

# The Taboos of Occupation in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent* and Naomi Shihab Nye's *Habibi*

Nasayabah Awajan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Language and Literature Department, Middle East University, Jordan

Correspondence: Nasayabah Awajan, English Language and Literature Department, Middle East University, Jordan.

Received: October 26, 2022

Accepted: November 28, 2022

Online Published: November 28, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n1p105

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n1p105>

## Abstract

The study explores the effect of occupation on the occupied population in both Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) and Naomi Shihab Nye's *Habibi* (1999). The impact of occupation is usually thought to be (and quite often are) taboos that cannot easily be revealed by the occupied, and if they are revealed, the audience will end up getting two different versions of the stories - one version from the occupier and the other version from the occupied. Abu Jaber and Nye express the taboos that are a result of the occupation of certain Middle Eastern countries, and more specifically, Iraq and Palestine. This paper attempts to show how both writers reflect which cannot be presented and spoken - the taboos of occupation - in their literary works, *Crescent* and *Habibi*. They even enhance these taboos by presenting them through different characters. There has been much literature written on both works, but there is still a lack in literature discussing how these authors have presented the taboos of occupation in Iraq and Palestine and how these writers took advantage of presenting these taboos through their narratives. Added to that, most of literature that has been written on current novels is about the political issues that these two countries have suffered from rather than the effect of these political issues on the people living in Iraq and Palestine. Second, most of the literature written has tackled each of the author's works alone rather than written on the two novels together.

**Keywords:** occupation, Diana Abu Jaber, Naomi Shihab Nye, Iraq, Palestine

## 1. Introduction

A huge number of studies have recently been conducted on how Arab writers living in diaspora present the Middle East in English, since they are addressing the West, the speakers of English language. They have tackled many themes such as identity, political issues, dislocation and other serious topics that express the Arab issues in diasporic contexts. For example, Gana (2008) raises many themes discussed by Arab writers in diaspora such as "migration", "indigeneity", and "belonging" which are, in the meantime, issues that the Arabs, who live in the West, suffer from as "a source of national anguish, dilemmas, disenchantments and one of the main engines of coercive and discriminatory policies" (p. 13). Many writers and authors have taken the role of introducing the Arabic world and its culture through their writings to the West at a time when migration to the West first began, but it was not until after September 11, 2001 when they started to gain attention and importance (Al-Maleh 2009, p. 1). This has resulted in an increase in the discrimination of Arabs living in the West (Gana 2008, p. 19). This has, in its way, enhanced the previously created and well-known stereotypes about Arabs and how the Westerners view them. Likewise, it also created new and more violent stereotypical images of the Arabs. Furthermore, the Arabs were seen as exotic, different, inferior, irrational, psychologically and mentally weak and backwards, even before they started to be viewed as violent and dangerous. On the other hand, the West presented themselves as superior, rational, psychologically strong and dependent. Here came the role of the Arab writers in diaspora, who use the language of the West to convey the real and right image of the Arabs and their culture. They started to write against the well-known and overused stereotypes that have been circulated about Arabs and their culture (Al-Maleh 2009, p. 1; Gana 2008, p. 18). According to Gana (2008), this has educated many Euro-Americans on who the Arabs and Muslims truly are (19).

The idea of stereotyping was discussed and explored by Said (1978) in his book *Orientalism*. Said set the basis of Orientalism, which is how the West views the East (the Orient). Orientalism is defined by Said as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1978, p. 13). According to Hassan (2011), Said's *Orientalism* has influenced many Arab writers and authors who have adopted the role of interpreters and translators of the stereotypical Arab clichés. Their role has been presented in their discourse (p. 4). The Arab American literary critic Salaita (2007) declares that part of being a nationalist in the USA is to reveal any mischaracterizations about Arabs and renounce these mischaracterizations. He comments on this saying that "I would describe myself to a degree as an Arab-American nationalist in the sense that I believe strongly in the positive attributes of my community and detest intensely any foolhardy argument that we are innate terrorists worthy of continual surveillance [...] there is nothing mysterious or dangerous about Arab Americans" (p. 11). Salaita agrees with Said on the role of Arab writers, especially the ones who live in the West.

