



DOI: 10.22559/folklor.1006

folklor/edebiyat, cilt: 25, sayı: 100, 2019/4

# Turkish and American Female Sephardic Children among Turkish Children in the 1950s<sup>1</sup>

1950'lerde Türk ve Amerikalı Kız Sefarad Çocuklar Türk Çocukların Arasında

**Fazıla Derya Ağış\***

## **Abstract**

The aim and scope of this research was to discover the games appreciated by Turkish Sephardic, American Sephardic and Turkish Muslim female children in the 1950s, their environmental teachings, and transnationalism. Old people teach children games, which can also be transnational and narrated in other countries. Oral history interviews were conducted with these three groups of women, and they were asked about the metaphors in their childhood games. These informal chats also led to the discovery of some games played by female children. Similarities of these metaphors were used to suggest a peace building theory based on environmental humanities. Accordingly, the metaphorical concepts in female children's games were analyzed through the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) for deciphering their environmentalist teachings and their impacts on the formation of children. As the transnational nature of games makes one understand that children would play together regardless of their creed and ethnicity in the 1950s, such games are recommended to be taught to today's children who rarely play games outside their houses with other children. As a result of this study, it was found that conceptual metaphors based on the protection of the environment were similar in certain games regardless of children's cultural backgrounds. The

\* Dr., Brandeis University, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, deryaagis@gmail.com, ORCID ID 0000-0001-7871-0932.

conceptual metaphors of “NATURE IS A MOTHER,” “ANIMALS ARE LOVE,” and “NATURE IS A SHELTER” were commonly used in these children’s games, and these similarities should be taught children by encouraging them to recognize and adapt the concept of unity in diversity. Consequently, the crimes committed by children against animals should be prevented, and children should learn the ways to preserve the environment and nature easily without damaging any plants or animals. It is crucial to teach children similar games with similar elements are played in different parts of the world. In these games, similar environmental, educative, and metaphorical objects and word games may also be used.

**Keywords:** *environmental education, ecocriticism, transnationalism, childhood games, Turkish culture, cognitive metaphors*

## Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı ve kapsamı 1950’lerde Türk Sefarad, Amerikalı Sefarad ve Türk Müslüman kız çocukların oynadığı oyunları, çevreci öğretilerini ve uluslar-ötesi özelliklerini keşfetmektir. Yaşlı insanlar, çocuklara başka ülkelerde de kültürel aktarım aracılığıyla öğrenilmiş olan ve anlatılagelen bazı oyunlar öğretir. Bu üç grup kadın ile sözlü tarih mülakatları yapılmış ve çocukluk oyunlarındaki metaforlar / eğretilmeler kendilerine sorulmuştur. Bu çalışma için yapılan resmi olmayan bu sohbetler, aynı zamanda, kız çocuklarının oynadığı bazı oyunların keşfine de yol açmıştır. Kullandıkları metaforların benzerlikleri, çevresel beşerî bilimlere dayanan bir barış inşası teorisi önermek için kullanılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kız çocukların oyunlarındaki metaforlar / eğretilmeler Lakoff ve Johnson (1980)’in geliştirdiği kavramsal metafor kuramı açısından çevreci öğretilerini ve çocuk formasyonundaki etkilerini çözmek için incelenmiştir. Bazı oyunların uluslar-ötesi doğası 1950’lerde çocukların inanç ve etnik kökenleri ne olursa olsun birlikte oynadıklarını göstermekte olduğundan, bu oyunların, günümüzde nadiren başka çocuklarla evlerinin dışında oyun oynayan çocuklara öğretilmesi tavsiye edilir. Bu çalışmanın sonucunda, çocukların farklı kültürel geçmişlerine rağmen, birtakım oyunlarda çevrenin korunmasıyla ilgili olan kavramsal metaforların benzer olduğu bulunmuştur. “DOĞA BİR ANNEDİR,” “HAYVANLAR SEVGİDİR” ve “DOĞA BİR SİĞİNAKTIR / BARİNAKTIR” kültürel metaforları / eğretilmeleri bu çocuk oyunlarında genel olarak kullanılmışlardır ve bu benzerlikler çocukları çok-çeşitlilikte birlik kavramını tanımaya ve benimsemeye teşvik ederek onlara öğretilmelidirler. Sonuç olarak, çocuklar tarafından hayvanlara karşı işlenen suçların önüne geçilebilir ve çocuklar çiçeklere ya da hayvanlara zarar vermeden çevreyi ve doğayı koruma yollarını kolayca öğrenebilirler. Çocuklara benzer öğeleri taşıyan benzer oyunların dünyanın farklı yerlerinde oynandığını öğretilmesi aşırı derecede önemlidir. Bu oyunlar da benzer çevreci, eğitsel ve metaforik nesnelere ve kelime oyunları da kullanılmakta olabilir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *çevre, eğitim, kültürel aktarımlar, çocukluk, Türk kültürü, Sefarad kültürü, metaforlar*

