

# Preserving Algerian Heritage Through Children's Literature: A Postmodern Analysis of Nouha Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*

Cezayir Mirasının Çocuk Edebiyatı Aracılığıyla Korunması: *Nouha Deliou'nun Mona'nın Scrapbook Macerası* Üzerine Postmodern Bir Çözümleme

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## Abstract

The transmission of the native culture to the younger generations has faced new challenges due to the digitalization process. Innovative instructional methods, as emphasized by Mark Prensky, are thus needed to minimize the gap between the different generations and to provide the digitally native children with traditional native values. Nouha Deliou's book, *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*, through the story of an Algerian immigrant family in the United States where the eldest sister is transmitting her native culture and traditions to her little sister in a modern way, exemplifies these efforts by maintaining Algerian traditions and protecting young people from cultural erosion. This paper aims to explore the importance of children's literature in protecting cultural heritage from oblivion and adapting instructive means to the preferences of the digital generation. It emphasizes the importance of linking technology with cultural heritage to preserve it for future generations.

**Keywords:** Cultural preservation, children's literature, Nouha Deliou, Mark Prensky

## Öz

Dijitalleşme süreci nedeniyle yerli kültürün genç kuşaklara aktarılması yeni zorluklarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Mark Prensky'nin vurguladığı üzere, farklı nesiller arasındaki uçurumu daraltmak ve dijital yerli çocuklara geleneksel yerli değerleri aktarmak için yenilikçi öğretim yöntemlerine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Nouha Deliou'nun *Mona'nın Scrapbook Macerası* adlı eseri, Büyük kız kardeşin Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yaşayan bir Cezayirli göçmen aileye öz kültürünü ve geleneklerini modern bir yöntemle aktardığı hikayesiyle, Cezayir geleneklerini koruma ve genç insanları kültürel erozyondan uzak tutma çabalarına somut bir örnek teşkil etmektedir. Bu makale, çocuk edebiyatının kültürel mirası unutulmaktan korumadaki ve öğretici araçları dijital neslin tercihlerine göre uyarlamadaki önemini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Teknolojinin kültürel miras ile bağlantılandırılarak gelecek kuşaklar için korunmasının önemi vurgulanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürel koruma, çocuk edebiyatı, Nouha Deliou, Mark Prensky

## Introduction

Children, in this digitalized era, are more and more attached to their screens, and the traditional methods of passing down cultural heritage from parents and grandparents are no longer the same as before. In the past, storytelling formed the foundation for transmitting knowledge about old times and cultural traditions. Algerian families used to gather around the hearth during winter evenings or in the courtyard during warmer seasons to listen to stories narrated by the elder of the family. Consequently, the literature and language that shaped the child were woven from the fabric of their ancestors' culture and heritage. The introduction of the internet, however, has altered the relationship between children and their environment, as they are spending more time captivated in their digital world, which leads to an increasing disconnect from their own culture and a greater exposure to Western and modern cultures, which may lead to cultural loss.

Mark Prensky (2001), in his influential work "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," emphasizes the need for new instructional methods to connect the different generations and introduce traditional values to the younger, digitally native generation. It is within this context that Nouha Deliou, through her book *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*, emerges as one of these digital immigrant instructors who have found a way to transmit a "legacy" content in a new and engaging way. Deliou's work not only saves a nation's heritage from obscurity but also protects younger generations from cultural assimilation, making it noteworthy contribution in our rapidly changing world. In this book, Deliou incorporates many Algerian traditions and culture. Accordingly, this paper addresses the following research question: How does Nouha Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure* employ postmodern aesthetics and digital-age pedagogical strategies to transmit Algerian cultural heritage to younger, digitally native generations? The article aims to explore the role of postmodern children's literature as a vehicle for cultural preservation and identity formation in a diasporic context, drawing on Prensky's digital natives framework to analyse how the text bridges generational and cultural gaps.

