

## **Crossing Boundaries: A Postcolonial Reading of Naomi Shihab Nye's Young-Adult Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper analyzes Naomi Shihab Nye's young-adult literature in the light of central issues of postcolonialism. Her original works dealing with the Middle East, namely the award-winning *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (1994) and *Habibi* (1997), a young-adult novel, are discussed as representative of minority literature for the young in the United States. Hence, her depiction of the Palestinian diaspora and related themes of identity, assimilation, marginalization and cultural conflict are discussed. Central to a postcolonial reading of Nye's works is her representation of the identity crisis of Arab-Americans as an ethnic minority uniting two allegedly hegemonic cultures, Eastern and Western. Related binaries such as "self" and "other," "centre" and "margin," alongside her revisionary versions of history reveal to what extent Nye's works are representative of the theory. Furthermore, the author's treatment of both cultural identity formation and hybridity as experienced by second generation Arab-Americans living both in the USA and the Middle East adds a fresh perspective to this focal postcolonial issue. The writer succeeds in advocating her message of building a sense of enlarged humanity through crossing racial, political, ideological and psychological boundaries among the young generation in order to achieve global peace. Her works prove the adaptability of the theory to the literature of young people; at the same time, they place great stress on the humanistic attribute of postcolonialism rather than its political aspect.

**Keywords:** Naomi Shihab Nye, Young-Adult Literature, Postcolonial Theory, Arab-American Literature, Identity, Diaspora, Hybridity, Orientalism.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the last two decades, ethnic literature dealing with the Middle East has gained importance as a prominent current of minority literatures in the United States (Marston: 2004, 1). Writers address children and young adults both to inform them about this region and to create understanding and respect among young people of different ethnic groups. Through such works, some writers also target changing existing negative stereotypes of the Arab formulated over centuries of Orientalist thought and political conflict. Such important messages are expected to be effective with young readers since through this "potent period of an individual's development, sensibilities can be transformed... allow[ing] readers a means to reconceptualize their relationship to ethnic and national identities" (Smith: 2002, 3).

Arab-American writers have contributed to Middle Eastern ethnic literature. Their writings often epitomize a long-going conflict between the two cultures marking their own identity and literature. Of these writers, Naomi Shihab Nye has won recognition as poet, writer and anthologist of a number of award-winning multicultural works for American children and young adults. Despite her important contribution, Nye has not received due critical attention to shed light on her achievement in contemporary literature for the young. In this paper, I attempt to show Nye's contribution to young-adult literature through analyzing her works in the light of central issues of postcolonialism. The writer's original works dealing with the Middle East will be discussed as representative of minority literature in the States. Hence, her depiction of the Palestinian diaspora and related themes of identity, assimilation, and cultural conflict are to be the basic points of analysis. Central to a postcolonial reading of Nye's works is her representation of the identity crisis of Arab-Americans as an ethnic minority uniting two allegedly hegemonic cultures, Eastern and

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Western. Related binaries such as "self" and "other," "centre" and "margin," alongside her revisionary versions of history will reveal to what extent Nye's works revolve around basic issues of the theory. Furthermore, the author's treatment of cultural identity formation and hybridity as experienced by second generation Arab-Americans living both in the USA and the Middle East--I intend to argue--adds a fresh perspective to this focal postcolonial issue.

## 2. NYE AND ETHNIC LITERATURE

Though Nye has written several works that can be classified under ethnic literature, her focus is on Palestinian Arabs. She has published three successful collections of multicultural poems addressed to the young: *This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World* (1992), which the American Library Association named a Notable Book, *The Tree Is Older Than You Are: A Bilingual Gathering of Poems & Stories from Mexico with Paintings by Mexican Artists* (1995), and *The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East* (1998), republished and abridged as *The Flag of Childhood: Poems from the Middle East*.

Her original works dealing with the Middle East, and Palestine in particular, include: *Sitti's Secrets* (1994), a picture book for young readers which won the Jane Addams Children's Book Award from the Women International League for Peace and Freedom. Her first novel for young adults, *Habibi* (1997), received several awards: it was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Notable Book, a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age, and a Texas Institute of Letters Best Book for Young Readers. In addition, it was granted both the Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature and the Jane Addams Book Award. *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East* (1994) is a collection of familiar and new poems that featured on the Notable Books for a Global Society 2003 List. A new introduction was added to the 2001 edition showing Nye's reaction to the events of September 11. Such profuse and highly acclaimed oeuvre makes Elsa Marston (2004), children's writer and critic specializing in Middle Eastern literature, regard Nye's works about Palestine as "groundbreaking" in the mainstream of American minority literature for the young.

As her works reveal, Nye captures the rich experiences of her life to give authentic representations of ethnic minorities. Her father is a Palestinian diaspora who

immigrated to the States and became a naturalized American. As the author often declares, she has spent part of her life in her ancestors' homeland and her experience proves to be highly inspiring. Autobiographical details abound in her works set in the Middle East; and the same details are used in more than one work. The main figure of the diaspora that has been modeled on Nye's own father features in *Habibi* as well as in several poems in *19 Varieties*. Liyana's journey to her father's country is basically Mona's in *Sitti's Secrets*. Moreover, several incidents in the novel reappear in various poems. For example, the village women's trip to the stream, figures of shop sellers, refugee camps, and most important the figure of *Sitti* (the Arabic word for grandmother). As the author herself explains in the introduction to *19 Varieties*, *Sitti* is a literary representation of Nye's Palestinian grandmother who becomes a spiritual mentor to the writer and an important inspiration for her works (xvi). Another essential unifying element of the writer's works is the calm, reasoning voice of her objective narrator which reflects the writer's belief in peace and orientation towards global understanding through crossing traditionally conceived boundaries of ethnicity, territory and culture. It is part of the aim of this paper to show how Nye's works move from the treatment of common postcolonial issues to reach messages different in scope from those representative of the theory.

The setting of Nye's Middle Eastern works shifts between her native town in the States and different parts of Palestine; the latter is, however, more prominent since it features as a backdrop for several poems and scenes in her fiction. Varied locales such as the Old City of Jerusalem, the village of Ramallah, a refugee camp, a Bedouin settlement, and a school classroom help inform her American readers of the region, its people, traditions, customs and daily life. Her characters are equally colorful; they are ordinary, everyday people seen in different roles: a student, a teacher, a grandmother, a shopkeeper, a villager, among several others. Though writing about the region of great conflict in the Middle East, the occupation of Palestine and the ongoing strife between Palestinians and Israelis is relegated to the background of her works. The overall picture given is of a marginalized nation, diasporized and estranged both outside and inside its own country. Echoes of Edward Said's *Orientalism* are clearly heard in Nye's works, especially in her subtle representation of the hegemonic relation between East and West. Her positive depiction of Palestinians, as will be seen later, also targets subversion of negative stereotyping

of Arabs in European and American cultures.

