

Voices of War in Children's Literature Against the Background of Conflict in the Gaza Strip

Baratz Lea

Achva Academic College, Israel

E-mail: lbaratz@netvision.net.il

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Abstract

This article aims to review children's books written about children living in the Israeli Gaza region under the shadow of a continuous security threats. Since 2001, five rounds of fighting have taken place. A content analysis methodology was adopted to examine the social and cultural processes of the adult narrators, their attitudes towards their Arab neighbours and the voice of the child who dreams about quiet days and peace. Two main motifs emerged: the first represents the 'sounds of war' and the second the motif of peace. The themes reveal a dimension of values, beliefs, symbols and myths, conceptualising the enemy in semantic submission to the concept of war and peace. These children's books allow young readers to examine complex realities through the experiences of literary characters and engage in cognitive and emotional processing without being directly exposed to the experiences.

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, children's book, peace, war, Gaza region

1. Introduction

Children's books play a role in imparting values and cultural, ideological and political behaviour patterns and are a tool for the establishment of 'culturally responsive pedagogy' (Ong, 2022). Twenty-one children's books have been written in Hebrew about the war that takes place in the Gaza region: some are didactic, some are therapeutic and some describe life experiences of violence. Some perhaps represent a glimmer of hope preventing the erasure of children's authentic voices within the politics of a war that silences them and contributes to the invisibility of children from minority backgrounds. Children's books must be actively involved in educating children about the process of pursuing peace (Adam, 2021). In light of the relationship between Israel and its neighbours, children's books are an appropriate, important and useful means of developing the concept of a culture of peace.

They may also be a medium through which the historical and contemporary ideologies of society are encouraged in young learners. This process may be viewed as a form of cultural hegemony when the choices of literature and reading materials for children are deliberately selected for content and themes (Ong, 2022). Children's literature is written by adults for children, so sometimes the writing attempts to adopt a seductive voice that hides political strategies containing anti-social and anti-humanist social baggage. The children, as silent voices (Nodelman, 2014), must adapt the terms of the worldview of the influential writer who tries to manipulate them.

1.1 The War in Gaza

Israel and the surrounding Arab countries have experienced decades of violent conflict, including political, social and physical upheavals (Nyhan & Zeitzoff, 2018). Since 2001, the residents of the 'Otef Gaza' have lived under a continuous security threat, during which time five rounds of fighting have taken place: Cast Lead in 2008–2009, Pillar of Defence in 2012, Protective Edge in 2014 and Guardian of the Walls in 2021, with the last being Operation Breaking Dawn in 2022. Israeli citizens are accustomed to living in the shadow of violent events while continuing their daily routines. This reality exposes them to a vortex of fear and faith, disconnection and routine, disappointment and hope (Cohen-Louck et al., 2017). The Israeli government is required to focus on goals related to the improvement of life in the Gaza Strip, even if the expected change is not visible in the foreseeable future. The citizens of Israel assume that freedom from violence is a natural right that the government must provide, and it is the duty of the Israeli government to keep its territory free from violence. In practice, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not seen as a war in the sense of a violent incident between armies or countries; rather, it is recognised as a long-standing struggle characterised by acts of terrorism that can be dealt with but not brought to an end. This situation has created a process of semantic-conceptual blurring among the Israeli public in the distinct contrast between the terms 'war' and 'peace' (Gabrieli Nouri, 2011).

The concepts of war and peace are seen in Hebrew as dichotomous concepts despite the affinity of 'referential looseness' between them (Sovran, 2006). A semantic-cognitive analysis reveals a contrast between the two concepts, and this is expressed as 'a state without war' or 'a state of the absence of conflict or war, mainly between countries, and of

establishing ties or diplomatic relations between them' (Zamir, 2017). Peace in Hebrew is not a concrete concept that regulates relations between countries or between people, but a utopian concept. The way the semantic field of the words is built allows one situation to be framed in different ways, thus creating a positive or negative connotation depending on the framing discussed in the text. The history of the State of Israel is divided according to its wars (Winograd Committee Report, 2006). Moreover, there is a need to brand the battles. The reference to the semantic issue stems from the need for politically interested considerations and is also due to public branding related to public relations. The semantics of war have become political leverage for a discussion that enters the field of public relations, related to issues such as the need to encourage support, silence criticism and increase 'cohesion', as if it were a question of advertising.