## **Introduction**

This research intends to reveal the games appreciated by Turkish Sephardic, American Sephardic and Muslim Turkish female children in the 1950s. Old people teach their children some games, which can also be transnational and narrated in other countries. At this point, one can mention ‘diffusionism’ about the transnationality of childhood games that have been played in Turkey and the United States since the 1950s (about diffusionism, see Kroeber, 1940). Such type of diffusionism influenced the transnational identities of Sephardic Turkish and Muslim Turkish children who have played the same games that contributed to their character and identity formation. These games have led children to construct friendly, team-work respective, and philanthropist behavior. Moreover, some of these games made children love and protect the environment. Thus, this study intends to analyze the games that teach multicultural children to protect the environment together without discriminating others due to their identities, but to collaborate to the oneness of humanity.

The aim and scope of this research project is to discover the games appreciated by Turkish Sephardic, American Sephardic, and Muslim Turkish children, and how these games are so transnational to be narrated in other countries as well. Besides, this study also aims at deciphering the underlying meanings of these games about peace-building strategies and traditions based on moral education, mainly environmental education. Consequently, the main aim of this study is to develop a method of sociological and political peace-building theory of environmental protection based on childhood literature. For this reason, oral history interviews in the forms of informal chats were conducted with a Turkish Sephardic, an American Sephardic, and two Turkish Muslim women, and they also depicted their childhood games.

Additionally, this study answers the following five empirical research questions:

- 1) What types of games do these children play?
- 2) What kinds of metaphors are employed in these games?
- 3) How is it taught to respect and protect the environment via these games?
- 4) As Harris (2002) divides peace education into five subfields, how are the following taught to the children?: 1- “human rights education,” 2- “environmental education,” 3- “international education,” 4- “conflict resolution education,” and 5- “development education” (Harris 2002).
- 5) Are there any transnational elements in these games, since Turkish and American Jewish families may have transnational identities for being Israeli, Turkish, Spanish, and American at the same time? Some Turkish Jews are Sephardic, thus, they have Spanish origins, since their ancestors have been expelled from Spain in 1492, they immigrated to the Ottoman Empire, and to the United States afterwards.

## **1. Theoretical framework: Environmental humanities**

“Ecocriticism is a subfield of literary scholarship involved in studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment” as it was originally regarded in the 1990s; however, today’s ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field of social sciences, humanities, and

ecological research (Issitt, 2015). William Rueckert coined the term of “ecocriticism” in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978; the term derives from “the Greek words *oikos*, meaning ‘house,’ and *kritikos*, meaning ‘judge’” (Issitt, 2015).

Leo Marx’s book *The Machine in the Garden*, published in 1964 observes the environmental devastation descriptions in “American literature of technology impinging on the pastoral lifestyle. In the book, Marx looks at how authors such as Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Mark Twain used this theme in novels, speaking about situations where the introduction of new technological innovations had a drastic, often destructive impact on the natural environment” (Issitt, 2015).

