ARTICLES

The Palestinian "Other" in Israeli Children's Books

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This article examines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it is reflected in Israeli children's literature, utilizing critical, deconstructive, and postcolonial readings.

ISRAEL HAS BEEN in a state of conflict with Palestinians since the day of its establishment. This ongoing conflict has found its way into Israeli children's books, many of which engage with the conflict or with the theme of "the other" in various ways.[1] In this article, I seek to examine how the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is represented within three books.[2] For that purpose, I utilize deconstructionist analysis and postcolonial perspectives. Such analyses aim to expose the ideological practices that characterize the Israeli colonial systems, and that are designed to cover their tracks (Shenhav, 2004). More specifically, I will present the way in which the illustrated landscapes echo the narratives of Israel's political left with regard to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and Palestinians as the "other" within these narratives. The decision to explore the links between landscape images and narratives is based on Mitchell's (2002) approach, which views images as an ideological mechanism that joins in the formation of consciousness. As symbolic iconography of ideological values, landscape imagery reflects not only the attitude toward the other but also the way in which we see ourselves and our own position vis-à-vis the other. I argue that—within the books analyzed in this article—stereotypical landscape images represent a *national* landscape, and therefore play a significant role in forming the national imagination in the context of the conflict (Agam Dali, 2010; Mitchell, 2002). While I point to possible interpretations of the stories—which all feature explicitly allegorical characteristics—in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, my main argument is that neither the narratives nor the illustrated landscape configurations reflect the full complexity of the conflict and of the "other," de facto excluding Palestinian subjectivity and perspectives (Cohen, 1985; Nodelman, 2014; Rodin, 2015).

I examine the visual construction of reality in the illustrations as reflecting the formation of a national identity—Israeli or Palestinian—including behaviors,

[1] For a review of the Palestinian "other" in Israeli textbooks, see Teff Seker (2012).

[2] Notably, while there are Palestinian citizens of Israel, when using the term "Palestinians" in this article, I will mostly refer to Palestinians living in the occupied territories. This is because the books analyzed in this article, which discuss the "conflict" in mostly national terms, focus on and refer mainly to that group. However, when discussing patterns of racialization and othering of Palestinians, my analysis may well refer to Palestinian citizens of Israel as well, as they are subjected to similarly racializing and racist narratives.

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thought processes, and discursive cultures. My analysis addresses both the practices of discourse (i.e., how we think and talk about a given subject, based on our knowledge of it) and power relations as they are manifested in the linguistic, stylistic, and terminological conventions of the stories, on both the verbal and visual levels. Moreover, I consider images and narratives jointly, as structures that meld meanings into a complete story, compatible with Israel's social and cultural reality. In general, I seek to answer the following questions: How do the books examined create a social hierarchy involving Jews and Palestinians? How is the Israeli–Palestinian conflict represented? How are Palestinians represented?

Focusing exclusively on books authored by prominent cultural figures associated with the Israeli left wing, this article turns its critical gaze to the way in which the othering of Palestinians exists even within societal and literary spaces politically committed to conflict resolution and peace. Indeed, although all of the books seek to communicate positive messages pertaining to the resolution of conflicts or problems, they all nevertheless produce problematic messages with regard to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. They do so via allegorical writing for children, which by its nature facilitates the abstraction and generalization of stories and narratives. As a result, while the explicit level of these books celebrates tolerance and peace, their oft-hidden messages on the implicit level tend to subvert and undermine the explicit text. As the following discussion will show, the extraction of Palestinians and their nullification from the conflictual space is prominent in all of the books discussed.

Theoretical Background

The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is one that rests on power and hierarchy, manifested via multiple sites, both material and symbolic. One site of such a power dynamic is spatial. Importantly, space, as a concept, can be defined, mapped, and analyzed. It has geographical boundaries that produce territory (Sack, 1986), which in turn creates national and individual identities, which shape and are shaped by institutional power (Hobsbaum & Ranger, 1992). As scholars have shown, space is not neutral but conceptual (Said, 1978). Landscapes and places are not only geographical sites, and landscape representations are not a neutral product. They may constitute an ideological apparatus that integrates symbolic images in order to form national identities.

A symbolic-interpretative analysis of landscape images will enable, therefore, the exploration of the social practices that underlie their cultural meaning. The interpretation of landscape imagery is inherently influenced by cultural insights and associations, as well as the stereotypical fixations of collective consciousness. This reciprocal relationship between culture and landscape points to the way in which we perceive ourselves and the other. The landscape's construction facilitates the symbolization of power relations and can function as an instrument for reproducing power in the cultural space (Agam-Dali, 2010; Schwartz, 1995). Simply put, landscape is not a natural occurrence. It is always a reflection of power structures and of ideology. Therefore, looking at landscape can reveal a lot about the ideologies that helped shape it.

This is certainly the case in the Israeli–Palestinian context, where there is no equality or symmetry between both national groups struggling over land, and their spatial relationship is inherently based on power and control. Since the establishment of the State of Israel (if not before), the design of the national-Zionist space has been based on the negation of Palestinian nationality, under a narrative of "preservation." National-Zionist space was built on top of Palestinian space, ignoring its existence, under the Zionist myth of "cultivating the wilderness." This is reflected in various legislation aimed at "cultivating" and protecting nature, and the establishment of institutions and organizations designated with similar goals. Israeli historians including Kadman and Pappe have claimed that the practices that shaped the Israeli landscape—including planting forests and declaring nature reserves and gardens on Palestinian village lands—were made as part of the process of the physical erasure of Palestinian villages, the erasure of Palestinian collective memory, and the symbolic erasure from maps and signage (El-Asmar, 1986; Kadman, 2015; Pappe, 2006; Sharif, 2016).

Notably, the relationship between the narrative of Palestine as deserted ("a land without a people") and the Zionist control over it is characterized by the circular structure of material and symbolic power relations: Racial and racist institutional actions create a material reality that is then reaffirmed through symbolic and discursive manifestations of this same racial discourse. The material hierarchy provides justification for the symbolic one, and the existence of racist discursive narratives in turn justifies the racist institutional actions ("they *deserve* less").[3] This dynamic echoes the rich literature examining the hidden relations of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

This approach sees imperialism as an apparatus that extends to representational and discursive practices, thus functioning on both tangible and symbolic levels (Said, 1978). The construction of landscape, Mitchell

[3] Azizah Khazzoom (2008) referred to this cyclical dynamic as the symbiotic relationship between representational dichotomization and resource dichotomization (pp. 50–53).