The conflict in the Gaza region affects all areas of Israeli life: politics, security, economy, social-emotional experiences, education and the child's awareness of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Since children's behaviour patterns, including their political behaviour, are internalised during childhood and early adolescence (Ichlov, 1984, 2001; Tadmor et al., 2017), children's literature and books become agents of socialisation, together with the family and the school (Hadar-Shoval & Alon-Tirosh, 2019). The study's books and the children's books are part of the organised knowledge of society. They instil in children's beliefs, norms, ideologies and moral concepts in relation to 'self' and 'other', and pass the social ethos from generation to generation. A study on the role of children's books in Finland (Malinen et al., 2022) found that books give many readers an opportunity to understand the war experiences of families, especially of children; the books identified ways of coping that would contribute to positive adaptation. Accordingly, books play an important role in shaping the political worldviews of children, especially in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2017).

A study conducted in Jordan by Al-Nusirat et al. (2021) on Israeli literature depicting Arabs emphasises a different narrative. The writers point out that the Jew sees the Arab as a barbaric type or a killer. Furthermore, in their writing, they emphasise that a culture of peace or any type of coexistence in a historical place like Palestine cannot exist as long as negative feelings deepen in the minds of the children of Israel. Since the brutality of war affects the innocence of children (Shankar et al., 2017), there is difficulty in presenting the war in an honest and critical way (An, 2021, 2022), and adults' avoidance of discussing 'Of war' the causes children to feel more helpless and afraid.

During the years of the State of Israel's existence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has found its expression in Israeli literature as well as in children's books, and the figure of the Arab has undergone many changes (Rodin, 2015). With the significant change in the construction of a worldview that represents children's criticism of the validity of values enshrined by hegemony, children's literature has become subversive and political, seeing the child as an entity capable of shaping an opinion, contrary to the opinion of the hegemonic establishment. This literature challenges the attitude that children's literature is 'police literature' and even imperialistic (Nodelman, 2014). Israeli children's and youth literature promotes messages of understanding and coexistence and undermines the perception that conflict is here to stay. This is literature that attempts to present a mental and behavioural antithesis, and it has

something to testify in relation to what is evident in Israeli society (Rodin, 2015) and in the environment (Keselman, 2019; Mohr, 2014).

1.2 'War Sounds': A Semantic Approach

The uses of the semantic field or the groups of related words in the 'war' content frameworks maintain meaningful relationships and illuminate the meeting between the poetics (children's books) and the ideology embedded in the main text. The use of language as a tool arises because language is not only a means of representing reality ('image') but a means of action ('tool'). Language is a tool with which we do things (describe, command, convince, ask, etc.); therefore, every expression in language has a purpose of doing. Understanding language involves understanding the actions we do with it (Wittgenstein, 1953). The projection of the research framework is important because the use of vocabulary depends on the existence of the social framework, which provides a specific perspective on the world.

The starting point for examining the semantic field of war originates from the concept of the semantic expression 'Red Colour'. 'Red Colour' is an announcement system that warns about short-range rockets being fired towards settlements surrounding Gaza. When the system detects a rocket launch towards a populated area, the call 'red colour' is sounded and shelter must be taken quickly (Marcus, 2009, no pa.) Stories have been written describing the reality of days between confrontations and military systems and between days of combat. On the face of it, the stories seek to be free of ideology, but the discourse reflects what is desirable and found in the hours of routine, that is, the regular order of activity of an organisation or person that builds a daily routine with clear boundaries, as opposed to an emergency routine, which is a state of uncertainty that causes stress and anxiety due to a situation in the shadow of war.