The stereotypical images that are recognized not only in the West, but also in the rest of the world have led to many misunderstandings

and false impressions about the Arabs, especially those images related to violence and terrorism. Lebedko (2014) describes stereotypes as “ubiquitous and typologically greatly vary social, cultural, national, territorial, political, gender, etc. The most harmful, prejudicial, hazardous and dangerous are racial and ethnic stereotypes” (p. 179). Rezende (2008) adds that “because stereotypes are based on the distinction between “us” and “them”, they are also used to create self-images, particularly those related to national identities” (p. 107). Gana (2008) states that the image of the Arabs became over-exaggerated only in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 (p. 18).

The reason behind the West’s belief that Arabs are terrorists comes from the previous labeling of the East and the stereotypes attributed to them (Gana 2008, pp. 19 - 20). This could also be the reason why those that are under occupation in the Middle East are viewed as terrorists when trying to resist those that occupy them. It is true that, in Middle Eastern regions such as Palestine and Iraq, the occupied are vilified and called terrorists and violent rather than the occupier. To the mind of the occupiers, this justifies their reasons for oppressing native occupants. The resistance of the indigenous has been circulated and interpreted as being terrorists.

The occupied countries presented in Abu Jaber and Nye’s novels are Iraq and Palestine, respectively. The writers do not mainly focus on the political issues and conflicts in the countries; rather, they focus on presenting the psychological and physical impact of the occupation and the oppression of the indigenous people by the occupiers – aspects of occupation, which are not usually presented as they truly are. Instead, it is usually the resistance of these occupied people that is circulated, exaggerated and maligned as terrorism rather than resistance.

Starting with the trauma of the Palestinian occupation which, since it’s earliest days, has continuously been presented by writers, poets, and artists like Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish and Suleiman Mansour. From their earliest works, these authors, poets, and artists began to reveal the true situations in Palestine rather than present distorted images and impacts of occupation on the Palestinians. Salih and Richter-Devroe (2011) discuss the period between the 1960s and 1970s in Palestine - a period considered revolutionary in their research on Ghassan Kanafani’s literature, Mahmoud Darwish’s poems, and Suleiman Mansour’s paintings. They add that these authors tried to modify the depiction of Palestinians as terrorists because of their resistance and unacceptance of their Israeli occupier. They reflect the trauma of mistreatment both inside and outside their lands, where they are forced to live in exile (p. 10). Kamal (2005) states that many literary works are told from the point-of-view of the Israelis or the West. These are usually false narratives, which hide the true part of the story, distorting and modifying the accurate image to depict the Palestinians as violent terrorists (p. 66). The fact is that the Palestinian’s rejection of, and their resistance to, the occupation is not understood for what it really is - the defense of their land, their homes, and their families. Instead, most Western and Israeli writers paint this as terrorism. According to Farag (2016), the resistance of the Palestinians started with the Intifada when oppression and mistreatment by the occupying Israelis gave Palestinians reasons to resist (p. 138). He also adds that the issues and conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians led to increase ways in which to make Westerners and the rest of the world more aware of what was really happening in Palestine (p. 140). This doubled responsibility is mentioned by Said (1993), where he addresses the Palestinian writers in diaspora, asking them to focus on presenting the Palestinian case to the world (p. 6).

Literature has always been a tool of resistance and mobilization for Palestinian writers (Ball 2012, pp. 3 & 61; Brenner 2003, pp. 113-116; Harlow 1987, p. 14; Kanafani 1968, p. 14). Masood (2017) adds that Nye has taken the initiative in bringing the reader to Palestine and inside her family. It gives her readers a clear view on how the Arabs are full of “humanity and shed(s) light on Arab culture especially Palestinian culture in a vivid way (p. 6123). This is to show non-Arabs who the Palestinians really are in a way that is much different from how the Palestinians are presented by the media to the rest of the world. In much the same way that Naomi Shihab Nye presents the Israeli occupation of Palestinians and its impact on the people of Palestine, Diana Abu Jaber presents the American occupation of the Iraqis and the impact of this occupation on the people of Iraq. Mohasien (2020) declares that the war in Iraq and its resulting occupation have had a great impact on the Iraqis and their land (p. 4031). The United States of America has its own interests in the Middle East and especially in Iraq. According to Evans (2003), the West has certain interests in the geography of the Middle East (p. 47). He adds that one of the reasons for that is the location of the Middle East, which allows it to serve as a bridge that connects the trade routes of all the continents. Still, another (and perhaps most important) reason that the West is so interested in the Middle East is oil (Evans 2003, p. 47). However, Iraqis resisted the American occupation, and according to Evans (2003), instead of seeing their resistance as the defense of their homes and families, they were painted as “terrorists”, who used violence against their occupiers - the American regime (p. 48).