(2000) argued, is a consequence of imperialism, as cultural markers often intermingle with actual landscape. For example, the decision to plant cypresses, olive trees, or a vineyard and to build a mosque, synagogue, or memorial site is culturally and ideologically motivated. Such decisions transform the landscape into a social "cryptograph" bearing semiotic characteristics that generate historical narratives. The linkage between landscape images and narratives is the point of departure for my discussion.

In the realm of symbolic representation of landscape (for instance in children's literature), one possible depiction of landscape will focus not on places with specific identities and context, but on "non-places," defined by the absence of a historical, territorial, or cultural connection. These non-places where stories can sometimes take place are universal spaces that are not characterized by a defined cultural identity. These are sites that express the no-man's-land of in-between geographical sites, where the concept of border is negated. Non-places are usually allegorical signs of something else. Ostensibly, two out of three of the books I examine are situated in this kind of universal abstract reality that characterizes fables. Accordingly, they are constructed as an allegory with both social and personal morals. As I will demonstrate, certain allusions in the stories' narratives and landscapes enable their positioning within the Israeli space, as well as within the Zionist-pioneering ethos.

The removal of contextual references to Israel and Palestine in stories that exist in non-places is intended to camouflage the actual landscape of dispute, soaked in Palestinian history and evidence of Palestinian daily life (El-Asmar, 1986). By rearranging the landscape of dispute to transcend geography and history and erase Palestinian influences on the landscape, these books encrypt a statement that seeks to base Israel's right to the disputed territory and question the Palestinian right to that land (Mitchell, 2000). In that sense, these books add a second layer of rearrangement of landscape; they create the non-space as man-made, ideological landscape, while alluding to another level of man-made landscape manifested in the "natural" geography of Israel-Palestine.

In his writing on verbal and visual representations, Mitchell (1986, 1994) undermined the binary of image/text and viewed children's books as constituting a "third text"—the combination of illustration and text standing as a cohesive text in its own right. The landscape and reference to it in the stories and illustrations can be considered as a "third text." It is not just an illustration, but a system of cultural codes, images, and stereotypical representations producing the national landscape and national imagination. Importantly, landscape images as a visual representation are more accessible for children, as they are easier to understand and remember than the verbal representation (Doonan, 1992; Nodelman, 1999, 2005).

The use of children's books in the educational process, whether it is formal and guided by the teachers or whether informal and done independently, is common in the process of development and socialization of children of preread-ing age. The implicit messages in children's books are seared into the children's emotional consciousness and form their identity and worldview. Therefore, educators' understanding of the implications of children's literature for the processes that shape a child's identity is of great importance (El-Asmar, 1986; Nganga, 2020; Yenika-Agbaw, 2014). In addition, educators also require a deep understanding of how the education system in its entirety is a social ideological structure, located within the discourse and created through it (Foucault, 1972; Mazawi, 1999). Critical thinking and analysis make it possible to expose and understand societal dynamics of power. In this article, I also discuss the implications of power relations and discourse patterns in relation to national identity and to the "other" in the national sense.

Methodology

This article focuses on three children's books that engage the theme of Israeli–Palestinian conflict (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

From Left to Right, the Covers of *Grandpa Aaron and His Rain*, *Itamar Meets a Rabbit*, and *Uzu and Muzu From the Village of Kakaruzu*

The authors of the books discussed below are prominent cultural figures in Israeli society. They enjoy a canonical status and openly and actively self-identify with Israel's left wing. The public discourse within Israeli society around the question of coexistence with the Palestin-ians has been controversial for several decades. Different approaches express different worldviews in relation to the character of the state and the appropriate solution to the conflict. For many years, it has been widely agreed that only the political left will lead the State of Israel to resolve the conflict, but unfortunately this has not been the case for several decades. In this article, I strive to turn a critical gaze at the ideology of the political left as it is reflected in

these children's books. The decision to focus on Palestinian representation within the works of left-wing authors is meant to highlight the prevalence of the othering of Palestinian subjects, even within books that explicitly promote equality and coexistence.

The books I have chosen are as well recognized as their authors and illustrators. I refer to them as canonical in nature given their popularity, which makes their circulation, and therefore also their influence, widespread. The decision to focus on self-identified left-wing authors is somewhat of a complex task. Many writers and illustrators do not reveal their political position at all. I therefore chose these books for their ability to illustrate this argument's main claim regarding the construction of the Palestinian "other" within the canon of Israeli literature, and more specifically, within the left-wing canon of children's literature. The books themselves were written two decades apart—from the 1980s to the 2000s. This wide time frame allows for a long-term observation of the issue in question.

This article's methodology is based on the visual culture critique (visual culture) that examines visual images and combines textual and visual interpretive critique (Heise, 2004; Rogoff, 1998). This method borrows its principles and insights from theories in modern literary criticism; visual critical theories including semiotics (Rose, 2016), iconographic, and iconology;[4] and narrative-based approaches for visual culture (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). All of these approaches include a formal and structural semiotic analysis of visual representations and values, aimed at revealing the meaning of visual messages.

My analysis performs an intertextual discussion to identify the power relations expressed in the story and its illustration. An intertextual reading locates a detailed interpretive account of segments from a text in order to analyze the language, choice of words, contradictions as well as points of refraction, and repression and silence of the text to reveal the ideology at the core of both the text and illustrations (Derrida, 1992). For instance, I examine how, in the visual language, colonialism is expressed as a phenomenon of ethnic and class civilization, and how those defined as "others"—in the case of this article, mainly Palestinians—are depicted.

My methodological approach to the text is further enriched by two other scholarly methodological traditions: postcolonialism and multiculturalism. Postcolonialism as a theoretical discipline focuses on the power relations between the East and West. Postcolonial reading is part of a social, historical, political, and cultural discourse that seeks to examine the representations of the "other" in literature as well as the modes of production of its images. Postcolonial reading is part of the larger discourse of Western colonialism and its implications for marginalized and colonized groups. Postcolonial readings allow voices that were considered foreign and marginal to be heard and have their perspectives recognized and considered. Accordingly, this theoretical framework contains an infrastructure for critique that ranges from Said's (1978) dichotomous approach to Bhabha's (2003) hybrid approach.

The trend in postcolonial reading that I adopt in this article is subordinate studies, which seek to examine narrative in a way that is not subjugated to Western elitism (Danino-Yona, 2018; Shohat, 1989). Accordingly, these studies epistemologically examine and critique the relationship between literature and history via the centering of nonhegemonic perspectives (Sharif, 2016). I echo Spivak's (1985) critique of the representation of marginalized, third-world voices within Western discourses and examine it in this article in the context of Palestinian representation within Israeli discourse and by Israeli authors. A contemporary postcolonial position seeks to examine literature from the point of view not only of the present but also of the past and how it affects the present (Shenhav, 2004).