The starting point for examining the stories is the 'sounds of war', around which the plot of the stories is built. After all, war is the world of adults. Words and phrases in the language are interwoven or added to words that exist in the language, and a connection between different elements in the text is combined into an overall meaning (Fillmore, 1985). An analysis of a word or a concept is not isolated or dictated by the limits of its applicability in the world. It is done from the preoccupation with the semantic and syntactic relations between the word and other words close to it within the common content framework: between the words and the category they belong to, between the category and the background for its creation and between different categories. The words are given in organising knowledge frames that have been called by different names: 'framework', 'script', 'cognitive model' or 'base template' on which what is happening is highlighted, and in the past, even a 'semantic field'. These are cognitive structures that underlie the concepts denoted by words, and based on the human experience and its understanding, they can be reduced or expanded depending on the circumstances (Fillmore, 1985).

War has many detrimental effects on the mental health, wellbeing and social functioning of people (Kelmendi et al., 2022). Bat-Ami (1994) listed the reasons why children should be exposed to war literature. First, children are afraid of war, so they have misconceptions that produce anxiety. In addition, our society trains children to participate in war; children are

waiting for war-torn heroes to return home. In Bat-Ami's opinion, very little has been done to implement the verses of Isaiah and his sect and even less to equip children with the tools of peace. This is why it is important to encourage collective readiness to achieve peace, as the younger the generation is, the more it can absorb the beliefs regarding this process (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011).

In a previous study conducted, residents of the area were asked how they feel when they have to leave their homes due to the war (Zamir & Baratz, in print). Another study referred to the mental state of the children (Baratz, 2023)

2. Methodology

Study area: The purpose of this study is to examine how children's literature describes a space that allows for shared discussion, a space that produces a sense of activity that contrasts with the paralysing helplessness at the root of trauma resulting from war (Keselman, 2019), especially for children growing up in a conflict zone.

data collection: The research corpus includes 20 children's books written about the situation of war in the Otef Aza region.

2.1 Research Questions

- 1) How does the semantic field of war-related words reflect the worldview of the adult (author/narrator)?
- 2) How does the semantic field of peace-related words reflect the child's worldview?

The research methodology is based on a content analysis of texts. The analysis examines the social and cultural processes that are described and that influence the reader's point of view. The analytical approach is based on the premise of Alter (2001), who emphasises that 'every verbal communication is related to the selection of certain elements and structures from within the system of language, which are responsible for the perspective created in conveying the message' (p. 38). Through content analysis, the social and cultural processes that influence the writer's point of view and have an impact on the reader were examined. At the core of the reading process is the assumption that reading is an interaction between the reader and the text, which helps the reader in three ways: in the process of searching for meaning, in the process of constructing meaning and as a means of applying different types of knowledge. Researchers perform several procedures on a text to derive significant distinctions and generalisations from the text itself (Weber, 1990). In this process, patterns that recur in stories and constructed discourses are identified so that derived meanings can be understood through discourse but also through the story and meaning. Assumptions about human existence are derived, and from the meaning, we derive lessons, insights and desired behaviours through which we can learn about the social being, ideologies and possibilities for offering aesthetic and educational experiences to children (Stephens, 1992).

data analysis: The database is based on a search of the interpretive code, the signifying code, the symbolic code, the action code and the cultural code (Barthes, 1974). These help to build a semantic field focused on war and from which fields related to excitement, occurrence and

cognitive knowledge are derived. These fields are rooted in a cultural code that helps reveal details related to the socio-cultural knowledge through which the author or hidden author describes society and their attitudes in relation to it.

3. Findings

Two main motifs emerged from the analysis of the texts: the first represents the ‘sounds of war’ and the second the motif of peace. The themes reveal a dimension of values, beliefs, symbols and myths, conceptualising the enemy in semantic submission to the concept of war and peace. Later, it will be clarified how the theme representing the world of war highlights the voice of the adult, while the theme related to peace highlights the voice of the child. Examining the stories reveals a recurring plot pattern, as shown in the following figure.



Figure 1. The chain of events from the moment of the alarm

3.1 *Just a Conflict: War or Operation*

The first category, the sounds of war, includes words that have a vocal meaning, such as alarms and the colour red. The sounds are accompanied by words related to weapons of war, such as missiles, Qassam rockets, bombs and Iron Dome. Beyond the denotative meaning, the action of any weapon is accompanied by noise. Besides the noises, there are words that describe the physical place as a place of protection, such as shelter and protected space.