### 3. CROSSING GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES

In her treatment of multi-ethnicity, Nye adds a new perspective to the portrayal of the diaspora in minority literatures. She deals with an Arab-American who has assimilated Western culture then she goes a step further to show another form of diasporization when the character returns to his Old Country. Such crossing of geographical boundaries has a great influence on the characters. In addition, the writer examines different forms of diasporization through representing a second generation of Arab-American struggling in search for identity in a Middle Eastern environment. Her protagonists' successful articulation of the multiple conflicting facets of their own identities shows hybridity at its positive side. A child (in *Sitti's Secret*) and a teenager (in *Habibi*) having mixed roots experience the reconciliation of two vastly different cultures living side by side within their character: Arab and American, or Eastern and Western. Little Mona's short journey to her father's old village in Ramallah introduces her to the warmth and love of her Arab grandmother, and to the joyful company of her cousins. The child protagonist and her Palestinian cousins are seen as children regardless of their national, linguistic and cultural differences. Mona goes back to the States at the end of the story with a wholesome experience: she has come to grips with the Eastern side of her personality.

*Habibi* explores aspects of identity through Nye's treatment of two types of character involved in the diasporic experience: Poppy, an Arab immigrant to the US, and his daughter Liyana, a second generation of Arab-American who, as the protagonist puts it, "walked a blurry line... [and] tipped from one side to the other" (*Habibi* 125). Poppy's identity as a Palestinian, married to an American and living in the town of St. Louis undergoes a smooth assimilation of Western culture. The problem of identity which Liyana and, to a lesser degree, her brother, Rafik, feel as hybrids uniting two conflicting cultures arises with their father's intended return to his homeland. Identity formation is explored further in the novel as the writer portrays different characters. Sitti, Liyana's Arab grandmother, though subjected to Israeli soldiers' oppression, has "never lost... peace inside" (247). Susan, Poppy's American wife, is open to Eastern culture and finds no difficulty in adjusting to life in Palestine. Khalid, a refugee boy born and brought up in a camp, has a firm belief in peace. Omer, a Jewish teenager with an

admirable character, lives contentedly in the country where his people are seen as oppressors.

In an attempt to reinstate the peaceful past prior to 1946 for younger generations, Nye gives a revisionist view of the history of Palestine through the story of the background of her diasporic character, Poppy. The personal story of his migration is given magnitude by merging it with the history of his nation. By doing so, she also gives history a new, personal perspective. Both Poppy's story of migration and the history of the conflict in Palestine are woven together in the essay Liyana writes as a school assignment. Furthermore, the story of the diasporization of Poppy's family is told within this revisionist framework of the history of his home country. Authenticity is maintained through the emphasis on the reliability of the human source of details: at intervals, Liyana repeats, "That's a direct quote" (*Habibi* 29), and "I'm just telling you what my father told me" (31), thus showing her father to be her authentic reference. This is in keeping with Nye's belief in humanity and the power of human voices to create understanding.

Liyana's essay reveals deep cultural conflicts between East and West. It is administered by her American history teacher, Mr. Hathaway, who can be seen as representing Western culture and though upholding a stiff colonial attitude, he is here ready to hear the point of view of "the other." He invites the protagonist to write about the country she will go to in order to show why people "have had so much trouble acting *civilized* over there" (*Habibi*, 27). Implications of the teacher's biased attitude towards Easterners are clear in his accusation of what he considers to be uncivilized actions. The protagonist nervously challenges this attitude, though not showing favoritism to one combating group over the other. She points out, "Just look at the front page of any newspaper... Look at the words--for what people do: *attack, assault, molest, devastate, infiltrate*" (27). The teacher, however, shows readiness to listen to "the other's" point of view; he directs Liyana, "Interview your father..., make some informal notes,... no encyclopedias for this. It may be your last chance to get extra credit, you know" (28). Though he is here referring to school work and grading, his words are resonant with deeper meaning; Liyana's last chance to tell her ancestors' first-hand story from their perspective before leaving the States may give them "extra credit" of Western understanding and compassion.

The story is eloquently and simply summarized to fit the young persona's perspective. Basic historical details are fused into a retelling of the suffering of common people and

their emotions. Liyana reports that as a child, her father lived in the Old City of Jerusalem and he used to play joyfully with his multi-racial friends trading desserts without thinking of their racial differences. Nye refers the onset of the political strife between Arabs and Jews back to the end of British colonial rule showing it as a point of history. Without directly blaming the colonizer for the conflict, she hints at the fact that the question of national identity arose after the occupier's departure. As a result, Arabs and Jews conflicted over having control of the country. Other countries, especially the United States became involved and military actions began ripping the country apart. When the Jewish politician, Golda Meir, the narration goes on, "said Palestinian people never existed even though there were hundreds of thousands of them living all around her" (*Habibi* 29), the situation worsened. People were killed and life there became difficult for ordinary men; Arabs, Jews, Greeks prayed for peace.

On the personal level of the story, there is also suffering and loss. As a child, Poppy's best friend was killed while sitting on a bench next to him, which was a traumatic experience Poppy never got over. His family's house was almost blown up so they left Jerusalem to find refuge in a small village, but when they got back, their house was "occupied" by Jewish soldiers and their belongings were ravished, so they moved to the village of Ramallah. Though against his family's wish, Poppy applied for a scholarship "to get out of the mess" (*Habibi* 30). Despite those grim and sorrowful details, Nye ends the narration of the history of Palestine in a hopeful tone reflecting her character's rising optimism; Liyana reports, "Only recently he grew hopeful about Jerusalem and his country again. Things started changing for the better. Palestinians had public voices again" (31). This optimistic tone will, however, be challenged when the story continues after Poppy's return home.

Unlike the majority of Arab-American literary works that focus on the process of assimilation itself, Nye portrays her character after achieving assimilation. Both biographical and fictional works of well-known writers, such as Elmaz Abinader, *Children of the Roojme: A Family's Journey from Lebanon* (1991), and Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz* (1993) depict the challenging struggle of resolving the dilemma of being torn between two cultures (Cherif: 2003, 207). Having in mind the age group she addresses, Nye only gives glimpses of the dilemma in the novel and in different poems. For instance, the cause of Poppy's immigration to the States is justifiably explained to be both a personal desire to attain academic fulfillment through the study of medicine, and an

escape from a political conflict in his homeland which was intolerably devastating to him. Few details are given about the type of life he leads; for instance, there is one reference in the novel to his career: he is a physician specializing in the care of elderly people. Judging by his relation to his family members, we realize that he is leading a contented existence. Nye's diaspora is happily married to an American; has two children and the family leads a blissful life full of emotional and intellectual nourishment. He fits well in that small, friendly American town of St. Louis which bears no ethnic prejudice towards its multi-racial inhabitants. As a result, Poppy does not seem to suffer feelings of displacement or difference which new immigrants often fall prey to.