Postcolonial reading of children's books lays the groundwork for multiculturalism as a political and social commitment. Multiculturalism is based on the recognition, legitimacy, and equal rights for different cultures to exist in a common political space, and on the positive conceptualization of diversity and cultural multiplicity (Inglis, 1996; Wieviorka, 1998; Yonah, 2005). It is also an elusive concept, which changes according to culture and geography (Triandafyllidou et al., 2012, p. 241).

A multicultural reading will emphasize various themes in its approach to text, including the question of authenticity (Krishna, 2012): Who writes the story? What is their point of view, and how is the other presented? (Zaria & Lowery, 2011). In the context of conflicts, building on multicultural scholarly traditions, I further assess the following themes: the question of tolerance, the representation of the "other," symbolic representation of the future and of the idea of a better world, and the diversity of voices heard in utopian visions. For that purpose, I draw inspiration from Jameson's (2005) "utopian impulse" as the basis for a critical position, and from Yonah's (2005) emphasis on the need to give expression to all groups in society in the process of forming a common collective identity and shared aspirations.

Before I begin, I wish to make one preliminary note regarding the structure of the following analysis. Rather

[4] Iconographic analysis utilizes symbols and images to examine the subject of the work and the story it tells. Iconological analysis gives interpretation to the meaning of the visual image in relation to other images that resonate with it. For more on this, see Panofsky (1955/1970).

than analyzing the books around a central theme, I chose a different conceptual framework to discuss each book on its own. This choice was made for two reasons: First, it is intended to make it easier for readers to follow the plots of books less familiar to an international audience, and not to deprive readers of the enjoyment that children's books at their core are meant to invoke. A comprehensive discussion that presents each book as a whole simulates the phenomenological experience of reading the book and can thus better illustrate the way the captivating nature of the plot assists in obscuring implicit messages. The second reason is my desire to give a central place to the stories themselves, which do not always respond to categorical dictation or themes, but rather present more complex plots.

An Illustrated Political Landscape in Three Children's Books

UZU AND MUZU FROM THE VILLAGE OF KAKARUZU

Uzu and Muzu From the Village of Kakaruzu (Sidon, 1987) tells the story of two brothers who share a loving and harmonious relationship, until one day when a dispute breaks out between them regarding which leg should be on top when one crosses their legs, left or right. The argument evolves from a verbal altercation to physical violence and ends with both brothers building a stone wall in the middle of the house and out through the yard, a wall that separates them for generations. As the years go by, the brothers and their families live on opposite sides of the wall. With time, a myth of hatred and fear develops in both families toward those who live on the other side. One day, a boy from one side of the wall meets a girl from the other. The two warn each other about the alleged monster that is supposed to live on the other side. The realization that no such monster exists eventually leads to the destruction of the wall and to a happy marriage between the boy and the girl.

This is an allegorical story about the conflict. It alludes both to the internal conflicts between the Israeli right and left and to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The story's main narrative, which is an attempt to trace the origins and development of the conflict, may lead to the understanding that the conflict is rooted in different worldviews between the right and left, and between Israelis and Palestinians, in both political and social terms. At the height of the conflict, it is only a wall of separation that enables the distancing of the "other" and the possibility of a peaceful existence for several generations to come. From the Israeli viewpoint, the wall enables the extrication of the Palestinians from the visual space and the collective consciousness. After several generations, the wall facilitates the blurring of memory and the reasons behind the hatred, and after its destruction, its absence allows the characters to sustain a human space devoid of boundaries, religion, and race, a space in which mixed marriages are not an anomaly. Although the book was written before the Israeli separation wall was built, today this wall's existence charges the story with new and relevant meanings.

The book begins by presenting the concept of the two-state solution as the immediate answer to the conflict, and it ends with one "binational state" or a "civic nation" as the resolution for the conflict. Notably, while the end of the story celebrates the concept of a one-state solution, the plot nevertheless stresses that the possibility for that political arrangement can only come *after* a two-state solution was formed, and some generations have passed. The problematic premise underlying the two-state solution, as it is presented in the story, is that the separation wall fosters equal opportunities for residents on both sides of it. This premise does not consider the actual lived reality in which, in many aspects, equality does not exist between Israelis and Palestinians in sovereign, legal, social, and economic terms. Through the negation of any form of asymmetry between both sides, the wall is presented as a mere act of separation, obscuring aspects of control or hierarchy rooted in its formation, as well as in the Israeli–Palestinian dynamic.

As mentioned, the story opens with a description of the lives of the two brothers, Uzu and Muzu, and the harmony between them. The space in which they grow up is idyllic and rural: "beyond the mountain…near the river, a white house between trees and flowers." This is a calm preconflictual space that foregrounds the pointlessness of the conflict and suggests that had it not erupted, tranquility and peace would reign forever (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Uzu and Muzu From the Village of Kakaruzu

In the preconflict era, the depiction of the brothers' growth and development presents, in an ideal fashion, a Jewish-Israeli coming-of-age tale, from one of the boys' bar mitzvah to another's army service. The heated argument between the brothers, which is ignited by an inconsequential question—in terms of principles or ideologies—escalates from verbal to harsh physical violence. The sharp shift from harmony to fraternal war around such an insignificant question highlights the fragility of coexistence and lays the groundwork for the justification of their

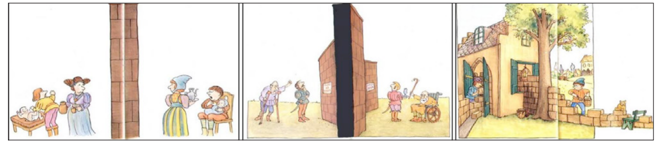
ensuing separation by the wall. The developing narrative regarding the essence of the other, on the far side of the wall, facilitates the dehumanization and portrayal of the other as a dangerous animal: "an animal in human form," "the man who lives behind the wall is a terrible two-legged animal." In the ensuing generations, the fear of the other intensifies and is granted historical legitimacy that is handed down from father to son. Generations of tranquility on both sides of the wall, during which neither side posed an actual threat to the other, nor controlled the other, also lay the groundwork for justifying life on the two sides of the wall. This tranquility enables a long-lasting national existence and the nurturing of historical memory.

As suddenly as it began, the prolonged hatred comes to an end, neither for principled nor ideological reasons, or from doubting history's veracity, but by way of a curious small boy who wanted to see the monster on the other side of the wall and who meets, in the course of climbing it, a young girl. Upon hearing what occurred on the other side of the wall, reactions on both sides are suspicious, panicked, and hysterical. The separation wall allows for detachment, the minimization of friction, and limited opportunities for contact. Via its erection—an act of landscape reorganization—the end of the conflict becomes feasible.