The theme of war in the stories begins with the word ‘alarm’ or a red colour alarm, whose function is to warn of a state of war. Usually, from the moment the alarm is heard, the plot describes the occurrence in the space of the home or in the space outside the home. The segments describe a sequence of actions inside the shelter to which the people run and outside the actions taken by the security forces.

This is a true alarm. The enemy is launching missiles into Israel to hit us ... At that moment the kibbutz public address system announced: red colour, red colour. Tamar’s legs were shaking a little, her hands were also shaking ... she quickly went to the security room in the house ... everyone entered the security room in a hurry, Mother quickly closed the steel door and Omari closed the heavy window. The children tried to catch their breath. They realised it was a real alarm and waited to hear the boom ... a Qassam rocket fell in one of the Western Negev areas, the settlements announced it on TV... Let’s hope it fell in an open area and didn’t hurt anyone (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 14)

The illustration in the book shows the Iron Dome intercepting an enemy missile (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 17).

We have in Israel a sophisticated defence system that knows how to identify the missile as soon as it is shot in the direction of Israel and it automatically activates the handcuffs and the announcement. In addition, the Iron Dome is activated to intercept the enemy's missiles (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021 p. 23).

The author describes the characteristics of a space that is supposed to protect those who stay in it, and in the process, she gives a didactic explanation designed to make it clear to readers who are not familiar with these spaces: 'Mom explained that the initials of the word *mmad* (shelter in Hebrew) are a residential protected space, meaning a protected place in an apartment, and every house should have a shelter' (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 17). Another example of an experience described in the voice of an adult seeking to represent authentic realities is found in *Tzuk and Eitan found a warm home (2015)*:

Bombs and rockets fell all over Israel, but the attack was overcome by 'Iron Fist' shelters, and protected areas were immediately opened, where parents and children sleep on mattresses. In the communities surrounding Otef Aza, the residents suffered greatly, a difficult experience for the residents of the cities but also throughout the country. In settlements far away from Gaza, the alarms went up and down, with the smoke of date palms in the sky. Red alerts were heard from all sides; people were alarmed and afraid, both at night and during the day. 'Hug me Mother', ask the children, taking care of Grandma and Grandpa, Father and Mother, Jews and Arabs—almost every resident (Zuki & Eitan found a warm home, Sternberg, 2015, no page number).

The multiple use of words related to the war creates an emotional and mental compression that indicates not only the experience of the war days but also the injustice done to the children following the war. The word count as a semantic matter reflects the nature of the company of speakers close to the conflict area.

To highlight the horror associated with the concept of red colour alarms, illustrations are used. For example, in the book *Graduate of the Red Garden* (Baron, 2014), the page is painted monochromatically in red to reflect the name of the alarm. The page depicts the children running in panic towards the shelter and a mother carrying a small child in her arms, bicycles thrown on the side of the path; all faces are frightened (p. 21). The image provides additional perspectives to identify with the narrative of the war.

'Ola' (Ofri, 2009) is an affectionate nickname for the alarm, an onomatopoeic name that comes from its sound. Ola is a book full of descriptions referring to the conflicting relationship between the Jews and the Arabs. The contrast is highlighted through an illustration of flags showing the Israeli city of Ashkelon and the city of Gaza in front of it. Ashraf flags are raised and there are missiles aimed at Israel. The missiles are painted in the colours of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) flags. Another illustration depicts an exploding missile and a PLO flag with 'The missiles that fly at the Jews will hit them' written on it. Since the book is written in Hebrew, its ideological position is expressed both in the

illustration and in the text and subtext. The position of the implied author is clear, but the story still evokes thoughts about the war process and its results.

3.2 Father as a Soldier: Father Goes to War

The father's enlistment in the war is part of the 'voices' of the war. The warrior father is the continuation of an Israeli ethos that has been reflected in Israeli literature throughout the years. The diverse terminology of the concept of war is expressed in one of the books: 'It is called an operation and it is a sign that there will be a short war ... both an operation and war are bad things' (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 24).