Danju et al. (2013) state that the American invasion of Iraq began in 2003 as a consequence of the government of Saddam Hussein, which was seen as a threat as much as those who committed the violent acts of September 11, 2001. After 9/11 (as it is called in America), the United States now had a justified reason to go to war – even calling it the “War on Terrorism” (p. 682). According to the American government, Saddam Hussein was part of that terrorism, and somehow linked to terrorist attacks against America and Americans everywhere. As a result, America took a defensive position in order to protect their land and their people. Added to that, a new threat to America created by 9/11 – the threat to America’s national security. All of these gave America the reasons it needed to go to war with Iraq and oust the government of Saddam Hussein by force (p. 682). Monten (2013) declares that the aim of the United States when they first invaded Iraq was to rebuild a new state in Iraq (p. 1). This shows how the first and major reason for occupation is to find an alternative world.

Most of the studies on these two literary works present these political issues; however, they do not tackle how these writers have presented the psychological and physical impacts of these political issues on the people living in these regions, specifically, the impacts (or “taboos”) of occupation. From the previous discussion, one could notice that both writers have presented the contexts of starting a war for occupation in both Iraq and Palestine. They have not only focused on the idea of occupation and introduced both parties, but for the

most part, they have also highlighted the impacts, whether physically or psychologically, of the occupation on the people living in these regions. Although writing about two different regions, both authors have explored the unspeakable treatment and behavior that the indigenous occupants, have been exposed to. As mentioning the previous points, both the contribution and the significance of the current study have been addressed. Abu Jaber and Nye are both Arab American writers, who were born and raised in the United States of America. Both have also visited the Middle East. According to Bayeh (2017), Nye considers her visit to the West Bank, as an experience that changed her life. Bayeh (2017) also states that both Abu Jaber and Nye's novels tackle the issues related to the impact of the East-West oppositions (p. 22). While most of the studies conducted on the works of these two authors have tackled these oppositions, what is still missing in these studies is how both writers try to reveal the suffering and distress that these occupations have caused.

## 2. Analysis

### Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent*

Abu Jaber presents the situation in Iraq where the Iraqi people live under the occupation of the United States of America. Abu Jaber does this through an Iraqi- American young girl called Sirine whose parents passed away while working for International Red Cross in Africa (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 83). She tries to get close to Han, who is an Iraqi professor. Sirine does this to know more about her home country. Later on, she gets to know another character called Nathan. Through Nathan and Han's narrative, Sirine learns about Iraq, but only about the unpleasant events that occurred under the American occupation.

Berrebah (2021) states that, in this context, Abu Jaber tries to educate the readers and inform them about the true Iraq and the reality of what happens in it. He adds that the narrative in itself is a kind of reflection of the real world, as fiction models reality (Berrebah 2021, p. 7). According to Mar and Oatley (2008), literary narratives are imitations of social life taken from the real world. They further argue that "narrative fiction models life, comments on life, and helps us to understand life in terms of how human intentions bear upon it" (p. 173). Based on the previous points, Berrebah (2021) declares that Abu Jaber uses the informative approach to introduce the politics taking place in Iraq along with her concerns about Iraq and the rest of the Middle East (p. 7). Although she is not from Iraq, she considers it important because it is part of the Middle East. Thus, she is viewed as talking on behalf of the Iraqi natives (Berrebah 2021, p. 8). Life in Baghdad (or really anywhere else in Iraq) can be summarized from a letter sent to Han by his sister, who lives in Baghdad. It shows how Iraq was put into a situation where the native Iraqis are under another country's domination. As a result, it causes many crises such as a failing economy and social instability. Further, there is the spread of insecurity and a lack of peace because of the American military intervention and policies as can be seen in the letter:

*"Our young women, like our men, march in formation through the streets wearing their veils and carrying long, black guns. Our fine, beautiful country is gone. We can't get away from the smell of burning. Terrible chemical fallout, starvation, no medicine, the usual catastrophe — so dull being a victim. There are many diseases, cholera, malaria, typhus, and rickets. How ridiculous to be struggling with outdated diseases! Our ancient night flashes with bombs. The Americans still bomb Iraq on nearly a daily basis. I'm told that during the Persian Gulf crisis these displays were compared to fireworks on American television"* (Abu Jaber 2003, pp. 176–177)

The previous quotation shows how the Iraqis suffer in their own lands from the invasion and from the weapons of war that the Americans use for controlling the people of Iraq. The bombs are used every day and the weapons that are used to kill, injure or poison many people. They are prevented from even the most basic human rights such as medicine and food. These exact same situations in Iraq are also presented by Nathan, an American who lived in the Middle East for a while and has tried to take photos of many disturbing incidents in Iraq. This could be seen in the following quotation:

*"When Schmaal brings up the U.N. and nuclear weapons inspections, and Gharb talks about the starvation in Iraq and crime and prostitution, and Nathan says that Iraq is suffering pre-famine conditions and is still being bombed regularly by America, who was recently selling them helicopters, and does anyone care?"* (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 221)

Abu Jaber tries to show what happens in Iraq from different point of views and perspectives to enhance these situations and incidents. This is related to how truth is relative and how each person looks at things and narrates things from his/ her own point of view. The same presentation of the situation and conditions in Iraq shows how these situations are real and factual. She does this by introducing different characters in the novel, who present the same conditions in Iraq. She introduces Nathan, an American who witnesses the abuse of Iraqis by Americans in Iraq. She also introduces an Iraqi-American, Han, along with other Arab-Americans such as Gharb, Schmaal and a lecturer from the university where Han studies. Nathan's character is so significant because he is an American who is documenting what the Americans are doing and how they are acting in Iraq. Sena (2011) declares that Nathan has documented the sad and painful moments in Iraq and other countries. Nathan does not even like to remember those days when he lost his true love in Iraq - Hanif's sister, Leila (p. 76). Nathan tries to highlight the situation between Iraq and the United States through his narratives. According to Sena (2011), Nathan puts the conditions of Iraq under a spotlight by documenting them through taking photographs (p. 76). Nathan's memories and narratives have a strong impact on Sirine and he introduces her to the real picture of Iraq (p. 77).

Abu Jaber's use of these characters is to enhance the truth and avoid any way in which the truth can be neglected or doubted. An unknown man opens a discussion in a lecture at the Department of Near Eastern Studies about the American foreign policy and warns of its negative consequences:

*"Now, according to UNICEF, fifty thousand Iraqi adults die because of U.S. sanctions every year, and five thousand children die in Iraq*

every month because of the American embargo of food and medicine. The sanctions deny people access to basic health care, clean water, and electricity – they are a systematic violation of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare [...] America simply cannot continue to pillage the natural resources and economies of other countries, to heap its desire and values, its contempt and greed on the backs of others, and not expect there to be consequences.” (Abu Jaber 2003, pp. 324–325)

As can be noticed, the speaker in the lecture talks about the children who die from hunger, stating that Iraqi children are dying because of “the American embargo of food and medicine” (p. 324). This is the same thing that Han had said earlier about the children who die from hunger (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 176). The speaker adds that if Americans die, it makes headlines, but when Iraqi children die, nothing is said (p. 324). Another point that Abu Jaber (2003) wanted to reveal is how Iraqis were not allowed to travel to Iraq. They could fly from either Europe or another country in the Middle East (p. 340). This shows how Iraqis do not only suffer in their own lands, but they also suffer even when exiled to the United States.

Djohar (2019) states that Abu Jaber tries to predict how the Iraqis will live under the surveillance of American officers in The United States of America (p. 86). This can be seen through the narration of one of the visitors of Um Nadia’s café when Abu Jaber describes the visitors watch the police and how the police, in turn, are also always watching Iraqis that come to the café describing them as “...two policemen sitting by the TV, eating fried lentils and onions, and watching reports in Arabic about terrorists from Saudi Arabia...” (p. 43). Djohar (2019) also adds that Abu Jaber presents these American policemen as onlookers, who are always watching the Iraqis living in the United States even though they do not speak nor understand Arabic. In this case, the two policemen are only watching the Iraqis in a superficial way (p. 86). This kind of surveillance shows how the Americans generally perceive Arabs or the Iraqis specifically. This resembles what Danju *et al.* (2013) said about how Americans viewed the Iraqis or any other Arab as a threat after the 9/11 (p. 682).