However, if this story is taken as a parable for Israeli society, the wall does not represent the Israeli–Palestinian reality and narrative. The actual wall was built by Israelis in spite of Palestinian opposition. It is symbolic of the Israeli desire, or perhaps need, to remove the Palestinians beyond the range of visibility, an expression of the belief that in order to live alongside the Palestinians, we—the Israelis—need to remove them from our sight. Notably, even before the actual wall was built (in the period when the story was authored), Israel's desire to erect it stemmed from such assumptions. The wall portrayed in the story is imagined as born out of mutual desire, negating the elements of power and control that characterize the conflict itself and various Israeli actions to "manage it."

This imagined landscape celebrated in the book, a landscape from which Palestinians are absent (El-Asmar, 1986), conceals the reality that there are in fact Palestinian settlements beyond the wall (settlements that were already built on Palestinian lands when the book was written). The separation allows us to maintain a racist policy without experiencing its repercussions. It further enables us to be indifferent and to ignore what is happening beyond the wall. The wall in the story (Figure 3) is presented as symmetrically dividing the space and creating an illusion of symmetry between its sides, even though no such symmetry ever existed in the Israeli–Palestinian reality (Handel, 2006; Mitchell, 2000, 2002).

FIGURE 3
Uzu and Muzu From the Village of Kakaruzu



The story does not position its heroes in an Israeli space, but rather in an imagined village in medieval Europe, and thus ostensibly constructs a space that has no connection to the local conflict.

The illustration includes a photo album that describes the family history and presents the generations that have passed since the wall was erected. In the album there are illustrated "photographs" that represent different nations and eras in human history: prehistoric man, the Egyptian Cleopatra, a French officer, a couple from ancient times, and a contemporary couple, and amidst all these, a genuine photo of children that could be found in any family album. This subversive choice generates a sense that the story about the two brothers is everyone's here-and-now story.

It is here that subversive allusions to Israeli and Palestinian motifs become evident: A mosque is seen beyond the wall in the distance; in Uzu's yard a T-shirt with the IDF Radio Station's logo hangs on a laundry line; and a BBQ grill appears, a tribute to the common picnic celebration of Israel's Independence Day (Agam Dali, 2010; Avieli, 2017).

In many illustrated scenes, animals are employed to symbolize the hatred between both sides: a dog, cat, and mouse. Interestingly, they disappear from the illustrations from the moment the wall falls until the end of the story, indicating the end of the animosity. A chameleon, an animal that is known to change color to blend in with its surroundings, appears in two illustrations, functioning as a symbolic glimpse of future change.

The illustrations further convey a lack of trust between both sides, for instance in an image of a knot in a water hose, or a square bicycle wheel, suggesting that water will not flow from this hose nor will the bicycle be able to move, and that, in fact, the Israeli side does not believe that "this deal can work." Another indication of the power relations between both sides is expressed in the portrayal of Uzu's parents as they climb the wall holding objects to defend themselves with: a metal faucet pipe and a rolling pin. Muzu's parents, on the other hand, climb the wall with nothing in their hands. The self-defense objects symbolize force, and it is not surprising that they belong to the "Israeli" side in the story. The harmony characterizing the end of the conflict is normalized only when the side representing the Palestinians is depicted as lacking any possibility to hold weapons (not unlike the Oslo agreements). This illustration

thus normalizes this asymmetry.

The illustrations' perspective on the balance of power is also expressed in the nature of the common living space inhabited by both sides after Uzu and Muzu marry—it is a typical *Israeli* environment from which all Palestinian elements are now absent. In the families' meeting, a classic Israeli family is seen in a typical Israeli living room. It is obvious from the illustration that the only possibility for a binational life is one in which the Palestinian features are obscured—a visualization of an aspiration for a space in which everyone resembles the Israeli stereotype.

The choice of a village and rural landscape as the space in which the plot unfolds symbolizes closeness to nature and harmony with the environment, an integration between nature and culture, nostalgia, simplicity, and intimacy, as opposed to the alienation associated with the city. The rural agricultural environment is associated with the term "nation." In the story, which is focused on a struggle for territory and land, it is only fitting that a village and rural-agricultural-national space would be chosen as the background for the narrative. Despite efforts to depict equality between the residents on both sides of the wall, the landscape space in the story is one with mainly Israeli features. It thus represents and produces a cultural and ideological construction that negates both symmetry and equality.

ITAMAR MEETS A RABBIT

Itamar Meets a Rabbit (Grossman, 1988) tells the story of Itamar, a boy who loves animals and is afraid only of rabbits. This great fear prevents him from actually meeting a rabbit, and therefore he can only imagine them as large and scary animals. One day, when walking with his parents in the forest, Itamar accidently meets a small and adorable creature—a rabbit—who is afraid of children. The rabbit, like Itamar, imagines children as big, intimidating, and frightening animals (see Figure 4). Both Itamar and the rabbit are unaware of each other's true identity. When they finally realize who the other is, Itamar and the rabbit are initially frightened; however, soon enough they both calm down and become friends. From then on, Itamar is no longer afraid of rabbits.

The main theme in the story is the emotional and irrational fear of the other and the possibility of discussion, reconciliation, and friendship based on mutual understanding and recognition. Both sides possess similar characteristics that may enable dialogue. However, these similarities do not exist in the reality presented in the story, but rather only in the characters' consciousness. The implied narrative is that, in reality, we *are* different; we are human beings, but the other is not. The fact that the story is told from Itamar's point of view—the point of view of an Israeli human child with a name—facilitates the reader's identification with him. The other in the story is a nameless animal, albeit likeable and harmless (Ron, 1995). This dehumanization characterizes our attitude toward the enemy (Cohen, 1985). If the story attempts to create symmetry between the sides, it fails.

Given that the story is allegorical to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the rabbit thus symbolizes the Palestinians and represents our ambivalent attitude toward them. The rabbit's traits—territorialism and living and reproducing underground—echo the racist public discourse regarding Palestinians. The boy's name, Itamar, echoes the name of the first Hebrew-speaking child,[5] a symbol of the new Israeli.