Examples

A difficult day of repeated alarms, IDF soldiers launched an operation to eliminate the terrorists who launched rockets at the settlements surrounding Gaza. Dad went to the army, wearing a uniform and high shoe. I will hug my father tightly and I will not be afraid at all. My father is strong and he is watching over us. (Zuki is Not Afraid of Alarms, Sternstein, 2015, p. 22)

Soldiers were recruited to defend the country. Matan also put on his shoes, put on his uniform and took a sleeping bag. He went to the Gaza Strip with his company members. He said he would stay and return soon. Matan's company went down to the Gaza Strip. (Tzuk and Eitan found a warm home, Sternberg, 2015, no page number)

By virtue of his role as a soldier, the father becomes a 'petty commander'. He analyses the situation of events, explains and reassures.

Father praised our soldiers and said that our army is the best and most humane in the world. I heard great pride in his voice and I relaxed a little. Father asked us to obey the security instructions and think positive thoughts on television. Red colour, Iron Dome, residents of the south, Sderot, surrounding Gaza, rubble, safety rules ... (Red alert, Cohen, 2016, p. 18)

Compared to the certain (gendered) role of the father, the child innocently formulates a philosophical question: 'Is Dad participating in the war?'

And only then did I realise that we were at war. Who's against whom? Why do you want to harm mothers and children? Isn't it just soldiers against soldiers? (Red alert, Cohen, 2016, p. 12)

The soldier also has a sublimated role designed to dispel the child's fears.

The child draws a monster that he is afraid of and sticks a soldier on it, whose job it is to exterminate the monster (Daniel's magic Nahman, & Ucenmh, 2009, p. 32).

In books that describe the war taking place in the Gaza Strip, the same role is reserved for the soldier that developed as a result of myths and ethos shaping the figure of the warrior throughout the existence of the State of Israel. Sometimes, the descriptions are idealistic, sometimes filled with pain, and in all of them, the cost of war is evident, which is the result of

dehumanising the enemy. As Yahav and Cohen, points out (p. 113) the militaristic messages, even if they are not acceptable to every reader, are important because the books are an 'institution' that educates and shapes the socialisation process of the child, whose opinion and behavioural norms have not yet been completely formed.

3.3 The Arab Beyond the Border: The Voice of the Adult Speaker

In the adult's voice, delegitimization is heard towards the 'other' side, that is, towards the 'Arab', because each of the parties in the conflict seeks to perceive the opposite side as the party responsible for the conflict.

Where does the rocket fall from? Father answered me: Across the border there are bad people who want to hurt us and they are shooting rockets at us (Daniel's magic Nahman, & Ucenmh, 2009, p. 8).

This is a true alarm. The enemy is launching missiles into Israel to hit us.... At that moment, the kibbutz public address system announced: red colour, red colour (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 14).

In Gaza, there are some Arabs who are angry at the Jews. They are so angry that they want to kill the Jews, so they built missiles that will attack the Jews and hit them (of course, without pillars), but the Jews are a wise people; they invented the Iron Fist. This Iron Fist is a sophisticated machine that intercepts the missiles that the Arabs fire and detonates them before they hit the Jews (Ola, Ofri, 2009, no page number).

The enemy is presented by the adult as hateful, evil and inhuman, with a goal to cause the killing of Jews; on the other hand, the children represent hope for the days that will come when there is peace and we will be able to live side by side with those who were once our enemies. The ongoing conflict creates no relief for the intensification of hostility. The stereotypes seep into the content of the stories written for children and are undoubtedly a means of increasing their fear. When the granddaughter innocently asks her grandmother if it is possible to achieve peace, and her answer is, 'It is a bit complex, you have to make a little effort and want it very, very much', a lot of scepticism is evident in her answer (Let's Cook Peace, Bibi, 2018 p. 18).

The opposite of the theme of war is the theme of peace. In this theme, the voice of the child stands out, presenting with childlike innocence their desire for peace. The diagram highlights the dichotomous division between the voice of the adult and the voice of the child who lives within the 'experience of war' but is still able to think thoughts of other days.

