit of profit through publications for children is ultimately meaningless in nurturing future generations with a sense of belongingness to a land and building national awareness. A collective effort should be undertaken in earnest; authors themselves should harbor the wisdom to portray history and uphold humane values in order to produce books that genuinely encourage future

generations to embrace national identity and the values necessary to build a nation based on coexistence, tolerance, liberal values, that prevail past wounds and contribute to a gradual healing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CREATIVE WORK NOTE

The following chapter covers the creative work of two stories that I wrote in an attempt to address the gap that I mention in previous chapters. Issues pertaining to national consciousness and identity, that I felt were missing in children's books for Lebanese children. The stories were written in English, because I am most comfortable expressing my sentiments in English. And to appeal to Lebanese children who use English as a primary language.

The Little Cedar Tree is published as an illustrated children's picture book. The protagonist is a cedar tree that witnesses major historical events in Lebanon and the deterioration of the natural environment. The illustrations represent the Lebanese landscape as well as the historical landmarks that shaped Lebanon. *The Boy Who Loved a Garden* is a story that I wrote for this thesis and is not illustrated nor yet published. It is a metaphor about a citizen contributing to his/her country, and nature. The more they contribute, the more beautiful and giving it becomes. The illustrations will again convey the Lebanese landscape and architecture.

I was inspired to write *The Little Cedar Tree* to satisfy a yearning that I had as a child, when at the height of the Civil War we had to travel. A similar book would have comforted my nostalgia. Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* inspired *The Boy Who Loved a Garden*. My parents, who instilled in us a profound love and dedication to Lebanon, also inspired it, reflecting their life of giving.

Lebanese children are entitled to see themselves and their environment in the books they read. It is equally necessary to develop a corpus of children's literature that reinforces

cultural markers that will contribute to societal unity, it is also essential that there be a collective effort to produce these volumes.

The Boy who loved a Garden

Salpi Boulghourjian Simitian

There once was a garden, and a little boy who loved it.

Everyday the boy went to play in the garden.

“If you clear the weeds, the wild flowers will bloom better and I will be more fragrant.” Said the garden.

So the boy cleared the weeds, he loved to run through the yellow dandelions and pink cyclamens.

“The vines on the trunks of my trees are too thick and tight.” Said the garden.

The boy cleared the wild vines and planted grapevines instead.

Everyday the boy went to the garden, climbed the trees, and made swings on its branches.

He built a tree house to share the garden with his friends.

“If you plant fruit trees” said the garden “then, when you and your friends are tired of playing, you can eat the fruits.”

So the boy planted fruit trees.

The garden was happy and she loved the boy.

Every year he planted new trees.

“If you plant more flowers,” said the garden “then the bees will come and make honey.”

So the boy planted acacia trees, lilies, lavender, and hyssop.

The boy loved the garden, and the garden was happy.

Time passed, the boy became a young man.

“I have to leave,” said the boy “I’m too big to climb trees and play in tree houses. I have to work to build a real house.”

The garden was sad.

Many years passed, New vines and weeds grew and there was no one to clear them.

Then one day, the boy returned. The garden was happy, so happy, the leaves on trees fluttered with joy, the flowers laughed and danced in the breeze, the chirping of the birds reached the heavens, and the butterflies colored the sky.

“Build your house next to me” said the garden “then your children, and your grandchildren, and your great, great grandchildren will be as happy as you were when you climbed the trees and ran among the flowers.”

So the boy cleared the weeds and wild vines, and built his house next to the garden.
The garden loved the boy, and the boy was happy.

Every spring, when the fruit trees bloomed the children’s laughter and the fragrance of the blooms filled the skies. The butterflies drank nectar and played hide and seek among the petals. The bees buzzed and were happy to see so many flowers to make more honey.

In the summer, the children and their friends climbed the tree house, made swings on the branches of the trees and ran among the flowers. When the sun shone too hot, the shade of the trees and the juicy fruits kept them cool.

Every fall when they harvested the fruit and honey, they kept just enough and gave the rest to their friends.

In the winter, when the rain poured and the wind sounded like dragons whistling through the branches, the garden rested and waited for the first sunshine to help the branches swell with buds.

Every year the boy planted more trees and taught his children how to care for the garden that he loved.

Many, many seasons passed.

“I’m old and tired now” said the boy.

“Well” said the garden “rest, rest in the shade of the trees.”

“Rest and with every breeze smell the flowers.”

And the boy rested.

And the garden was happy.

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