### Theoretical Framework: Reshaping Cultural Transmission in a Changing World

In an era dominated by digitization, the world has undergone profound transformations, changing the way information is processed and transmitted. As Mark Prensky (2001, p.1) asserts, the new generation's thinking patterns have changed compared with their predecessors due to their excessive exposure to digital technologies. This evolution necessitates the adoption of innovative methods in the transmission of knowledge and cultural heritage. Most of young children today, even in the Arab world, for instance, are more exposed to videos in English than in their own language resulting in the absorption of the western culture. Besides, the proliferation of cultural influences to which the child is exposed thanks to the internet may function as magnets drawing him away from his own culture and identity. Thus, it is necessary to find ways through which cultural heritage can be saved.

### How Reading can Shape a Child's Identity

Throughout history, storytelling has always been a method of nurturing and captivating children. It has always served as a means of entertaining young minds and cultivating their imagination and supporting their development. As it has been stated by Seth Lerer (2008, p. 1), "Ever since there were children, there has been children's literature." Children, in fact, are the outcome of what they read, as "the child was made through texts and tales he or she studied, heard, and told back". Besides, this early encounter with stories in one's life "plays a powerful role in shaping how we think about and understand the world." (Lerer, p1).

The modern era where digitalization and globalization are shaping the world, the new generations throughout the world are absorbed in western and modern cultures, which is a dangerous path that can lead to the loss of their own cultural identity. It is here that children's literature plays one of its significant roles, which is that of preserving cultural heritage and conveying values, as stories serve as significant carriers of information about cultural shifts across time, covering both the present and the past. Adding to that, children's literature is a means of keeping traditions from oblivion and ensuring that valuable knowledge and values are transmitted to future generations (Lerer, p.4). As emphasized by Xin (2022, as cited in Al-Matrafi, 2023) children's literature has a significant impact on shaping and representing cultural and national identities.

### Adapting Children's Literature to Current Trends

Digitalization has altered almost every sphere in our lives. As children are at the forefront of this revolution, children's literature, too, has its share in change which is visible in its borrowing new forms and approaches to ensure harmony with the perspectives of the current generation. Picture books, indeed, seem to fit the expectations of this generation as they address modern readers' preferences and needs. This is achieved by combining visual storytelling with concise and engaging texts. Additionally, picture books support the multimodal nature of digital media, providing a fascinating reading experience that fits the digitalized generation in their specific way of obtaining information. As it is stated by Atken (2007, p. 2), "a picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical

document; and, foremost, an experience for a child".

Children's books that are influenced by postmodernism are different from traditional books in terms of both visual format and narrative content. Following Atken, postmodern works are vivid; and their pages are similar to computer screens, offering multiple focal points that create a mixture of images and text fonts. Unlike the well-defined lines and focused compositions found in traditional children's picture books, these postmodern works challenge conventional norms and carry a sense of playfulness and experimentation.

As a picture book, Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure* will be analyzed within this context exploring the way its content together with its design conveys a postmodern style, overlapping between text and image, while also evoking elements of Algerian culture and traditions that engage young readers in an interactive reading experience. The use of symbols and motifs that belong to the Algerian culture in the book, such as henna, ululation, the different traditional dresses and recipes, etc. is highly celebrating the heritage and absorbing the reader in a broader cultural exploration. This interaction between postmodern aesthetics and Algerian influences creates an exceptional reading experience that encourages young readers to actively participate in the narrative, nurturing a deeper understanding and appreciation for both the story and the cultural context it represents.

### **Critical Analysis: Mona's Scrapbook Adventure: A Bridge to Cultural Legacy in an Age of Technology**

Children's literature used to be a means of nourishing children's imagination. Today, however, technology has dominated all spheres of life and made children prisoners of digital devices and isolated them from their real world. Children's literature, thus, shifted its purpose according to these needs, seeking to reconnect children with their real world. Nevertheless, as this generation is acquainted with sophisticated means of acquiring information, this necessitates innovative approaches to presenting information.