Poppy's successful diasporic experience springs mainly from a process of assimilating Western culture while retaining some ties to his Arab roots. His national identity has, however, to be reshaped; some aspects of that identity are lost in the process of adjusting to a new culture. The first aspect of his national identity that undergoes change is his name. After his migration, Dr. Kamal Abboud acquires a new Western name: he is called "Poppy" throughout the novel and retains this name even after going back to his home country. Though this name change can be seen as a betrayal of his national identity, it may reflect a wish on his part to fit into the new Western environment. In their study of the Palestinian diaspora, Alfonso, et al. (2003) support this argument shedding light on its deeper cause:

[S]tereotyping members of the Palestinian diaspora collectively as terrorists may... have the opposite effect: in order to escape such gratuitous inculpation, members of minority groups often attempt to get out from under the diasporic embrace by assimilating culturally as quickly as possible, weakening their connections with fellow ethnics, adopting the religion of the hostland majority, and even changing their names. Escape is of course more difficult, if not impossible, where there are physiognomic impediments, as in the case of Africans, Indians and East Asians; and it is for that reason that these minorities tend to retain their diasporic identities much longer. (22)

Nye's Palestinian character manages to escape what the critics describe as "the diasporic embrace;" he has few Arab friends, shows readiness to fulfill quick cultural assimilation, adopts the creed of what he defines as universal truth and discards his Arabic name for an English one. Furthermore, unlike diasporas belonging to other nations, he does not have

"physiognomic impediments" to achieving quick assimilation. In the case of his children, however, naming reflects cultural hybridity within the family: one has a Western name while the other bears an Arabic one, *Rafik*--meaning mate or friend.

Naming as an aspect of identity also appears in defining Poppy's country which is more problematic; it can be seen as reflecting the critical position of Palestine and Palestinians in modern history. The national identity of his homeland, like his own, is at risk of being lost between names. The name she has been known by, namely Palestine, is shown to be related to the past. On their arrival at the Tel Aviv airport, Poppy's family has trouble with the new name for the country, Israel. The narrator explains, "Why? Because Poppy had always, forever and ever, called it Palestine. Why wouldn't he? That's what he called it as a little boy" (*Habibi* 36). Connecting the name Palestine to the remote, pre-industrial past is also indicated in an episode describing Liyana's sightseeing the Old City in Jerusalem; "on some dusty black-and-white postcards put on sale, the name Palestine instead of Israel appeared and showed pictures of the desert, camels, donkeys, the River Jordan and Bedouins in tents" (121).

Furthermore, various descriptive designations are given to Palestine indicating the "othering" of the country which entails loss of a national identity. It becomes an indefinite, unnamed place whose means of identification are remoteness from the Western "centre" in addition to its multi-ethnic, combating dwellers. Before visiting her ancestors' land, Liyana, who has a Western upbringing, refers to it as "the other side of the ocean" (*Habibi* 21) implying both physical and emotional distance. She describes Jerusalem as "her dad's hometown" (21) which gives it a personal identity. To her American school friend, Sandee Lane, it is "Jesus' hometown" (21) indicating the spiritual and historical magnitude of the land. The history teacher identifies Palestine as being "a big part of religious history and constantly in the news" (27). The designation the Middle East itself which appears in Nye's works, as Joanna Kadi contends, is given to the region by Western colonizers who see the region as it relates to their worldview; it is situated to the east of where "the centre" lies (xix). Such indeterminacy of name makes the land lose its identity especially when compared to the place of Liyana's birth which is referred to using a fixed, definite name, "the United States" and a positive description, "America the Beautiful" (*Habibi* 3).

At the same time, Nye stresses the historical multi-

ethnicity of Palestine through those names and designations. In a 1926 book entitled *Life in Palestine When Jesus Lived*, which Liyana comes across at the American library in Jerusalem, she reads that "the people were constantly at work.... How many languages were spoken, what differences of color, look, habit, manner, dress, must have been seen!" (*Habibi* 193). The author's aim lies in paving the way for the possibility of coexistence of different ethnic groups in present-day Palestine. She resorts to the past to find solutions for the ethnic struggle over the land, inviting readers to attempt reliving that blissful past. This is indicated in Liyana's suggested name for the country; she believes the country namers should have made "a combo" word such as "Is-Pal" or "Pal-Is" in order to indicate its multiculturalism. The irony of the second suggested name, which the protagonist prefers, is revealed in the conversation with her brother. "Pals" meaning friends does not fit the current relationship between the two conflicting groups of dwellers. "And Pal-Is sounds like palace--but they don't even have a king. Do you think they would have been better off with kings?" (37). The protagonist's innocent question could have deeper political undertones related to systems of government.

In sketching the character of the diaspora, Nye sheds light on those aspects of Poppy's national identity which he had to revise in order to fit into Western society. Though young Palestinians often dress in clothes similar to those of Westerners, we are told that Poppy has brought his father's *kaffia* and cloak to America. Obviously, national dress maintains the diaspora's sense of belonging; thus it is kept for its symbolic significance rather than actual use. When Poppy once puts on traditional Arab costume, it is meant as an effective tool to combat prejudice against minorities. By wearing his father's costume when receiving missionary women, Poppy intends to attest their tolerance and conviction in the universality of faith--a test which they fail to pass.

Poppy's assimilation also affects another aspect of his national identity, namely the use of his native tongue. As reflected in the works under study, the use of Arabic is restricted to few words, mainly food and forms of address; he calls his children by Arabic words of endearment, *habibi* and *habibti*, which stress the emotional side of Arabs as seen in Nye's works. Arabic words also appear phonemically represented and italicized in the texts when typical Eastern dishes are mentioned: *baklava*, *falafel*, *humus*, etc. In *19 Varieties*, the persona's father keeps emotional links with his native culture through the use of Arabic:

He sang with abandon,  
 combing his black, black hair.  
 Each morning in the shower,  
 first in Arabic, rivery ripples  
 of song carrying him back  
 to his first beloved land,  
 then in English, where his repertoire  
 was short. ("What Kind of Fool Am I?" 8)

As the lines above show, the Arabic language is not used to communicate with fellow ethnics; it reflects Poppy's unconscious desire to retain his national identity. In the novel, however, we do not hear him use Arabic, and he only starts teaching his family few words of Arabic when they move to Palestine in order to help them get around. As for Poppy himself, he uses his mother tongue with his people when he returns home, and works as an interpreter for his American family.