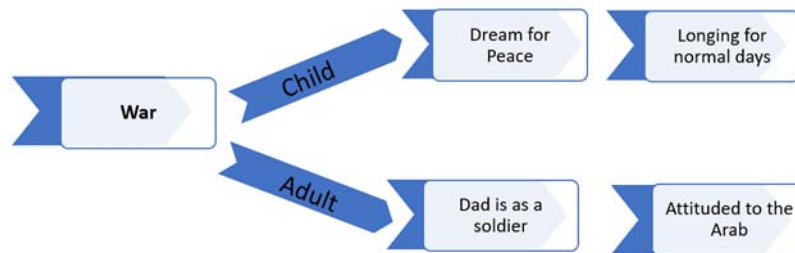


Figure 2. The voices of the war

3.4 Amidst the Sounds of War: The Child's Desire for a Normal Life

The desire of the child living in these areas of conflict is to have a normal life. The child, with senses that have not yet been corrupted, understands that peace can be the catalyst for such a situation.

I was born on the border. I hope for peace, but there is awareness that childhood has been shot. We don't want an emergency routine; we want just a fun childhood routine (Yotam HaKassem, Cohen, 2021, p. 7).

The child's dream is: 'One day, when I become a rich contractor, I will build the resilience centre, the most luxurious in the city, there will be ponds of fish ... with chocolates at the front desk ... and unlimited ice cream ... and there will be no psychologists waiting for you to speak first' (Yotam HaKassem, Cohen, 2021, p. 26).

It's sad to say, but we're used to it. You can't count the rounds anymore. We want to live a normal life, without fear of walking around the paths. To live a routine life without worry. To feel happiness and joy (Jardan Gafni Marko, in Dayan, 2020, p. 48).

Who's against whom? Why do you want to harm mothers and children? Isn't it just soldiers against soldiers? (Red Alert, Cohen, 2016, p. 12)

But with a child's understanding, he points out that the shelter is a safe place and the Iron Dome protects everyone. If we win the operation, no more rockets will fall on our kibbutz, but in the meantime, don't stay away from home (Cat and peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 25).

The child's vision is for a 'safe routine' that allows them to lead a normal life.

Like we'll go to the beach, go to the movies, have a pyjama party, eat huge buckets of popcorn and, of course, go on family vacations, not one that permeates the memory of the war days in the south. The family routine is disrupted when Dad goes to the army (Red Alert, Cohen, 2016, p. 12).

The peace was violated and peace became a dream (Tsuk and Eaitan, Sternberg, 2015, no page number).

In a childish voice full of anger, he complains to the government authorities, anger at the prime minister, who does not understand what the residents are dealing with, and he invites them to live here (in the Otef Aza) for at least a few months (Yotam HaKassem, Cohen, 2021, p. 32).

3.5 The Child's Longing for Peace

The peace was violated and peace became a dream (Tsuk and Eitan, Sternberg, 2015, no page number).

Aside from the fact that this is a sensitive situation, the concept of 'peace' occupies a large place in the children's world.

I have a dream, a great and special peace, not every small round, a small ceasefire, once and for all peace with Gaza (Yotam HaKassem, Cohen, 2021, p. 33).

The dream reflects the subconscious and reveals the children's fear when they tell the adult the dream. Usually, it is a bad dream about experiencing the horror of the situation. On the other hand, the child has a dream or desire to change the situation through magic, although in the children's statements, one can sense the childish innocence.

It is no longer simple to make peace with the neighbours. Then we won't need a shelter, not even the Iron Dome. It's hard to make peace, Mother sighed, we'll do it gradually (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021, p. 28).

And sometimes while waiting at the shelter ... they like to say a prayer, a prayer that will protect them and their family and all the people of Israel, but most of all, they pray that this quarrel with the Arabs will end, and that instead of hatred, love will come and Jews and Arabs will live in peace (Ola, Ofri, 2009, no page number).

The child understands that the 'other' child is also in a similar situation and that the fear built up following the war is experienced by both Arabs and Jews.

On the other side, there are also people who suffer, and there are people who are afraid during war. The cat and the dog live together ... this should also be done between humans. They should be educated to live in peace with each other, even if they are members of a different religion or members of two nations.... First, we will start talking to each other. We will visit their houses and they will visit ours. Then we will buy in their stores, and they will shop in our stores until we get to know them and they us, and we become good neighbours and good friends. I think that the children who live in Gaza suffer from the war like us, and they also surely want to make peace.... I hope your dream comes true (Cat and Peace, Israeli, 2021 p. 31).