Itamar's parents are presented as a "third side" in the relationship. They are the ones bringing him to the forest, thus facilitating his meeting with the rabbit. Following that facilitation, they remain close and yet keep a distance, allowing the meeting to develop on its own terms. The parents could represent the United States as a patron superpower that respects our need for independence, and whose role is to enable the encounter between the two sides and to ensure Israel/Itamar's security in the confrontation with the Palestinians/rabbit. The parents are situated at a reasonable distance and allow for the unmediated and undisturbed acquaintance and discussion (Ron, 1995). The question arises, therefore, as to whether the manner in which the parents are portrayed represents a desired model for the role of the "third party" in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The story seems to provide a positive answer, given that the goal is achieved in the encounter.

The landscape illustrations complement the narrative through various techniques. The presentation of Itamar as a single figure on a whole page generates a sense of loneliness that echoes the perceived loneliness of the State of Israel, which is surrounded by and isolated among Arab states. This representation dramatically intensifies Itamar's situation and his need for companionship. The story underscores the narrative of the reverse reflection; Itamar's fear of rabbits is identical to the rabbit's fear of children. The reverse reflection is presented in the illustration in a way that instills it with symbolic meaning; the reversal between right and left is depicted in terms of different color schemes. Itamar imagines the rabbit in dark, melancholy colors, whereas the rabbit imagines a boy colored in optimistic pink. Here too, not unlike in *Uzu and Muzu*, the mirrorlike presentation of both sides' depiction of the "other" creates a false sense of symmetry (a symmetry of fears and of positions), obscuring the power relationship that characterizes the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

[5] The son of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, reviver of the Hebrew language.

FIGURE 4
Itamar Meets a Rabbit

It is also worthwhile to consider Grossman's choice of a rabbit, and to consider an alternative situation had he selected an animal larger than Itamar. Here, like with the decision to have only the "Israeli" side hold weapons coming to meet the "Palestinians" in *Uzu and Muzu*, harmony is only achieved by depicting the other as inherently and completely without any ability to put us at risk, while leaving the focal side with the ability to protect itself. In both books, our ability to imagine reconciliation rests on a depiction of the enemy as completely and utterly harmless, devoid of any ability to hurt us—even if it wanted to.

Throughout the story, the more Itamar and the rabbit's fears fade, the proportion of their bodies in relation to the space in the illustrations increases; however, while their sizes change, the rabbit's animalistic figure is unchanged. Itamar is the one who abates the rabbit's fear of children, without knowing that the lovable creature standing before him is a rabbit. What Itamar knows about children and the fact that they are the cause for the rabbit's fear puts him in a superior position that assists him in overcoming his own fear. Through the other's experience of fearing him, he is able to let go of his own fear of the other. Although the book's title is *Itamar Meets a Rabbit*, the rabbit is absent from the pages that establish the narrative framework; the story's protagonist is Itamar, and the story is therefore told from his point of view. Except for its mention in the title, it seems as if the rabbit was cast only to help Itamar overcome his fears, to be an object of Itamar's humanity. Accordingly, the ostensibly equal and symmetrical orientation in the thematic and visual development is not fully comprehensible.

As an analogy to the conflict, the story presents the narrative of the political left, according to which the root cause of Israeli/Palestinian fear of one another is ignorance. This is the same narrative at the core of *Uzu and Muzu*: If we would only meet with the other side and learn to recognize our sameness, recognize that there is a symmetry between us, perhaps we would succeed in becoming friends and overcoming our fears. Examining this premise in *Itamar Meets a Rabbit*, Ron (1995) asks, are we certain, like Itamar, that the Arabs have no reason to fear us? Could it be that the things that calm us in the encounter with the rabbit—his pleasantness and his fear of us, or his physical smallness—are actually indicative of weakness? In an analogy to Israeli reality, one can argue that only the "romantic left" in the peace camp will claim that the other side does not constitute any threat and that there is no cause for fear. The illustration depicts an enlargement and empowerment of the characters in the space parallel to the process of their advancement toward discussion and reconciliation, a process that demonstrates the characters' internal growth and development. This is a message that corresponds with the narrative that the peace process will empower us as a society. However, as previously noted, there is no demonstration of change in the rabbit's character, which may hint at a lack of faith in the other side's ability to grow.

The contradiction between the suspenseful and frightening plot and the format's design and illustration pattern imparts a sense of stability and calm and enables the reader to witness the frightening encounter in the forest in an atmosphere of relative safety. The illustration style presents simplistic scenes, in which there are few characters and details. The dominant color in the illustration is green, which is used to visualize the idea of growth and renewal that instills a sense of hope for the results of the process.

In the thematic and visual landscape, there are three motifs: Itamar, the rabbit, and the forest. In different illustrations, certain images are enlarged and in turn, empowered by way of shifts in perspective. Two figures that are enlarged in relation to Itamar and the space are, for instance, the dragon and dinosaur, in a manner that represents Itamar's fear of these mythical animals, while other enlarged images represent Itamar's and the rabbit's conscious image of the other. In most illustrations, Itamar's image is enlarged, and its integration in the landscape visually and symbolically depicts his dominance over the space and a sense of his significance in the reader's eyes.

The space in which the plot occurs is a forest, a common visual image in legends, fairy tales, and children's stories that symbolizes a mental state, the losing of one's way, or unexpected encounters (Bettleheim, 1976). The forest in this story is a space where Itamar experiences his journey of maturation and loss of childhood fears and adumbrates the journey on which Israeli society needs to embark to free itself from its fear of the Palestinians (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5
Itamar Meets a Rabbit

The forest is embedded in the Zionist consciousness as a symbol of the blooming of the desert, to a large extent thanks to the Jewish National Fund's Zionist project discussed earlier.[6] However, simultaneously, this forest exists in a non-place, with no clear geographical references to anywhere in particular. The forest hints of a European landscape emulated in the Land of Israel by the "pioneers,"[7] as a plot of nature in contrast to the urban landscape. The fact that many forests were planted in the country, despite its arid climate, underscores the forest's role as an instrument to enforce imperialist power over the cultural and political space. The landscape's ideological weight, in this case, a forest, is appropriated for a specific character and event, thereby instilling them with a specific context and meaning. The characterization of the forest landscape in which the plot takes place is universal: It lacks, on the one hand, geographical features that situate it in either the Israeli or the Palestinian space and cultural markers found in the collective Israeli visual conscious, such as cypresses, hills, tilled fields, and a farmer. On the other hand, it also lacks Palestinian characteristics, such as olive trees, flocks of sheep, and shepherds. The forest is characterized as a neutral (European) space devoid of realistic details, but that is designed instead to communicate a particular atmosphere. Thus, it not only serves as a background for the narrative events but also enables these events by nullifying any national or cultural reference. The neutral space corresponds with the various neutral sites in the world in which peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians were conducted under the sponsorship of the United States, for instance, the presidential retreat at Camp David, which is nestled in the heart of a forest.