Nye places great emphasis on cuisine and food symbolism through which she reflects Poppy's attachment to his native culture. Traditional Arabic cuisine becomes part of the Abbouds' daily life in the States. It is an aspect of national identity which Nye's character strongly maintains. Coming home one day and catching the smell of garlic and pine nuts fried in olive oil, he holds "his nose up to the air, saying, 'There it is, there's my country' " (*Habibi* 12). The protagonist affirms that she knew nothing of her father's country except "the skillet of olive oil" (12). Poppy drinks Arabic coffee in his favorite spot in the garden, while a whole poem in the anthology is assigned for this traditional drink. Sensory images related to food abound in both Nye's poetry and fiction: "*The city was a cake made of layers of time*" (67). Olives, pine nuts, grapes, zucchini, and figs are recurrent symbols of the Middle East in her poetry. "My Father and the Fig Tree" reveals the symbolic significance of the fig:

There in the middle of Dallas, Texas,  
 a tree with the largest, fattest,  
 sweetest figs in the world.  
 'it's a figtree song!' he said,  
 plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,  
 emblems, assurance

Of a world that was always his own. (*19 Varieties* 7)

Despite his successful assimilation, Poppy never loses emotional ties to his homeland, which can be seen as a way of retaining aspects of his national identity. Physical distance from Palestine does not keep Poppy from maintaining a sense of compassion for the suffering of Palestinians. Liyana reports, "It was hard for him to watch the evening news all

these years. Sometimes the Middle East segment shows people he knows" (*Habibi* 31). The little boy in the poem entitled "Peace" touches the same "chipped wall" on his way to school every day and as an old man living outside his country he misses that "chipped wall" which becomes the object of his yearning (*19 Varieties* 112).

The return home, which features as a common motif in Arab-American literature (Cherif 210), carries deeper significance for the Palestinian diaspora as "the homeland is not so much a territorial or topographic entity as a moral destination" (Hammer and Schulz: 2003, 10). In *Habibi*, homecoming functions as an important aspect of the diasporic experience. Poppy's sense of belonging to his Old Country is revealed in his decision to return home; it is also reflected in the determination to take his children to the land of their ancestors. Such a decision is, however, neither sudden nor uncalculated on the part of Poppy. Breaking the news of the return to his children, he explains, "I never planned to be an immigrant forever. I never thought I'd become a citizen" (3). Choice of that particular stage of their life is also convincingly justified; since his children are going to new schools, Poppy assumes they will not feel a big change.

Nye shows the emotional state involved in the preparation for the return indicating both excitement and anxiety. Liyana observes that her father "was walking differently. His stride had a new lift in it" (*Habibi* 11). Indications of anxiety such as silent spells, absent-mindedness and neglect of appearance could obviously be discerned. Furthermore, reading news of demonstrations in Palestine now makes him very nervous. Noticing this change in his behavior, his clever daughter asks whether he is reconsidering his decision of going back home, but he answers, "No,... I was just thinking about... how I like doing this" (11). Poppy's return is shown to mirror a similar tension which overcomes his wife who is leaving her home country to the Middle East--an opposite journey to Poppy's. In this way, the writer explores the experience further through a different perspective.

The emotional intensity of Poppy's wish to relive his first journey to the US is paramount. He retraces his steps as he first arrived to New York nineteen years ago letting his family share his first impressions. Through a short but highly effective flashback, Poppy recaptures for the readers the first encounter with Western culture. Arriving at New York, he experienced contradictory feelings: familiarity with the American symbol of freedom and estrangement by industrial advancement. He was well acquainted with the

Statue of Liberty through pictures; therefore, the Western epitome of freedom was to him Miss Liberty who, "like an old girlfriend," held her hand up to welcome him. At the same time, young Poppy who came from the village of Ramallah thought hot dogs were made of dog meat; he also mistook shiny trashcans for mailboxes.

While Nye does not focus on Poppy's process of assimilating Western culture, the testing of his acquired cultural identity after returning to his homeland is a central theme in the novel. Here she attempts to "advance revisionary versions of cultural identity" which Katharine Smith regards as one of the essential issues minority literature should target (3). Clashes between Poppy's old identity, which is aroused by the return, and the assimilated one ensue. After coming to grips with his new Western identity, Poppy has to face the challenge of attesting that new identity at a different setting. The first test he faces is at the airport where his national identity as a Palestinian is questioned. Disregarding the information given in Poppy's papers that indicate length of stay to be "indefinitely," the Israeli customs officer asks how long he planned to stay in the country. In a high pitched voice, Poppy answers, "I happen to be from *here*..." (*Habibi* 35).

In addition, cultural conflicts become paramount after his return home. His assimilation of Western culture has made him shake off customs and traditions that were incongruous with his identity as a modern educated man living in the West. On coming back, however, he has to face his family's emotionalism, superstition, and old customs. For instance, Poppy feels outraged when his elder brother asks for Liyana's hand for his son on their second visit to Ramallah. He flares, "We do not embrace such archaic customs... does she look ready to be married? She is fourteen years old" (*Habibi* 60). He also expresses annoyance at his large family's continuous demand of money and gifts. When a distant, unrecognized relative stays at his house all day insisting to have her conventional gift of a dress, Poppy emphatically explains to his children that "[t]he old customs have to be changed..." (82). At the same time, Poppy tries to discard Western behavior that clashes directly with what is seen as "conservative" Eastern codes. While living in the States, Liyana could wear shorts, but she is not allowed to take them with her to Palestine; she is also scolded for combing her hair in the balcony of their flat in Jerusalem, an attitude which reveals double standards in dealing with cultural conflicts.

A major source of anxiety for Poppy is his children's confrontation with Eastern culture. The clash between his

own native culture which has not been adequately introduced to them and American culture which shapes their identity may result in difficulty or even failure of assimilation of Arab culture. On arriving at the hotel in Tel Aviv, Poppy, forewarns his children before meeting their Palestinian grandmother, "Remember, Sitti comes from a different world. She is very--earthy. She... wear[s]... old-fashioned long clothes.... She may seem strange to you. You won't understand her. I'll translate..." (*Habibi* 39). What Poppy seems to do here is to project a picture of his mother as seen through his Western identity in order to prepare his children for cultural differences they are about to encounter.

Poppy's eagerness to introduce his children to their ancestors' culture produces the opposite result. After settling in Palestine, Poppy takes his family on a tour of the Old City of Jerusalem which represents his country's past and its universal heritage. He walks them around the whole area for several hours until they are very exhausted and hungry. The children's impression is not as he has expected; Liyana asks her father, "Isn't history better in small doses?" (*Habibi* 72). Mrs. Abboud reacts differently; she overwhelmingly identifies with the sanctity of the holy places, thus she repeatedly breaks into tears and the failure of the tour is aggravated.

Despite such clashes, Poppy's sense of content at returning to his native country is clearly felt. Nostalgic memories of well-known places along with a strong sense of belonging are evoked when coming back to those places. Going to Ramallah after a nineteen-year-long absence, the returnee remembers landmarks: the garden where he had a party after graduating from high school and the shoemaker's shop that has been there since his birth. As they arrive to his old house, Poppy keeps saying, "We're here!" (*Habibi* 53), both in English and Arabic. Dining with his wife and children at his favorite restaurant in the Old City of Jerusalem, Poppy observes, "Being here with you all, I feel my heart has come back into my body" (74).