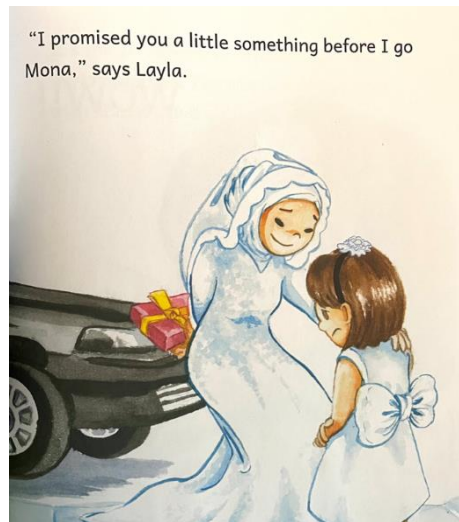
In his article "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," Prensky investigates the way technology has affected the cognitive processes together with the manners through which this new generation acquires information which is sharply different from the old procedures. For Prensky, this is what has widened the gap between the digital natives and their parents as well as with their instructors, who grew away from digitalization. This difference has made the transfer of knowledge and information using traditional methods almost impossible, as the way of understanding and learning for the new generation is fundamentally different.

The term "Digital Natives" was coined by Prensky (2001, p.1), depicting this generation who are fundamentally fluent in the language of computers, video games, social media, and the internet, while "Digital Immigrants" represents those who were exposed to technology in a later phase in their lives. This vast difference in upbringing between the two generations has complicated interactions between them, including the educational process. Consequently, this has necessitated a comprehensive change in teaching methods and information delivery to align with the needs and qualifications of the digital generation.

Deliou's book aligns with the key points of Prensky's theory. The story portrays an Algerian immigrant family in contemporary America. The two main characters represent the two different generations. Layla, on behalf of the immigrant generation, uses a scrapbook, representing the sophisticated means of linking the two generations, for transmitting the old values to her younger sister Mona, who stands for the new generation. Throughout the story, Layla collects joyful memories with her sister and creates a scrapbook, which she presents to her at the end of the narrative, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Layla offering the scrapbook to Mona*



*Note.* This picture is taken from Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*. Sourced from Deliou (2022).

When Mona felt sorrowful about the idea of parting with her only sister due to her marriage, her sister sought a clever way to bring joy back to her. She did this by reducing the distance using modern communication methods and creating memories immortalized through photographs, which made Mona regain her happiness and enthusiasm. Consequently, what Layla did was address her sister in her new language, thereby smartly bridging the generational gap.

Furthermore, *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure* reflects the richness and diversity of Algerian culture. All along the book, different traditions and customs of Algeria were artfully displayed. Mona, the little protagonist, enthusiastically declares, "Over the next few months, Layla, Mama and I go wedding shopping. First, we find Layla some dresses. Mama says there are many different styles in Algeria" (see Figure 2). Pictures of various styles of dresses, then, were displayed. In addition to clothes, there are references to other traditions such as Algerian cooking recipes, marriage ceremonies, and other values.

Figure 2

*Traditional Algerian dresses*



Each dress can have a special jewelry piece or head covering. They are all so colorful!



*Note.* These pictures are taken from Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*. Sourced from Deliou (2022).

*Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*, as a children's book, represented by the scrapbook itself, stands as a portal through which old values find a way to reach the realm of the younger generations. As Deliou uses her picture book to transmit her cultural message to the younger generation, the elder sister within the story, too, uses the scrapbook for the same motives towards her little sister.

#### **Digital Natives Vs Digital Immigrants in Deliou's Book**

Setting is the first element through which the difference between the digital natives and digital immigrants is well apparent in Deliou's book. The digital natives are presented by modern America where the story takes place. The digital immigrants, on the other hand, are represented by the immigrant Algerian family.