The title of the story *Cat and Peace* (2021) evokes the reader's expectation that they will be deceived during the plot. The theme of war occupies most of the narrative space, and the detailed story about the war creates an emotional compression that is a poetic means of

emphasising the atmosphere. The narrative discourse related to the war is densely populated with words such as the colour red (5 times), alarm (9 times), descriptions of war tools (11 times) and mention of the protected space (12 times). The theme of hoped-for peace appears at the end of the story as a hopeful dream. Between these two approaches, it is possible to identify a theme in which the child, in their innocence, fantasises about how they can be responsible for creating peace.

As well as statements about hating Arabs, there is also an attempt to negotiate and reach a state of peace. In the book *Let's Cook Peace* (2018), the fantasy of cooking peace takes shape for the children by adding spices, such as tolerance, giving up a dream, optimism, faith, listening, desire, consideration, equality, fairness and promise. The ingredients are mixed and put on a low heat because it takes time to cook this type of stew, which the children are ready to offer to the elders and people of the whole world (Let's Cook Peace, Bibi, 2018, pp. 20–22).

Together we will unite and continue to fight, we will believe that a day will come and we will become 'soldiers of peace' (Alumnus of the Red Garden, Baron, 2014, p. 23).

It is worth paying attention to the oxymoronic expression 'soldiers of peace'. This theme forces the child to deal indirectly with difficult moral questions: Is the person good or bad? Can a person in different life circumstances establish other situations of conduct with the 'other'? The presentation of the spectrum of opinions regarding the figure of the Arab shows that there is a position in the children's attitude that is ready to accept the 'other'. The reasons for this differ: the innocence that exists in them, a lack of understanding of complex politics, and perhaps because at these ages, the perception of peer groups and the relationships between them begins to take shape. They recognise the children across the border who also have difficult experiences and project their self-esteem onto that group of children.

4. Discussion

This article describes 'voices of war' as they are reflected in children's books written during the years of conflict in the Gaza Strip, books whose aesthetic plots cover war scenarios containing violent experiences that leave behind trauma and even post-trauma. The article describes two observational points of view that are reflected throughout the plots: one is of the adult and the other is of the child. Through them are reflected the social and ideological aspects. The use of the semantic field or groups of words related to 'war' content frames illuminate the worldviews of the adults at the meeting between poetics and ideology. The stories describe the reality of days of fighting and of days between the conflicts and the various military systems. The stories seek to be free of ideology, but in the presentation of the heroes' lifestyles and the authors' references to the effect these lifestyles have on them, there is an ideological statement about what is desirable and what is found in the hours of an emergency routine.

A study conducted in Finland (Malinen et al., 2022) shows that society was not properly prepared to deal with the cognitive and psychological problems of children left in the shadow of the war, and books written about war helped families overcome the traumatic situation.

Furthermore, childhood studies suggest that society as a whole was somewhat unprepared to meet the emotional and psychological needs of these children; prevailing cultural norms emphasised self-control and the importance of holding back negative feelings, which would have influenced the way children's emotional expressions were tackled. In this cultural context, any long-term 'negative' feelings in children might have even been considered a sign of an abnormal personality.

The Voice of the Adult and Their Attitude Towards the Other—In the stories, a dichotomy stands out between the position of the adult, who still perceives the 'other' across the border as foreign, hateful and a threat to the residents of the Otef Aza, meaning they must be part of the legitimate army that exterminates the Arabs, and the position of the children, who often have compassion towards them and a strong desire to reach a state of peace. The explanation for the gap in approaches is explained by Bar-Tal et al. (2017). The character of the Arab moves along a continuum of being responsible for the situation and hoping that the situation will change. The child is exposed to the factors of fighting—Arabs shooting at the Otef Aza and causing the activation of the 'red colour' alarm—but at the same time, believes that maybe the situation can change and that the fantasy of peace is realistic.