In her attempt to subvert the stereotype of the Palestinian as terrorist which prevails in the States, the author manipulates the returnee's attitude towards the political crisis in his homeland to an extent of making him seem insensitive to his country's plight. Poppy remains a bystander in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians even after Israeli soldiers ravish his mother's house. Later in the novel, he starts reacting when the life of a human being is at stake. When a soldier attempts to shoot Khalid, a refugee boy, Poppy obstructs the soldier--an act which results in his imprisonment. Furthermore, seeing the suffering of

Palestinians in prison instigates his involvement; as soon as he is released, he becomes an activist. People's suffering becomes a reality to him and not a story in the Middle East segment on the CNN. His involvement, however, takes the form of working through peaceful channels; he begins writing letters to people in charge in order to improve conditions at prison.

Through delineating her Palestinian character as educated, rational, peace-loving and in harmony with Western culture, the writer attempts to subvert negative images of Arabs which, as Said explains, have shifted from one negative picture to another in Occidental culture: "a camel-riding nomad," "a colorful scoundrel," "a rich sheik," "owner of oil wells," "anti-Zionist" among others (285-86). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the new image of "a terrorist" has been added to this long list. In her literary representation of the Middle East, Nye works against such stereotyping, while often retaining an objective voice inviting readers to judge for themselves. She states, "[T]he sense of wanting a positive image of Palestinians or Palestinian Americans to come forth through the simple story and appealing characters in *Habibi* was definitely part of my writing consciousness--but I didn't want it to be rhetorical, or a soapbox, or a didactic position, simply an intrinsic one" (Castro: 2002, 208).

To achieve this goal, however, Nye appropriates her character to an extent that he loses his identity as an Arab and becomes very westernized. Dr. Abboud's smooth assimilation of American culture affects his identity to the extent that the reader discerns very little difference between Poppy and, say, his American wife. Nevertheless, the positive aspect of the writer's delineation of Palestinians is that she "humanizes" Arabs in the eyes of American readers showing them as human beings with feelings, aspirations and traditions, much similar to the readers. By doing so, she controverts the "dehumanizing" of the Orient in American awareness which modern social science in the States propagates (Said, 291). To a great extent, Nye succeeds in showing her characters as human beings worthy of respect and understanding.

#### 4. CROSSING PSYCHOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Though Poppy's diasporic experience is a major issue in a postcolonial reading of *Habibi* and *19 Varieties*, it is Liyana's search for identity that takes centre stage in the novel. Nye shows the duality within a hybrid personality while, at the same time, she emphasizes the sense of what

Homi Bhabha terms as "in-betweenness" ("Cultures in-between," *passim*). The author's treatment of hybridity and the state of being "in-between" in the case of a teenager adds a new perspective to this central theory in postcolonial discourse; it also necessitates resolving the problem at the end of the novel when the protagonist reaches a reconciliation of the two sides forming her identity. Identity crisis becomes highly climactic for fourteen-year-old Liyana as it manifests itself on several levels: cultural, ethnic, territorial and psychological. Liyana Abboud faces a traumatic challenge; her very presence epitomizes opposites as she represents two hegemonic cultures, two different races, two divided hemispheres with several boundaries setting them apart. In addition, being a teenager, she comes in-between two phases of life--childhood and adulthood.

In *Habibi*, Nye shows hybridity to be an asset rather than a threat. Her protagonist is delineated as an admirable character who successfully manages her identity crisis. Poppy realizes that his children's mixed origin adds to their personality, thus he wants them "to know both sides of their history and become the fully rounded human beings they were destined to be" (3). When younger, Liyana thought of their mixed origin as giving them "doubled lives" (3), but as a teenager, she becomes conscious of duality. With this sense of difference comes dissatisfaction and indeterminacy. She expresses these feelings eloquently when she tells her father:

'I'm half-half, woman-girl, Arab-American, a mixed breed like those wild characters that ride ponies in the cowboy movies Rafik likes to watch. The half-breeds are always villains or rescuers, never anybody normal or in between.' (20)

Here, the protagonist mirrors an unrealistic picture American media propagates of people of mixed origin as being different and as standing at two polar extremes. Like other minority writers, Nye aims to teach her readers empathy and tolerance of ethnic minorities (Castro, 226). By doing so, she achieves an essential message which ethnic American children's literature targets: "to react against essentialization and the 'othering' of ethnic experience" (Smith, 4-5). The danger of forming such concepts lies in creating distance and misunderstanding between ethnic groups--attitudes minority literature subverts.

Nye's presentation of hybridity brings her closer to her Arab-American predecessors who advocate biculturalism. According to Salwa Cherif, the very presence of hybrids "make[s] a useful acknowledgement of the existence of differences and similarities that both divide and unite people

and testify to a beneficial openness to difference which people who straddle two cultures, who 'see far more than most ever do'..., have easier chances of achieving" ( 210). This is true of Nye's protagonist who at kindergarten "knew *indivisible* when her friends thought it was *invisible*..." (*Habibi* 182). The choice of word is significant; while stressing the protagonist's intelligence, it also foreshadows Liyana's success in bringing the two conflicting sides of her identity together to make an "indivisible" self.

*Habibi* focuses on the psychological difficulties involved in the protagonist's adjustment to the Arab side of her identity which entails assimilation of a new family, country, language, and customs. Therefore, Liyana's struggle to achieve identity formation is highly challenging. With the sensitivity of a poet, and the authenticity of autobiographical detail, the writer draws a vivid picture of a teenager caught up in-between the two conflicting cultures that lie at the core of her identity. The protagonist only reaches a reconciliation of the two sides of her dual identity after a long process of suffering entailing a remodeling of the Western side of her character and a willingness to understand her emerging Eastern side.

Liyana Abboud's identity as an American teenager is well established at the beginning of the novel. Born to an American mother and being brought up in St. Louis, Texas make her assimilate Western culture, thus her belonging to that quiet peaceful American atmosphere which represents the "centre" is guaranteed. As long as Liyana remains within that "centre," her latent "other" side is marginalized. At the exposition of the novel, she is swiftly introduced as an intelligent, sensitive teenager leading an exciting life; she fits well in the social structure of home, school and neighborhood while successful school achievement adds to the portrayal of a happy young protagonist. Her new emotional attachment to a boyfriend at school ties her further to this place and its culture. Despite her awareness of having Arab roots, she has no feelings of ethnic difference for she is seen as part of that American society. Liyana seems content with her identity as an American girl having Arab ancestry. With this reassuring sense of belonging and sameness comes a smooth process of identity formation.