Therefore, my study does not investigate the contemporary games children play with computers, or other machines, but it analyzes the games they play individually for their personal development, or as such a perfect team to cooperate and build new skills of communication and empathy-building.

Moreover, Cheryll Glotfelty and her associates founded the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992; besides, in 1993, the same Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) started to publish a new journal entitled *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (Issitt, 2015). Cheryll Glotfelty edited *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* together with Harold Fromm in 1996; the Modern Language Association has organized various panels; a journal entitled *The Electronic Green Journal* was published, and successively, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment was established (Burbery, 2012).

Regarding the link between ecocriticism, environmental humanities, environmental education, and children’s games, one can suggest that children can learn how to protect the environment via team-work, or through individual efforts. ‘Team-work,’ ‘self-esteem,’ ‘communication skills,’ ‘self-discovery,’ ‘anger management,’ and ‘coping skills’ are very crucial in the selection of games for children, since they develop all via them (see Jones, 1998). Muslim and Jewish Israeli children’s games had previously been analyzed by Eifermann (1968). She asked about some game choices among male and female students; these games included marbles, fivestones, hopscotch, football, dancing, skipping, and cops and robbers, et cetera. My study differs from hers for analyzing the similarities between the rules of games and how they teach children to respect the environment.

According to Feder (2014), “recognizing the existence of other animal cultures—and, in so doing, rejecting various ideologies of nature, particularly that of human supremacy—challenges structures of power that oppress both human and nonhuman animals” (p. 2); in 1953, Kinji Imanishi observed the ethnographic behavior of animals on the island of Koshima; moreover, in September 1953, Satsue Mito observed an eighteen-year-old macaque called Imo that would have cleaned a sweet potato before eating it (p. 8).

In this study, we will discover how children were developing affection towards animals, plants, and natural resources through group and individual games in the 1950s.

## 2. Games for loving the nature and conceptual metaphors

Children's games should be divided into two as group and individual games. Group games should be divided into sitting games (games played by sitting) and moving games (games played by running, walking, skipping, or rushing). At this point, I will refer to the Cognitive Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) for deciphering the underlying meanings of objects used in the games of children. As an example to the cognitive conceptual metaphors, one can cite, "TIME IS MONEY" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 7):



**Picture 1.** Time is very precious; one must invest her or his time in doing good work, and working hard; both concepts must never be wasted; however, one must invest in their future by spending or saving money and dedicating or saving time (graph originally from Ağış, 2007: 24).

Abstract objects may be compared to concrete objects for their matching particularities leading to the formation of conceptual metaphors, as in "TIME IS MONEY." In this study, the similarities of the conceptual metaphors in some games are used to suggest a peace building theory based on environmental humanities.

### 2. 1. Group games

#### 2. 1. 1. Sitting games

Regarding previous research conducted in Israel, it has been found that children who live in rural places are more inclined to do adult work, since they assist their parents on the fields in farming, gardening, raising crops, and feeding animals; thus, children living in the kibbutz and villages are raised, playing with real objects (Eifermann, 1968: 189). Eifermann (1968) observed that children's games or play activities were associated with their real-world needs and abilities (p. 2). She (1968) obtained this result through a two-stage observation in twenty-seven Israeli schools between 1964 and 1965; however, just one school participated in both stages; "the schools were selected so as to constitute a balanced design" in accordance with their geographic locations (North, Center, South), the socio-economic levels of students, their grades, their community structures, and their cultural backgrounds as Arabs or Jews (p. 2).

Accordingly, some sitting games of American Sephardic, Turkish Muslim and Sephardic female children included growing flowers in vases, feeding pets, including cats, dogs, ducklings, and canaries, and playing the house, generally imitating their relatives. One of the Sephardic women was making carpets with flower designs, when she was very young. Some also dressed paper dolls who visited their friends' paper dolls.