The second means that demonstrates the contrast between the two generations is that of characterization. The young protagonist, Mona, for instance, stands for the digital generation while her eldest sister, Layla, represents the digital immigrants, as she must find ways to connect with Mona and helping her cope with her absence due to her upcoming marriage.

The third element which emphasizes this distinction is language. Although the story is written in English as it is mainly addressed to American children, the ideas and themes tackled rather belong to North African culture. This choice of language reflects the necessity of adapting the language of the "natives" to teach them the values and traditions of the old generation.

#### **The Picture Book and the Scrapbook as Bridges Between the Two Generations**

Both Deliou's picture book and the scrapbook, which is the main theme of the story, are the door through which the two generations meet. The book itself is mainly composed of pictures rather than text, which echoes the visual format of postmodern children's books that differ from traditional narratives. In postmodern children's literature, "Visually, pages often provide multiple focal points just as a computer screen does a carnival of images and text fonts with no clearly delineated priority or direction cavort across the pages" (Atken, 2007, p. 2). This departure from traditional picture books reflects how Digital natives "prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite [and] prefer random access (like hypertext)" (Prensky, 2001, p. 2). Through this visual medium, the picture book becomes an effective tool for engaging the new generation and facilitating their connection with the story.

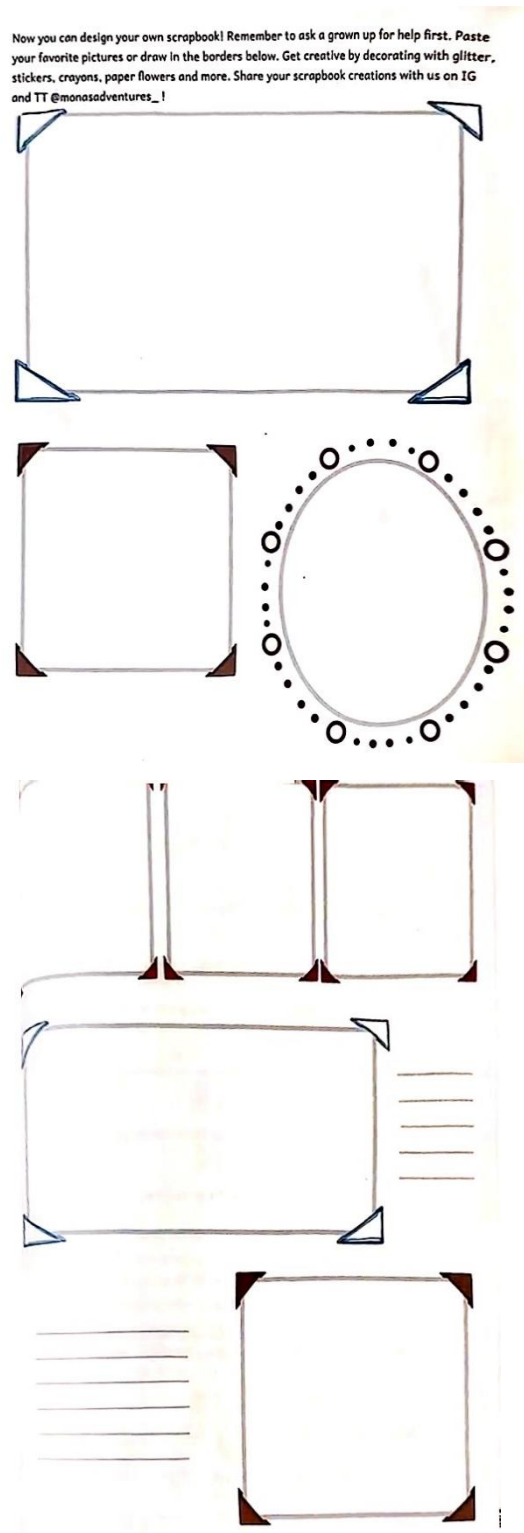
Scrapbooks and digital stories are similar in several ways such as in their use of pictures and the ability to share them with others. These characteristics help in creating an atmosphere of community and in uniting the two generations. The scrapbook in Deliou's book is the backbone of the whole story. Layla's decision to create a scrapbook for her younger sister as she prepares for her marriage is more than an act of kindness. It also symbolizes the act of passing down Algerian heritage to the next generation through innovative means.