Nevertheless, the decision of moving to Palestine, which entails a departure from the "centre" and a disturbance to her identity formation, leads Liyana to what her mother adequately describes as "the crossroads" of her life. Such a decision threatens her sense of belonging and tests her readiness to embrace a new culture. When hearing this decision, she argues, " May be it's a bad idea" (*Habibi* 2).

The shock of the news resembles the devastation of undergoing a car accident last winter. When she arrives to Palestine, she dreams of being pushed on her sled down the steepest hill in Forest Park which signifies being forced to go into a difficult, painful experience she is not ready for.

To be torn off the culture and place of her birth in order to identify with "the other" unfamiliar culture to her puts the protagonist to a traumatic experience. It makes her lose her sense of identity and suffer a conflict often experienced by minorities--in this case both half-breeds and, in a sense, teenagers. Literary allusions to well-known works for young people heighten the inner conflict Liyana undergoes. She identifies with the persona of her favorite poem, Emily Dickenson's "I'm Nobody, Who Are You?" (*Habibi* 14), and with the hero of Margaret Wise Brown's story, "The Dog That Belonged to Himself" (128). A strong sense of loss of identity is powerfully evoked through these apt allusions to two young heroes in the midst of an identity crisis.

Furthermore, the writer arouses readers' sympathy with Liyana through showing her strong sense of belonging to her birthplace, which is upset by her departure. Her familiarity with the smallest details of St. Louis together with the strong attachment to familiar places are powerfully established. Before leaving her hometown, she says goodbye to "the third step outside the school cafeteria," "the chute at the library" and "the fragrant pine needles on the trees" along the road to school (*Habibi* 22). Nye delineates small spatial details to establish her protagonist's sense of belonging to the physical aspects of place, which in turn heightens its psychological impact:

She knew the bush with red berries.... She knew which bus number to take downtown....

St. Louis air smelled of tar and doughnuts, old boards washed up out of the muddy river, red bricks, and licorice.... How could Liyana give all this up? She knew what grass smelled like, a rich brew of dirt and green roots, right after rain. (9)

This quiet Texan town evokes the Western backdrop of Liyana's environment. In a desperate attempt to retain a mental picture of her homeland, she tries to memorize images of familiar places and natural manifestations: houses on their street, cracked sidewalks, cherry trees, tulip beds and gray pebbles.

What heightens the young protagonist's dilemma is the sense of having to part with her past which is part of her identity. For teenaged Liyana, her childhood is her past and it is an important aspect of the present. Hence, going through the agony of the garage sale is highly disturbing. Though

unwillingly, she has to relinquish what she describes as "childhood treasures," which refer to objects that have been stored away for years such as the blue bicycle, the Mexican china tea set, the tangled-haired dolls, the pink diary with a key. Having to part with those representations of her childhood signifies loss of identity which formulated over fourteen years of belonging and identification.

Equally disturbing to the natural process of identity realization are feelings of loneliness, longing, estrangement and homesickness that overcome the protagonist when plucked out of her environment to live in another completely unfamiliar country. These feelings are stressed both as an aspect of a diasporic experience and a reflection of the sensitivity of the young protagonist. After moving to Palestine, "[f]or the first time, Liyana felt totally alone" (*Habibi* 99). Memories of places and people in St. Louis haunt her. When removed from Western culture, she misses the very small indications of that culture such as drinking spicy cider out of Mrs. Mannino's painted cups with Claire and Kelly, her old friends, and listening to her grandmother's nursery rhymes. The pathos aroused by her longing is successfully wrought out: remembering "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick" the protagonist bitterly wonders, "Where was Jack now? Was his candle all burned out?" (108).

Every experience Liyana goes through is interpreted through the consciousness of her former identity. She felt the sea breezes of the Mediterranean "were coming from another world" (*Habibi* 99), meaning her homeland. When sick with fever, she thinks of her friends back home: "this is the same sun that strokes the faces of [her] old friends back in [her] earlier world.... What was Claire doing at this moment?" (142). Even at moments when Liyana feels happy, she thinks of home: the patterned wooden table at Abo Mustafa's café where she sat blissfully with Omer reminds her of currents in the Mississippi River. The narrator projects those feelings by asking, "Would she ever smell that muggy air again?" (154). Liyana falls in love with the green lamp at the Sandrounis' ceramic shop because its color reminds her of the grass back home. Again, the narrator wonders, "Who ever thought about grass when you had it? Who ever thought about missing a *color*?" (127-28).

Her strong nostalgia arouses her sense of neglect by her old friends back home, which in turn adds to her agony. They do not show the feelings she expects of them; their few, long-awaited letters are brief and devoid of strong feelings: "she *did* want people to like and miss her. She wanted more letters stacking up in Postal Box Number 898

that said, 'Nothing is the same without you' and 'Please come home soon' She pretended they were on their way" (*Habibi* 147-48). Liyana falls prey to such feelings that stand in the way of her assimilation of Eastern culture.

One of the obstacles that intensify the protagonist's dilemma is the marginalization she faces at the Armenian school in Jerusalem where the school principal considers her "an outsider" (*Habibi* 78). Though her name comes alphabetically at the top of the list, it is listed last; she was "the P.S. in the roll book" (115). Sensing Liyana's difference, her schoolmates teasingly add the suffix "-ian" to her family name, so that "Abboudian" would sound like Hagobian, Melosian and other Armenian names. The fact that the school is trilingual, while Liyana speaks English only distances her further. Moreover, the writer stresses Liyana's difference in terms of character. Her courage, liveliness and sense of humor contrast with the rigidity of the school system and its rule-abiding students. Nevertheless, the protagonist learns coexistence with Armenian schoolmates and is, therefore, appointed honorary Armenian citizen.

Nye tries to examine her protagonist's overemphasis on place as being part of one's identity, which is a focal issue in postcolonialism:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Indeed, critics such as D. E. S. Maxwell have made this the defining model of post-coloniality.... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. (Ashcroft, et al., eds: 1989, 7)

Similarly, when Nye's young protagonist suffers displacement, her sense of place in relation to identity is intensified. Living contentedly in St. Louis, she used to believe that "[y]our country could be an age not a place: she felt she had passed her own country already" (*Habibi* 12). After leaving her birthplace, her sense of displacement makes her change this view; she now thinks that "a place is inside you--like a part of your body.... Like a liver or

kidney? So how could you leave it? It sounds like big trouble to me.... Do you think you can get your kidney back?" (154). When starting to come into grips with her real identity, Liyana realizes that one's birthplace does not necessarily give one a fixed identity. In keeping with the postcolonial idea of the relation of self-awareness and displacement, the narrator observes, "Some people let their countries become their religions and that didn't work either. Liyana thought it would never happen to her" (182). Eventually, she develops a broader concept of place and culture which reflects the author's message; she is satisfied with having "two countries" (267) indicating acceptance of hybridity.