Oren (2008) plays games with children to conduct therapies with them for their emotional development. She (2008) asserts that "many children aged 6-12 refuse or avoid imaginary play and ask instead to play games - board games or sports - during therapy sessions. While psychotherapy with children commonly uses imaginary play, as well as projective techniques such as drawing or drama, the use of board games is less common."

My interviewees told me that all appreciated a game called "*Kızma Birader*" ('Don't get angry, brother / sister!'): four stones are castles; players throw a dice: number six is necessary for starting to move for each player; when a player gets a number six, s/he can rethrow the dice. A player is free to move her or his stones everywhere, and s/he can take her or his rivals' stones, and successively, those whose stones were taken must return to their castles and restart the game, when a number six comes, when they throw the dice. A person who gathers all of her or his four stones in the targeted area becomes the winner. If one includes flowers or animals as awards in the game, or calls the stones with plant or animal names, love towards nature is taught in this sitting group game that can be played with natural stones painted by children. Cognitive metaphors associated with this game are "COURAGE IS A LION" (the winner can be called a lion in both Turkish and Sephardic cultures), "COLORS ARE FRIENDLY RIVALS" (because the stones are painted in four different colors for four different people who are friends, but become rivals in the game), and "EMPATHY IS NATURE," as other rivals understand the anger of a person who is about to lose the game by returning to her or his castle, after having lost one of her or his stones.

Regarding the game of fivestones, five round stones are taken. The first player is selected as follows: the stones are thrown in the air, the one who gathers the greatest number of stones starts the game. A person has to catch all the stones by throwing just a stone in the air to win the game. The cognitive metaphors associated with the game are "RIVALRY IS AN OBSTACLE" and "FRIENDSHIP IS AN ETERNAL FLAME" alongside "LOVE FOR NATURE IS A TREASURE," since stones are products of the nature, rivalry occurs just during the game, and friends stay friends after the game.

Children would also play with colorful marbles made up of glass, produced of heated sand: sometimes they try to place their marbles into a specific hole, and sometimes they throw their marbles towards the wall from a hall, and the fastest wins. The cognitive metaphors involved in the game may be "CURIOSITY IN THE NATURE IS A TOY-BOX" and "COLORS ARE PRODUCTS OF NATURE," since marbles are formed of glass, and colors could be produced with some plants, as the marbles have different colors.

Moreover, regarding a game called "*yağ satarım, bal satarım*" ('I am selling oil and honey'), children would form a circle and sit, while singing "I am selling oil and honey; my master died; I am selling them," the id would put a handkerchief behind a child who would become the id, if s/he could not catch the id. The cognitive metaphors underlying the game

are “SPOILING THE NATURE IS MONEY” and “OIL AND HONEY ARE JOBS”; for this reason, the children learn that nature provides people with food, jobs as farmers, business owners, and sellers, and some money. Children may start to raise crops in vases, after having conceived these metaphors.

### 2. 1. 2. Moving games

Female Turkish and Turkish and American Sephardic children would play hide-and-seek in the 1950s: one used to be the id; and while the id was counting up-to ten, others would hide, and the one whom the id first discovered would become the id. This game can teach children about nature, if it is played in a garden. “NATURE IS A SHELTER” is a cognitive metaphor, representing this moving game.

In addition, a game called “*yakartop*” (‘burning ball’) that was played even in the 1950s teaches children how to become a team. At least three children are necessary for the game; each player is a member of a team among two teams; some stay in the middle, and each team member tries to push the ball to the rivals in the middle; if the ball touches them, they are out of the play, but if they catch the ball, their team earns a point; the team all of whose members are caught loses the game. If played in a garden, the children will appreciate the nature, and their teams should have animal names such as boars, lions, horses, cats, et cetera. Thus, the cognitive metaphors associated with each game played in open areas are “NATURE IS A MOTHER” and “ANIMALS ARE LOVE.”