However, by positioning the story in this non-place, one primary narrative achievement is the complete symmetry design between the starting point of both sides, and between their claims. In contrast to the asymmetry of the human–animal relationship that is aimed to legitimize colonial representation of Palestinians, as discussed above, situating both sides outside of historic Palestine allows for the erasure of the context upon which the conflict started, and for the negation of the need for Israeli accountability.

[6] The Jewish National Fund (JNF) was founded in 1901, 47 years before the establishment of the State of Israel. Its aim was to purchase and designate land in Palestine for Jewish settlement. Following the establishment of the state, the JNF focused its activity on foresting, developing the water economy, and environmental preservation.

[7] The first Jewish settlers in pre-state Israel were involved in building settlements, foresting, building roads, and agriculture.

GRANDPA AARON AND HIS RAIN

The third and final book I discuss is *Grandpa Aaron and His Rain* (Shalev, 2007), which tells the story of three grandpas who are farmers and good friends, all concerned about a drought. Grandpa Aaron suggests that they climb to the top of the mountain and release the clouds, which he claims are captured in a cave. Although Aaron's friends do not believe him, they join him on the journey to the top of the mountain. At the peak, they indeed discover a huge rock blocking the entrance to the cave. They move it and release the clouds that then pour rain over the land. Grandpa Aaron returns home happy, riding on a cloud (see Figure 6).

A reading of the book in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict draws an analogy between the drought and the conflict, supporting an approach that sees faith and creativity as necessary to resolve it. The conflict may lead society to detrimental results, similar to those that droughts have on agriculture. The problem is presented without referencing the other side, as if the conflict is our problem alone and we have to resolve it by ourselves, an approach that echoes the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. The story presents the two main reasons for postponing the resolution of the conflict in Israeli reality: the concern for security and the lack of faith. In terms of security, attempts to find a solution fail, and the realization that a solution is not feasible is instilled in the Israeli public. In the story, there are many references to the security issue by way of the vernacular "*leyeter bitakhon*" ("for more security"), meaning "to be on the safe side." The excess security that we advocate for delays our chances to resolve the conflict. This in turn raises the question: Are the actions we take in the name of security indeed justified? Simultaneously, the word "faith" in the present tense appears in the book multiple times. The other characters, Grandpa Aaron's friends, do not believe his stories, but they also do not believe what they see. Their lack of faith does not discourage Grandpa Aaron from solving the problem of the drought; he is represented as a model of determined leadership despite the lack of faith in his course of action. The multiple appearances of the word "faith" establish its status as a key, necessary factor in the resolution of the conflict.

The appearance of the word "faith" in the past and present tenses does not intensify the historical import of the present for the resolution of the conflict. According to this reading, the solution to the conflict will not be bestowed from heaven but will be achieved by leadership here on Earth. We can change what seems predestined; we can change nature, our landscape, even when everyone around us does not believe it can be done. The story presents the shift in our and the Palestinians' positions in the conflicted space, which can be viewed as representing the political

left. This shift occurred as a result of the demise of the left's political power parallel to the formation of the Palestinian narrative alongside the Zionist narrative, and the growing belief in Israeli society that there is "no partner." This approach differs essentially from those that preceded it in that it removes the Palestinians from the conflictual space and does not present them as a side in the conflict of which they are part. The "drought" is our problem, and the motivation to solve it stems from its danger to our society, regardless of the Palestinians.

Although grandchildren do not appear in this story, the grandfathers' symbolic role as wise and experienced elders is upheld. However, while Grandpa Aaron is attributed, like the others, with agricultural expertise, unlike them, he also displays agency and creativity. Although an expert on fruit trees, with trees that bear wonderful fruit, "he had a plum tree that did not bear even a single plum and became a wonderful closet." Creativity enables him to look at things from an unconventional, practical, and advantageous viewpoint. As the Hanukkah holiday[8] approaches and there is still no rain, he proposes to go up to the mountain and release the clouds he argues are trapped in the cave. When they arrive at the cave Grandpa Aaron asks them, "So friends…now do you believe me that there's a cave at the top of the mountain?" They both answer decisively, "No!" even when they can already hear the clouds rumbling inside the cave. "And do you believe…now that there are clouds inside it?" They answer "No" with the same decisiveness. The friends' passive attitude—"There's nothing you can do…when there's a drought you just need to wait patiently"—is contrasted with Grandpa Aaron's proactive approach. The story takes a distinct position favoring one's decision to act even when faced with a passive approach to resolving the conflict.

The question then arises as to why Grandpa Aaron's absurd theory, which has no grounding in reality, nevertheless yields tangible results. As the story's message goes, sometimes theories that seem absurd and illogical by any measure are discovered as the only possible solution, and therefore, they need to be given a chance. Grandpa Aaron's theory and the ensuing evidence of its truth establish his position as a leader and define the traits worthy of such a leader: creativity, faith, and determination.

Four motifs represent the problem in the story: the ascent to the mountaintop, the cave, the rock, and the drought. I will address each one separately.

[8] Hanukkah, the holiday of lights, is a Jewish holiday celebrated for eight days, during which candles are lit. It celebrates the victory of the Israelites-Hasmoneans over the Greeks. The holiday occurs in midwinter, when rain is expected.

FIGURE 6
Grandpa Aaron and His Rain

The peak of the mountain to which the grandfathers climb is not only a geographical site but also a symbolic image that corresponds with the biblical and literary sources to which the story alludes. The peak of the mountain in Jewish culture is a site to which one ascends on a journey of revelation.[9] The choice to situate the cave in which the clouds are confined on the peak of a mountain seeks to underscore the effort required of us to resolve the conflict and the possibility of broadening our scope of vision. Hiking in general, and mountain climbing in particular, is a cultural marker of the Israeli youth movements and the epitome of the "sabra" ethos (Almog, 2000).[10] In addition, hiking, and being outdoors generally, is a symbolic manifestation of the occupation of the homeland by walking its entire length and breadth (Gurevitch, 2007). Both share the physical element that connects one to the land, the canteen, sweat, navigation, and climbing the mountain that reverberates with the ideal of "die or conquer the hill."[11] The illustration of the story effectively demonstrates these

[9] The most prominent biblical stories involving such ascent are the stories of Moses, who goes up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments; Abraham, who ascends Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac; and Moses and Aaron, who ascend the mountain at God's command, whereupon Aaron's life ends and Moses passes the priesthood and leadership over to his son Elazar.