In digitalized education in general, and in digitalized literature in particular, learners and readers are considered as active and engaged participants. As described by Atken (2007, p. 3) in reference to the analysis of a book, "This last image of the hand removing a page of the story also uncovers the mystery of the book-making process and invites the reader to be the co-author and finish the book, thus giving opportunity for another perspective." In a similar vein, Deliou adopted this method

in her book by including additional blank pages in her book, enabling young readers to personalize the story by adding their own pictures (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Blank pages for the readers to add their own pictures.*



*Note.* These pictures are taken from Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*. Sourced from Deliou (2022).

Layla, representing the digital immigrants, uses the scrapbook as a tool to transfer her previous culture and traditions to her

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young sister, who represents the digital natives. Layla's choice of a scrapbook is a clear example of the transmission of cultural heritage in a modern way. Thus, Mona's Scrapbook Adventure, as a picture book, with its emphasis on visuals, and the act of creating a scrapbook in the story, both serve as means linking the digital natives and the digital immigrants.

#### **Mona's Scrapbook Adventure Incorporation of Algerian Traditions and Culture**

As Aisawi and Addhafeeri (2017) remarked, "Arabic culture comprises family values, role relationships, and gender issues." Mona's Scrapbook Adventure belongs to this type, where a myriad of Algerian traditions is included. Many literary devices such as characters, themes, and illustrations are used to incorporate those cultural elements. Thomure et al. (2020) mentioned that "The major aspects of culture include traditions and ways of life, such as clothing, family relationships, and gender." These three aspects are indeed well treated in the Deliou's book portraying Algerian traditions.

Though Deliou's book is set in the United States, most of its characters reflect the Algerian tradition and culture. Despite living in a different country, these characters maintain the Algerian and Arabic values and norms. The choice of Arabic names such as Mona, Layla, and Ahmed for the characters clearly demonstrates a strong cultural connection to their mother land. The adult female characters, maintaining their Muslim faith, are always presented in their headscarves whenever going outside. When Mona and her sister, Layla, accompanied their mother on a visit to the flower store, for example, both the mother and Layla put on hijabs. This tradition is strongly apparent in the scrapbook's photos. In one of the scrapbook's photos (see Figure 4), the young girl writes, "Layla plucks two camellias and places one in my hair and one in her hijab" (Deliou, 2022). Furthermore, it is explicitly stated in the story that even "for the wedding, Layla will wear a traditional white dress" (Deliou, 2022). The family's harmony with the host country, while still preserving strong connections with their native culture and religion, serves as a strong reminder to children of the importance of keeping one's identity.

Figure 4

*"Layla plucks two camellias and places one in my hair and one in her hijab."*



*Note.* This picture is taken from Deliou's Mona's Scrapbook Adventure. Sourced from Deliou (2022).

Mona's Scrapbook Adventure addresses several themes related to the Algerian and Maghrebi traditions including marriage customs, celebrations, and the profound bonds within families. The new generation tends to lose connections with the older generations, and their interactions with their families are fading. The story artfully redraws the frame of unity within families. Mona's family, throughout the book, is actively participating in the preparation of Layla's wedding, which is a clear demonstration of family support, while the strong bond between the two sisters Layla and Mona stands as a central theme in the story. In one of the moving scenes in the book, the young girl openly declares her fear of being separated from her sister where she anxiously confesses: "I don't want Layla to be far because I'll miss her so much. She's my only sister!" (Deliou, 2022). Layla's reassuring promise to communicate with her through video chats and to share funny activities while they are still together eases Mona's worries, as she excitedly realizes: "that sounds a great idea! I am going to be Layla's wedding helper, so we will spend more time together. YAY, I am SO excited now" (Deliou, 2022). The scrapbook, indeed, both captured and preserved all those merry moments between the two sisters, carrying in its pages both the power of sibling love and a beautiful Algerian culture.