With the shift to a new place, other aspects of the conflict of displacement arise. Feelings of estrangement heighten self-realization, thus Liyana wonders, "Who would they be if they had to start all over again?" (Habibi 5). On meeting her Arab relatives in Jerusalem, she feels emotionally estranged; "they were *here* but no one really knew her here, no one knew what she liked, or who her friends had been, or how funny she could be if she had any idea what was going on. She would have to start from scratch"(53). Ignorance of Eastern culture aggravates her sense of estrangement; on the linguistic level, hearing her name mentioned in her relatives' Arabic conversation feels "like a little window. But she couldn't see through it" (55).

Spatial transference to her ancestors' homeland awakens the latent "other" side of her self making her experience duality. When her father identifies his native country in the smell of Eastern food, she wonders, "Well, where was hers? Was she on the verge of finding out?" (Habibi 12). Links to the culture of her descent are very vague: a picture of Sitti she keeps in her wallet, a resemblance to her in creative talent, and Arabic dishes familiar to the family. Since second generation Arab American do not have the memories their immigrant parents have of the homeland, "their attachment to Palestine is in a sense built on myths and stories" (Hammer and Schulz: 2003, 207). In Liyana's case, being a half-Arab distances her further from her father's homeland.

Consciousness of the Arab side of her identity, however, starts to arise after the decision to move to Palestine: when packing her childhood belongings to get ready for the journey, she finds the red velvet embroidered dress sent by her "faraway" relatives which makes her reflect that "[n]ow she is going to meet the fingers that knotted the thread" (18). This realization of her ethnic identity leads to her categorization of people into ethnic groups. To Liyana, her own mother is now identified as unquestionably "American"

while she sees herself as a "half caste." At the same time, the protagonist is frustrated to overhear her father tell his Arab relatives, "We are Americans," so she wonders, "Americans? Even Poppy, who was always an Arab before?" (124).

Moving to the Middle East sets Liyana's identity formation on the right path. Despite early conflict, the protagonist learns the value of cultural hybridity and transnationalism. She has first to undergo "changing her life" (Habibi 9) which entails going through a transitional stage of loss of old ethnic identity. This is represented in the first meeting between Liyana and Omer, the Jewish boy who becomes her friend. As she follows some European tourists into the Sandrounis' ceramic shop, he asks her, "You are not--with them?... You are--with who? "... I am with myself," (128) indicating her wish not to be put to ethnic categorization. Omer, whose character closely resembles Liyana's, answers, "I'm also with myself.... I like to be with--myself" (128). A significant metaphor of this transitional stage is her new room in Jerusalem which stands in direct contrast with her room in St. Louis. The former is white with undecorated walls while the latter has a deep raisin color and decorated walls that looked like an art gallery. She "thought she'd try living with blank walls for a month or two. It was just an experiment" (66). This experiment comes as a step towards identity realization and proves to be fruitful for Liyana.

Consciousness of the Arab side of her identity actually begins when she starts to get involved in everyday existence of Palestinians. Paradoxically, the drastic encounter with Jewish hatred and prejudice in the Old City arouses her sense of belonging to Palestinians. She chooses to identify with the assaulted Palestinian spice-seller, Bassam, who is kind, tolerant and well informed rather than with the impudent Jewish passer-by who mistakes her to be Jewish thus warns her against Bassam calling him "an animal." In a violent tone, he orders Liyana to buy from the "better stores in [their] part of town" (Habibi 95). Enraged but speechless, she ponders, "I'm an animal too. Oh! I'm so proud to be an animal, too" (95). Nye prepares the readers for the emotional intensity of the incident by an argumentative introduction on anger. She explains the conflict in Jerusalem from the human aspect as resulting from old, long-kept anger in the hearts of its dwellers. In her view, this negative feeling fills the city and heightens the conflict. The incident she weaves in the chapter is a good example.

The protagonist's involvement in the Palestinian resistance of oppression does not take the form of violence. After a period of standing as a bystander, Liyana becomes

involved in the conflict when Israeli soldiers shoot her friend, Khalid, and imprison her father for standing in the way. At the prison, she boldly condemns the soldiers' atrocities. The author also advocates her message to her young readers by showing Khalid's conviction in peace even after being wrongfully subjected to oppression. In *Varieties*, Nye shows young people negotiating peace in the most drastic conditions: as Israeli soldiers dig trenches and moats to put Palestinians under a siege in their towns, the poet suggests exchanging positions between occupier and occupied as a way of achieving compassion, which will eventually lead to peace:

There is a language  
between two languages  
called Mean but who will admit  
they are speaking it?  
"Let's change places," the teenagers said.  
"For a week, I'll be you and you be me."  
Knowing if they did, they could never fight  
again.

Listen to them. ("Trenches and Moats", 117-18)

These harsh realities of Palestinians' everyday life under occupation, "described just sharply enough without altering her non-abrasive tone, provide the first glimpse of harsh Israeli military occupation... to appear in mainstream literature for young Americans" (Marston: 2004, 4). The writer, however, tries to remain objective and not to take sides; she gives glimpses of violence and hatred on both sides asking her readers to help stop the terrible "wheel of violence" which will never be stopped by standing in front of it. Such a message can be seen to contrast with the postcolonial doctrines of resistance and opposition which mark the rise of the theory in the 1970s and 80s. While writers called for resistance of occupation and retaliation to oppression, Nye suggests putting an end to fighting and violence which have proved futile. In this way, she seems to belong to what can be seen as a later stage of postcolonialism which is less passionate and more peace oriented. The type of resistance she advocates is the pacifist, legitimate resistance such as that Liyana practices after the imprisonment of her father.

## 5. CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

In *Habibi*, Nye manipulates her protagonist's conflict carefully in order to give an example of successful assimilation and thus promote her belief in multiculturalism—another issue that is alien to postcolonial discourse.

Liyana's openness to the experience of a new culture helps her embrace that culture while retaining her own. As long as Liyana observes distance between her and her Arab culture, she remains outside it. Her refusal of Sitti's invitation to sleep over at the village signifies refusal to cast aside her dominant Western self and open up for experiencing cultural hybridity. As a result, she fails to bring the two sides of her identity in harmony and her search for her real identity flounders. Only when she goes through the experience of spending time in Ramallah does she grasp the essence of her Arab heritage. In sharing Sitti's daily routine, Liyana experiences a different existence: she sits on a mattress on the floor, makes bread in the taboon (a mounded oven), takes the trip to the spring to fetch water, visits a neighbor and receives traditional gifts. Such an experience proves to be highly gratifying to Liyana; it gives her a sense of freedom.