The conceptualisation of narratives of the enemy by adults (parents and educators) influences children's interpretations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Freud, 2015). The discourse with children, at home and at school, is loaded with vocabulary describing the conflict between the groups (Jews and Arabs). On the Jewish side, the emphasis is on the bravery of the soldiers defending the country (Bar-Tal et al., 2017), while for the Arabs, the emphasis is on the Israeli's hatred of them (the article by the Jordanians). Teff-Sekera (2020) found that the textbooks of Palestinians had a minority of narratives on the topic of peace, and naturally, this is a potential obstacle to achieving peace education goals. There is a connection between affective pedagogy relevant to social-emotional learning and values education that prompts learners to contemplate their role and the possibility of changing the status quo through processes of critical multicultural education (Zaidi et al., 2016).

Voices of war affect the innocence of children. It is important to focus the reading of the texts on the statements of hope and peace that are reflected in the findings. The need to present the fantasy of peace through the voice of a child stems from the understanding that innocence still exists in the child's soul. Another reason is that in every adult, there is an eternal child who wishes to return to the lost paradise of childhood. The description of the opposite attitude of war through the voice of a child gives a sense of credibility to things.

A statement of hope dulls the pain and enables the construction of a vision for a better future, even if the reality that the person or child experiences at that given moment is one of war and conflict. In the theme that deals with the peace fantasies of the children, it was found that they attempted to break the concept presented by Hagar (2005) that peace is only a utopian dream and irrelevant to the existing reality, that peace is presented only as an ideal in Israeli culture, but is actually another tool that demonstrates the superiority of 'our' side compared to 'their' side, since 'we' (the Jews) want peace and 'they' (the Arabs) prevent it. Bar-Tal et al. (2017) emphasised that in uncontrolled conflict, as he defines the Jewish-Arab conflict,

peace is presented as a goal to strive for but actually functions more as a positive characterisation of the internal group ('We are a people who seek peace') and as a dream, as a longing or an amorphous goal and less as a practical goal. Hope is a cognitive–emotional resource that arises in a person when they expect a concrete positive goal and aim at that goal with the help of such mediated thinking (Snyder et al., 2003). Hopeful people believe that they will reach their goals by developing plans and pathways related to goal-directed behaviours to solve problems (Cheavens et al., 2019)

Political literacy is supposed to provide young people with tools for language development and a dictionary of terms for engaging in discourse about politics. These will be used to promote cultural polemic, to analyse and explain the political situation and to formulate a personal position. Using political literacy through literature written about war makes it possible to understand political reality, develop social awareness, discover involvement in what is happening in the environment, cultivate critical thinking and stimulate a desire to act for change. More than that, they can be used to make children's dreams come true. The acquisition of positive thought processes through children's books allows them to build a sense of personal, community and national resilience. Children's literature and storytelling could be helpful in promoting students' global development and wellbeing when included in school curricular activities. Children's books are places of endless possibilities where young people can open their minds to broad horizons, create new perspectives, find possible alternatives or solutions to problems and develop their strengths, such as self-confidence and resilience (Pulimeno et al., 2020). In addition to conflict transformation and peace education, targeted interventions in the context of conflict can and should work to promote prejudice reduction, that is, to address intergroup factors that can encourage positive perceptions and challenge children's negative attitudes towards the out-group (Bar-Tal & Hameiri, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Children's literature can support children's human rights and contribute to equitable and socially just outcomes for all children. In the books under discussion, due to their being reflections of a process of conflict and not a process of contact between friendships on both sides of the border, the sense of designing the dehumanisation of the Arab character returns again, but the pole of hope is preserved in the child's perception. They reveal the phenomenon of delegitimization towards the figure of the Arab and make attempts at education for acceptance. The applied aspect that emerges is that the book makes it possible to discuss fear in a protected environment in situations where real experiences may cause danger (Currie, 1995, 1998). Using a literary filter, the book attempts to illuminate the ideological position of the "I" in order to create a calming channel that allows for the construction of a resilient narrative. Perhaps the book has the capacity to offer a glimpse of a world that could prevent future suffering and possibly build a less violent world! (An, 2022, 2021).

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Notes on contributor

Lea Baratz has a PhD in Hebrew literature. Her fields of research are Modern Literature (mostly children's literature), Literature Teaching, and Multicultural Education. She has written several research books and in addition one book of poetry.

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ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7655-9105>

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