[10] The term "sabra" refers to Israeli Jews who were born in Israel—the epitome of the "new Jew." The myth of the Israeli *Tzabar*, which echoes the cactus plant (in Hebrew: *sabres*), is meant to depict the new Jews in Israel like the cactus: thorny and hard on the outside, but sweet and soft on the inside.

[11] This expression, representing the position of the political right in Israel, is part of the anthem of the right-wing movement, Beitar, and was written by its leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky in 1932. In June 1938, Beitar activist Shlomo Ben Yosef was executed and sang this anthem while he was being led to the gallows. A month after Ben Yosef's hanging, Jabotinsky recalled at the Beitar public assembly in Vienna that he had carved these words on the wall of his cell.

motifs. Grandpa Aaron, with his closed umbrella raised like a tour guide indicating the direction in which he is headed, ascends the mountain to bring the rain, while the other two grandfathers follow. It is no coincidence that the "conquer the hill" motif was integrated into the story to communicate the opposite of its original meaning, which refers to one's willingness to die for the founding of the homeland.

The cave is an enclosed and dark space. In traditional tales, this is the place where treasures are hidden. The decision to confine the clouds in a cave is not the natural choice in thematic terms, and it triggers a hermeneutic motivation to understand its meaning. The cave hints at an enclosed and confined space in which clouds are contained—unruly and thunderous clouds that seek to be released from their prison. Given the allegorical nature of the story, the clouds may well be representing the Palestinian people trapped under Israeli occupation. As the story goes, we—Israelis—have the power to discover the treasure, to release the clouds, and to bestow blessings on our own lives. This reading is complemented by the choice in the illustration to characterize the boulder at the entrance to the cave as an Islamic religious icon—a large black rock.[12] Thus, while Jewish belief (that change is possible) is offered here as the solution to the conflict, Islamic belief is presented as the obstacle, or the cause for it. Removing the boulder is no simple task, and requires reinforcement summoned by Grandpa Aaron. While the grandfathers are waiting for that assistance, the text states that "in the meantime, they talked and sang songs and calmed the clouds and argued arguments." In the illustration, this text is cast in stereotypical Israeli imagery. The grandfathers light a campfire, a *kumzitz*,[13] and sing and play music around it. The campfire is emblematic of the Palmach[14] and was a central aspect of its way of life. Given the organization's limited physical power, the Palmach's soldiers were shrewd strategists.

This astuteness and creativity, which largely influenced the formation of Israeli culture and myths, is represented in the campfire night scene by two animals: the owl, a symbol of wisdom, and the snake, a symbol of lethal shrewdness. These animals characterize the Palmach narrative, which constitutes the conceptual and moral foundation for the grandfathers' story. Their age implies that they were active during the founding of the state, and it is clearly not incidental that they are farmers in the Jezreel Valley, a symbol of Israeli pioneering. The responsibility to lead us to a solution for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is on their shoulders, a moment before their lives end, as the last of the founding generation. The illustration further contributes to this reading by way of Israeli cultural symbols: Aaron's head resembles Israeli founder David Ben Gurion's silhouette, and after the clouds are released, he sits in an armchair holding a journal, an image that echoes Ben Gurion, who famously wrote multiple journals. Grandpa Nachum is wearing a blue work shirt that is reminiscent of the Zionist-Socialist youth movement uniforms, and army uniform pants tucked into army boots. He wears a typical Israel *tembel* hat[15] and eats falafel,[16] which was appropriated into Israeli culture as a national food. The choice of drought as an allegorical counterpart to the conflict allows for a reading that positions contemporary Israel in mortal danger if not addressed. In the Bible and rabbinic literature, rain is perceived as divine providence and as a tool in the aggravated relationship between God and man, not as a neutral, natural phenomenon.

Drought represents man's weakness, sins, and arrogance, while in this secular children's story, it represents an impasse that needs to be breached, a state of consciousness that needs to be altered. The provision of rain is not a divine prerogative; rather, it is in the power of human beings. This transference of the power to make rain from God to humans requires faith. Faith is part of the complex of religious principles that the story seeks to integrate into the world of secular values. Grandpa Aaron has faith; his friends do not. They do not have faith in the notion that a story has the power to create meaning and motivate people to take action that changes the world. Just as religious faith and the secular Zionist project were the basis for the establishment of the state, so too now they will combine in the second most important Zionist endeavor—resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Additionally, one can view Grandpa Aaron's choice to become a rainmaker as a criticism of the traditional Jewish concept of summoning rain through prayer. Beside the rain prayer, which is recited on the autumn holiday of Simchat Torah (literally: "the joy of the Torah"), during the holiday it is common to hold a public prayer service for rain. Thus, the mention in the story of these two holidays—Simchat Torah and Hanukkah—as the points in time at which

[12] The Kaaba, also known as the "black stone," is located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and is the holiest pilgrimage site for Muslims.

[13] The *kumzitz* is a social meeting around a campfire.

[14] The Palmach was the pre-state Jewish military force and the foundation for the Israel Defense Forces.

[15] "*Tembel* hat" is a term used for a hat that was once commonly worn in Israel and is symbolic of the typical Israeli.

[16] Falafel is an Arab dish of small balls made out of ground chickpeas, served inside pita bread with vegetables, hummus spread, and tahini sauce.

Aaron decides to act is contrary to what is customary in Judaism. He decides to take action toward solving the problem and is not satisfied with prayer alone. Indeed, after the clouds are released, "a heavy rain splattered on the ground." "It rained for three days. Rained and did not stop," a deluge that resounds with the hope that after the flood, peace will come upon the land.[17]

The story posits a new vision for Zionism, the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. When his mission is completed, Grandpa Aaron returns home riding a cloud, an image that in Jewish tradition is associated with God, and may be found in liturgical prayer.[18] In that sense, it may be argued that the story positions Aaron as God's earthly, corporeal counterpart. A prominent visual motif in the story is Grandpa Aaron's cane, which in vernacular Hebrew is called "grandfather's stick," with a handle resembling that of an umbrella. Before ascending the mountain, he replaces the cane with an umbrella for which he has no need. The fact that Aaron's umbrella is collapsed and that he does not get wet implies that the rain is employed metaphorically. When the clouds burst out of the cave and the rain begins to fall, the others escape in fear, and only Aaron stands upright at the entrance to the cave, looking up at the sky, his hands lifted upward, in a gesture that may be interpreted either as thanking God or mimicking him. He does this when the rain falls, not before, because this is the stage at which there is no longer any need for God's mercy. Thus, the illustration expresses a measure of criticism toward God. If this is linked to the image of Aaron riding a cloud, it is possible that the story is implying that human, secular individuals can also have divine powers.