Through this culturally nourishing experience, the protagonist reaches a stage of reconciliation between the two sides of her character and achieves self-realization. Liyana's success in communicating with her grandmother has deeper significance indicated in the title of the chapter, "Past and Present Rolled into One." The figure of Sitti stands for the past, ancestry, traditions and homeland; so when Liyana communicates successfully with Sitti and develops love and closeness to her grandmother, she achieves identification with her Arab culture. At this point in the process of identity formation, Liyana comes to the realization that she has never felt "a Full and Total American" (Habibi 182)—a realization which gives her the chance to revise her former identity and understand her culturally hybrid individuality.

Making new friendships helps the protagonist adjust to her new environment. Liyana and her brother meet an Arab brother and sister from the refugee camp and through sharing food, games and calamities with these children, they start to be involved in Palestinians' daily existence. Paradoxically, Liyana's emotional attachment to Omer, the Jewish teenager, also helps her realize the Arab side of her identity. At first, this relationship is met with disapproval by their families, but as they come to consider each other away from inherited views, they reach acceptance. By showing the possibility of such understanding between individuals belonging to two combating ethnic groups, Nye invites young people to reconceptualize ethnic relationships under a new light.

Nye encourages multiculturalism through showing her young protagonist to be open to cultures other than the two forming her ethnic identity. Her upbringing has prepared her

to understand diverse cultures: the views endorsed by the Abbouds at home are summarized in their belief that "there must be a *kernel of truth in every avenue*" (Habibi 179). In Palestine, Liyana accepts Armenian culture which is introduced to her through school life; she also experiences Jewish culture through Omer who takes her to the Jewish part of the Old City; they also visit the Jewish museum together and discuss their histories and beliefs. A good example of cultural hybridity is when Omer and Liyana wait in front of the Russian Orthodox Church for Armenian friends to go to a French film at the British library (175).

Nye advocates globalization as a way towards better understanding between people of different ethnic origins, cultures and beliefs. In an interview for Pif online magazine, she explains:

[P]eople who consider the world an interesting place filled with delicious variations always hope to get to know many other people who are unlike themselves in certain ways: different colors or cultures or food-preferences or song-styles or religions. You know, I've never understood the impulse to be with people only like ourselves. How dull that would be.... I would hope that writing for young people might serve as an invitation to get to know some of those other slightly different folks out there in the world--without fear, without ever thinking of "otherness" as a threat. It's a glory, not a threat. We'd have fewer school shootings if kids could remember this. Those people unlike us: how to have empathy with them, for them? Those lives seemingly unlike our own: how are we connected, ultimately? We all sleep, eat, have dreams and loves and hopes and sorrows. I want writing to be connected to all of this. (Castro, 2002, 225)

As indicated here, the writer shows her belief in the value of globalization from a purely humanistic side; but she does not negotiate its political and economical aspects. She aims at bringing people closer together through abolishing both physical and spiritual boundaries and stressing the essential oneness of human experience. As mentioned earlier, though his message does not conform to basic postcolonial issues of division, borders and difference, it can be seen as the writer's proposed solution to the long-going conflict in the Middle East.

Successful characters in Habibi are open to new cultures and are not tied to one place or a fixed identity. Different cultures are represented without hierarchal classification or favoritism. For instance, Poppy who has grown up in the

Eastern part of the world with its special culture has smoothly adopted another when he lived in the West. Susan, his American wife, adjusts well to her new Middle Eastern environment; she looks after her family, achieves a career and pursues her philanthropist activities in Palestine. Liyana and her brother, Rafik, though unprepared for such a major shift in their lives, manage to achieve adjustment after a relatively short time. Liyana finds nourishment for her artistic inclinations in the Old City of Jerusalem; she meets a friend who, though ethnically different, shares her temperament and mentality. The warmth of her new, extended family in the village of Ramallah helps her realize her hybrid identity. She tries to shake off traditionally conceived definitions of identity in terms of ethnicity, nationality, and age in order to develop a cross-cultural, transnational identity.

As a result, Liyana's experience of embracing new cultures through revision of her own identity and exposure to other cultures proves to be enriching and productive. It reflects on her creative sensitivity as an emerging writer. Rafik does not mind shifting his favorite game from baseball to soccer or getting late issues of Star Trek magazine; he has no objection to being one of the few boys studying at a school for girls in Jerusalem. By the end of the novel, Liyana and her brother willingly accept their stay in Jerusalem for good, hence giving the readers good examples of successful assimilation and openness to multiculturalism.

Nye's message of promoting awareness of ethnic minorities and fostering understanding and acceptance of difference among young generations continues to meet plausible reception. In her works for young readers, Nye reflects a firm conviction in multiculturalism; she argues:

[W]e all need to be both bigger and smaller than we are. We are uplifted by one another's cultures, infused, enlarged. Cultures by necessity blend and commingle and enrich and flavor one another.... We may all appreciate one another's cultural traditions and help to be vehicles of traditions not originally our own by blood without having to feel guilty for it. (Castro: 2002, 226)

The understanding among the three friends, Liyana, Khalid and Omer is highly evocative. The three share identical views on peace and they realize their responsibility to write a new story of the land where the two combating ethnic groups get together and forget their differences.

The final chapter adequately shows the successful crossing of political, ideological and psychological boundaries between people of different ethnic origin,

culture, belief, and age group. All major characters: Liyana (second generation Arab-American), Khalid (Palestinian refugee), Omer (Jewish teenager), Sitti (Palestinian grandmother), Poppy (Arab-naturalized American) and Susan (American) sit together in a restaurant by the sea in Galilee. Despite their differences, people share basic human traits and when they show openness to various cultures, boundaries dissolve. Poppy eloquently sums up the author's belief when he tells the principal of the Armenian school, "Let's believe together in a world where no one is inside or outside" (*Habibi* 78).

In conclusion, the foregoing analysis shows that Nye's young-adult literature echoes postcolonial discourse. Basic issues of identity formation, assimilation, diasporization, othering, marginalization, binaries, and cultural hybridity are explored in her fiction and poetry. In this way, her works prove the adaptability of the theory to the literature of young people; at the same time, they place great stress on the humanistic attribute of postcolonialism rather than its political aspect. Nye's call for peace and her message of promoting understanding among different ethnic groups represent a major bend away from postcoloniality as

perceived in its onset towards globalization and transnationalism. Her belief in multiculturalism which is revealed through choice of characters, themes and tone is convincingly advocated.

Nye's works reflect a great sense of responsibility which writers addressing young generations should enjoy in order to bring people closer together through building a sense of enlarged humanity. She stresses the basic similarities between people belonging to different ethnic groups in an attempt to establish good human relations and build bridges of understanding between East and West on one side, and between Arabs and Jews on the other. Amidst present day political strife, violence, and rising conflicts, her message of working for peace might sound too optimistic; yet one feels she is addressing her messages for both present and future generations. Through raising young people's awareness of the necessity for crossing different boundaries –both outer and inner ones–the writer is encouraging future generations to consider their identities within a large frame of mutual understanding. With this message expressed through the literature of young people, one hopes that peace will be foreseeable in the future.

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