Additionally, the book emphasizes the celebration of marriage, opposing the widespread tendency of declining marital relationships. It highlights the significance of honoring and cherishing the sacred bond of marriage, contrasting with societal

norms that often overlook its importance.

Another point related to marriage is that in Islamic and Algerian culture, traditional marriage is characterized by the union of couples consisting of different genders, setting it apart from newer forms of marriage that are acknowledged and even legalized in numerous regions worldwide. The wedding ceremony in the story, led by an Imam who "performs the kitab", shows that the marriage is done following Islamic customs and practices.

The book also explores vivid aspects of Algerian culture, such as traditional clothing, food, and customs. The main character Mona declares "In our Algerian culture, we will have a fun henna party for Layla, wear traditional clothes and make yummy sweets" (Deliou, 2022). The illustrations richly display diverse Algerian dresses, celebrating the country's rich cultural tapestry. In her henna party, as illustrated in Figure 5, Layla wears different styles each representing a specific Algerian culture "there are Kabyle, Karakou, Chaoui dresses and many more beautiful styles" (Deliou, 2022).

**Figure 5**

*The henna party.*



*Note.* This picture is taken from Deliou's *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure*. Sourced from Deliou (2022).

The book gives great importance to the depiction of traditional food. With the approach of the wedding, the family began preparing various types of traditional Algerian food and sweets. The author, for example, presented the recipe, ingredients, and traditional method for preparing "El Aarayesh," which is an Algerian cookie. This careful attention to detail about the names and preparation methods of dishes denotes Deliou's keenness to accurately convey the culture of her country.

Ululating during ceremonies, which is a typical Algerian traditional habit, has also its share in Deliou's book. This is explicitly mentioned in the passage where "Layla and Ahmed exchange rings and the women start to zaghreet in celebration: 'leleleleeeee!'" (Deliou, 2022). This depiction adds an authentic touch to the portrayal of Algerian customs and traditions.

### Conclusion

Children in contemporary society seem to be sinking in the ocean of digitalization and are totally disconnected from their cultural heritage which may lead them to a loss of identity. The necessity to find advanced and effective methods to create connections between these generations and their cultures and traditions is more required in this era of digitalization. Modern children's literature, as is the case with Nouha Deliou's book, *Mona's Scrapbook Adventure* plays a significant role in preserving culture, customs, and traditions by making children participate in the act of reading through visual stories that are in harmony with the technological age. This type of literature is characterized by its ability to embody aesthetics and integrate with new artistic forms, such as picture books and scrapbooks. Deliou's book serves two clear purposes: creating connections between the digital natives and their parents' culture and making this process more entertaining and adapted to the digital era.

Returning to the research question posed in the introduction, the analysis demonstrates that Deliou's book employs postmodern visual strategies—multimodal page layouts, interactive blank pages, and a scrapbook format—to re-encode Algerian cultural heritage in a form accessible and appealing to digitally native readers. The eldest sister Layla functions, in Prensky's terms, as a digital immigrant mediator who consciously adapts her cultural message to the communicative

preferences of the younger generation. The book's diasporic setting further amplifies the urgency of this transmission: identity preservation becomes not merely a pedagogical goal but a political and affective necessity for Algerian immigrant families. Future research could productively engage with postcolonial and diaspora studies frameworks, as well as multimodality theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), to deepen the analytical scope of such readings. Nonetheless, this study establishes that children's literature, when thoughtfully conceived at the intersection of cultural memory and digital aesthetics, constitutes a meaningful and effective tool for safeguarding heritage across generations

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