### 2. 2. Individual games

The games that female Turkish Sephardic, American Sephardic, and Turkish Muslim children played included dressing and talking to paper dolls, plastic dolls, and animal figures, and gardening in the 1950s. Girls would play the house on their own with individual friends. They had an intention to protect animals, thus, pets.

Most children would also sing short songs in these times, for instance, the following:

*Yağmur yağıyor (it is raining);*

*Seller akıyor (water is flowing down the streets);*

*Arap kızı camdan bakıyor (The Arabic girl is looking through the window).*

As the rain is a natural event necessary for the growth of plants, this little song brings joy to children. Another Turkish spring song was “*Ari viz viz viz...*” (‘Bee, flying... buzz, buzz...’); such a song can teach children that bees make honey, and they do not sting people, if they are not angry.

Moreover, the following Sephardic song was for adolescents; however, it depicts sadness and expatriation through the rain, the rain drops on trees, and mountains, and serves to build empathy between human emotions and nature; children may learn the tragedies of being

expelled for racial reasons in this sad song through saddening nature descriptions; by the way, Sephardic children had heard Judeo-Spanish songs from their relatives in the 1950s:

*Arvoles Yoran Por Luvya (Trees Cry with the Rain)*

*Arvoles yoran por luyas (Trees cry with the rain)*  
*I montanias por ayres (And the mountains with air),*  
*Ansi yoran los mis ojos (So are my eyes crying),*  
*Por mi kerida amante (for my dear lover). (twice)*

*Torno i digo (I turn and say),*  
*Ke va ser demi (It will not be complete),*  
*En tierras ajenas (On foreign lands),*  
*Yo me va murir (I will die) (refrain) (Shaul, 1994, p. 124)*

“NATURE IS A HUMAN BEING WITH EMOTIONS” summarizes the song above as a conceptual metaphor. Moreover, more interestingly, Turkish Sephardic children would consider their Muslim friends as brothers or sisters in the Ottoman Empire; the minority Jews were granted their equality as citizens in the Ottoman Empire in 1908 during the reign of Sultan Abduhamid II; consequently, children liked this following song (Shaul, 1994, p. 128):

*Turkos i Judios (Turks and Jews)*

*Turkos i Judios eramos. (We were Turks and Jews.)*  
*Todos otomanos. (Each of us an Ottoman / all of us were Ottomans)*  
*Mos tomimos de las manos. (We held our hands)*  
*Jurimos de ser ermanos. (We promised to be brothers and sisters)*  
*Ya la libertad se va azer (Liberty will be offered),*  
*ya nuestra sangre se va verter (our blood will change its flow, going towards there),*  
*Por l'amor de la Turkiya, et cetera (for the love of Turkey, et cetera).*

Regarding other commonalities, or shared values between Turks and Sephardim, we have a Sephardic Djoha, or a Turkish Nasrettin Hodja, an imam from Hortu who moved to Aksehir in 1237 (Sansal, 2005). Let us discover the transnationality of a Hodja anecdote: “*Djoha kere azer yoghurt*” (‘Hodja wants to make yoghurt’) narrated in Shaul (1994: 92): this anecdote was originally Turkish (see Masal. org, 2019). One day Hodja Nasrettin (*Djoha* in Judeo-Spanish) decides to transfer all the lake (“*mar*”, thus sea in the Judeo-Spanish anecdote) into yoghurt, and mixes yoghurt in it with a large spoon; a man tells him that the lake, or the sea is formed of water, not milk, and the lake, or the sea cannot become yoghurt; Hodja answers, “I know,