In the discourse on Israeli identity in the face of the struggle for the land, beyond the conflict with the Palestinians, the struggle between us is over, and the reality and significance of our homeland, identity, and continuing existence as inhabitants of the land is reinforced. This is reflected in the illustrations in the prevalent iconic Israeli imagery, on the one hand, and the lack of Palestinian markers, on the other. The narrative setting of the rural settlement—red tile roofs, a water tower with a ladder above it, a tractor, plowed fields, and farmers in work clothes and army uniforms—is the model landscape in Aaron's story that reflects the importance with which Zionism regarded working the land.[19] Zionism's perception of the Land of Israel as a deserted wilderness bore political-ideological significance manifested in a fear of the oriental local inhabitants and in looking to the West for a desirable model. The valley and its open landscapes, which are the basis for the landscape imagery in the story, are perceived as the ideal scenery accompanying the emergence of the new Jew and the realization of the Zionist vision. Several illustrations present a bird's-eye view that exceeds the human, natural field of vision. This perspective symbolically represents control over geographical territory and the notion that man is "lord of the land." This is Aaron's viewpoint when he rides on the cloud and looks at the land from above. This reading, which ascribes Aaron with a divine viewpoint, corresponds with the parallels presented earlier that associate him with a secular divine mission.

[17] The flood is an event described in the book of Genesis, according to which a deluge of catastrophic proportions was a form of divine punishment and after which there was peace and calm.

[18] *Adon Selikhot* is one of liturgical poems sung by Jews during the month of *Selikhot* (petition for mercy) before Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year). The poem is based on descriptions from the book of Psalms.

Summary and Discussion

This article sought to present the way in which prevalent problematic narratives of the Israeli political left regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are expressed in children's books, and to explore the landscape imagery in these works as symbolic icons of ideological values. All three stories are allegories. While allegory requires a capacity for abstraction that young children may largely lack, it nevertheless enables the encoding of ideological and political messages. In all three stories, there is extensive use of literary and visual constructions that mitigate the political meanings in the allegory. For example, there is distancing and circumvention of symbolic meaning by way of time, location, and message: the visual characterization of Kakaruzu as a medieval European village, the forest in which Itamar meets the rabbit, and the placement of the clouds in a cave on the top of the mountain. Likewise, the message regarding the conflict is circumvented in thematic terms by means of rivalry between two brothers, fear of rabbits, and dealing with drought. In all three stories, humor and irony are employed alongside amusing rhyme schemes. The characters are presented as positive and proactive, thereby enabling identification and eliciting a sense of hope in the reader: Uzu and Muzu climb the wall, Itamar goes out to the forest and befriends the rabbit, and Grandpa Aaron is determined to climb the mountain and release the clouds. In all three stories, readers can witness the left's perception of itself as the hope for the region, and accordingly the problems rooted in this Jewish-centric narrative of conflict resolution.

[19] The biblical myth of Jacob's ladder demonstrates the immigration to the land and its settlement, as expressed by A. D. Gordon of the second Aliyah: "And here a ladder is set and its top reaches the sky. And what do we ask for, is it not a place for the ladder?" (Gurevitch, 2007, p. 43).

Both natural and human spaces in the stories are iconographic in that they represent pioneering socialist Zionism, and at the same time lack, almost entirely, Palestinian landscapes and images. In turn, this denotes a hierarchy that perpetuates the inequitable balance of power between the sides involved in the conflict. The implied and interpretive levels in all three stories present inequality between the sides and construct a social consciousness of the conflict that involves social scalability and the expulsion of the Palestinians.

The stories represent the process experienced by the Israeli left from the 1980s to the current moment regarding the conflict, which is manifested mainly in the narrative's underlying themes. These themes include indecision between the "two states for two nations" and "two nation state" solutions; the realization that in spite of fears and essential differences between Palestinians and Israelis, they must engage in dialogue; the undoubted existence of a "partner," regardless of how that partner is perceived; and the attitude—which is increasingly claiming its status as an ethno-Zionist approach—that represents both the left and the right, and at the same time, neither. This approach is based on the opinion that the "problem" is ours and that in the absence of a partner, we will take steps to solve it as we see fit. This unilateral solution is necessary for instituting the power and status of Israeli society as an "exemplary society" and for securing a better life within it. This approach nullifies the Palestinians as a relevant subject of the conflict, in literary depictions that range from presenting them as a nonthreatening and nonsuffering other, to an animal, to completely nonexistent and irrelevant.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Acknowledging the problematic narratives in the books discussed, teachers are faced with two options: first, broaden the scope of books they bring to the classroom to include those that bring forth alternative, authentic voices from marginalized communities such as the Palestinians (al-Musawi, 2017), and second, critically assess and examine—within the classroom—texts discussing the "other" that deserve critique and scrutiny. No doubt, finding books written by Palestinian authors and reading them together with students would provide a more diverse learning experience, and would enable the Palestinian voice to be heard directly, rather than filtered through Jewish-Israeli authors, left or right wing.

But along with exposing students to a wider range of books, teachers also need to help students apply skill sets that enable them to deconstruct—within the books they read—power relations that are steeped in history, nationality, religion, and race (Rasiah, 2020). For instance, in the case of *Uzu and Muzu From the Village of Kakaruzu*, teachers may draw attention to certain historical markers embedded in the text—like the decision to build a wall, or the literary decision to have the fight between the brothers revolve around the left or right leg—and indicate how these help decipher the political allegory at the core of the book. Likewise, in the case of *Grandpa Aaron and His Rain*, they may focus on the repetition of the expression "*leyeter bitakhon*" ("for more security") and explore with students how the position that favors security over change and a better future has helped to shape the current situation in the context of the conflict. Furthermore, in *Uzu and Muzu*, teachers could promote a discussion regarding alternative options opened to the brothers for conflict resolution, other than building a wall. Or, in *Itamar Meets a Rabbit*, they may ask how the story would change if, instead of a rabbit, Itamar had met another child in the forest. What characteristics might that child have? How can we imagine the "other," and what does our imagination of the "other" tell us about ourselves? Additionally, teachers may encourage children to ask how the clouds in *Grandpa Aaron and His Rain* end up in the cage. Why does Grandpa Aaron's idea, which at the beginning seemed to not make any sense, actually work at the end? What does this teach us about the possibility of dreaming the impossible?

Discussing these types of questions can expose children to plot absurdities as well as to places where the plot seems to make the most sense, and can encourage them to ask critical questions exposing mechanisms of power hidden in the verbal text and illustrations. Such questions may also highlight the fact that during conflict, there is always more than one path to resolution. ◘

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