but if it becomes yoghurt.” This anecdote teaches that “NATURE IS MAGIC,” “MILK IS MAGIC,” “WATER IS WEALTH,” “NATURE IS A MOTHER,” “ANIMALS ARE LOVE,” and “MILK AND WATER ARE TREASURES” as conceptual metaphors. The nature is regarded as a protective mother whose milk product should be immense for its many creatures and spectacular artistic views such as seas and lakes. Cows also produce milk, and they do not harm people, thus, they are love, or lovable. If we teach children similar anecdotes, songs, and games, present in different cultures, they will understand that human beings are similar, too, and they will be more inclined to be peace-builders rather than haters and fighters. Consequently, conceptual metaphors should also be taught to children from different cultures so that they can perceive why one needs to protect and care about the environment and world peace.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, one sees the similarities in the games played by Turkish Muslim, Turkish Sephardic, and American Sephardic girls in the 1950s. Conceptual metaphors based on the protection of the environment are also similar in these group or individual games. Therefore, one can refer to universal peace-building and environmental education strategies.

Therefore, we discovered that children play similar games and employ similar environmental objects regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

We also found that cognitive metaphors such as “NATURE IS A MOTHER,” “ANIMALS ARE LOVE,” and “NATURE IS A SHELTER” are used in these children’s games. Besides, children are taught to respect and protect the environment by playing in gardens, parks, and beaches, using plants, animals, soil, sand, stones, and marbles. They develop a passion for these natural objects alongside love towards nature.

Additionally, as Harris (2002) divides peace education into five subfields, the children learn these subfields via group games, interacting with other children, by losing or winning games, being “id,” and catching and tagging others, as long as a hard worker wins: 1- “human rights education,” 2- “environmental education,” 3- “international education,” 4- “conflict resolution education,” and 5- “development education” (Harris, 2002).

In sum, there are many transnational elements in these children’s games, since Turkish and American Jewish families may have transnational identities for being Israeli, Turkish, Spanish, and American at the same time, as one sees in Nasrettin Hodja tales. If children discover the commonalities between the other children’s traditions and games, they become more pacifist and empathetic.

### **Notlar**

- <sup>1</sup> This research was presented at the Social Science History Association’s annual conference in Chicago from November 17 through November 20, 2016 in Chicago, U.S.A

### Resources

- Agiş, F. D. (2007). *A comparative cognitive pragmatic approach to the Judeo-Spanish and Turkish proverbs and idioms that express emotions*. (Master's thesis). Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey.
- Burbery, T. J. (2012). Ecocriticism and Christian literary scholarship. *Christianity and Literature* V.61(2), pp. 189-214.
- Feder, H. (2014). *Ecocriticism and the idea of culture: Biology and the bildungsroman*. Ashgate Publishing Company: Burlington, VT, U.S.A.
- Jones, A. (1998). *104 activities that build: Self-esteem, teamwork, communication, anger management, self-discovery, and coping skills*. Richland. (Paperback – 1 Jan 1998). Richland, WA: Rec Room.
- Kroeber, A. L. (1940). Stimulus diffusion. *American anthropologist* V. 42 (1), pp. 1-20.
- Lakoff, G., and Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Oren, A. (2008). The use of board games in child psychotherapy. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, V. 34 (3), pp. 364–383.
- Shaul, E. (1994). *Folklor de los Judios de Turkiya*. Isis: Istanbul.

### Electronic resources

- Eifermann, R. R. (1968, June). *School children's games. Final report*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel). Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED024061.pdf>
- Harris, I. M. (2002, April 1-5). Peace education theory. Paper presented at the 83<sup>rd</sup> American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA. Retrieved from [https://archive.org/stream/ERIC\\_ED478728/ERIC\\_ED478728\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ERIC_ED478728/ERIC_ED478728_djvu.txt).
- Issitt, M. (2015). Ecocriticism. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Literature Research Starters*, EBSCO host (accessed October 23, 2016).
- Masal.org. (2019). Göle yoğurt çalmak fıkrası. Retrieved from <https://www.masal.org/gole-yogurt-calmak-fikrasi.html>.
- Sansal, B. (2005). About Turkey. Retrieved from <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/nasreddin.htm>