This could be related to how the Westerners, and especially Americans, view the Arabs, and in this case, Iraqis specifically - as terrorists, especially when seen as defending their lands. According to Berrebbah (2021), the reason behind labeling Arabs as terrorists, as well as the connection of terrorism to Arabs, is the media (p. 10). This is also revealed through the commentary of the Egyptian character Jenob, who says that “[a]ll we see on the TV or movies about Arabs is they’re shooting someone, bombing someone, or kidnapping someone” (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 222).

From the previous points, Abu Jaber tries not only to show the real picture of Baghdad and Iraq to the non-Arabs, but also tries to negate the well-known stereotypical images of Arabs. In other words, “Abu-Jaber’s reconfiguration of stereotypes and representations can be interpreted as an apparatus to interrogate the complex binary system of us (Arabs) versus them (white Americans) and correct what represents Arab identity” (Berrebbah 2021, p. 9).

Through Nathan, Abu Jaber puts forth a positive image about the Iraqis (and Arabs in general) as seen in the following quotation:

“...a white American student of Middle Eastern Studies, who goes to Iraq to explore the life there and work on his research project. Upon his arrival, he finds himself surprised that people in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, are different from what the media and popular culture in American mainstream describe. He considers them hospitable gentle people, providing a positive stereotype: I had this thought about going over to the Middle East and uncovering terrorist spies ... And when I finally got there, you know, to the Middle East, I travelled through all these different countries, and this amazing thing happened – the people there were really nice to me. They didn’t drive around in huge cars talking to each other on phones. They invited me right into their homes. We sipped tea and talked all day long ... I never found my terrorist.” (Abu-Jaber 2003, p. 284)

Berrebbah (2021) comments on this quote by saying that Abu Jaber intended to negate the stereotypical images of the Arab while also showing who the real terrorists are (p. 11). Another character who gives insights to Iraq is Sirine’s uncle, who she talks to about Iraq, trying to learn more about her parents. Sirine’s uncle explains to Sirine how Iraq is no longer the place they know and that it is now a different and terrifying place. He also tells her that the place he and her father lived in does not exist anymore (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 127). Sirine links what her uncle says to the story of Han’s brother who got arrested and tries to synthesize all these things together.

The story of Han’s brother can be best understood by the following quote, where Sirine is narrating the story to her uncle:

“‘Han’s brother was arrested and he’s still in prison,’ Sirine blurts out. ‘Han says he can never go back again’ . . . her uncle stares at her, closes his eyes. Finally, he rubs his fingertips over his eyes. ‘Oh no. Terrible. Yes, now, that, you see – that place is a different Iraq you’re talking about. Different from the one that I and your father grew up in. I’m so sorry for Han.’” (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 127)

Sena (2011) also comments on this quote saying that the pictures that Nathan has bothers him and Han reminding them both of the events in Iraq. They remind Han of his family and Nathan of the girl he loves, Han’s sister (p. 84). Sena (2011) adds they also remind them about all of the people living in Iraq under a dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein. Despite how these people felt, they still hope for a better life. This could be seen and understood from the words of Han through his narrative (p. 84). Han describes how it is hard knowing about the people in Iraq and how hard it is to communicate with them. This is clear in the following quote:

“‘I do and I don’t. It’s hard to get information from Iraq, so few letters get through, and the ones that do are usually so heavily censored that they don’t make much sense. I suppose my brother is still in prison and I hope that he and my mother are still alive. But I have no way of telling for sure. And there’s no way for me to know if I’ll ever see them again.’ He pauses ‘I always think about them.’” (Abu Jaber 2003, pp. 143-44)

Sena (2011) also comments on this quote saying that Han describes the difficult conditions people in Iraq were put through during

Hussein's leadership, especially for the ones who went against the law (p. 91). Sirine insists that the fact that commerce is what the Americans are most obsessed about and this is the reason behind the biggest problems in our modern world (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 144).

Through Nathan, Abu Jaber tries to show how any person living in Iraq that is related to any Iraqi disobeying the law will be held responsible for their disobedient relatives in the eyes of the government and thus be punished for their relatives' crimes. This is exactly what happens with Han. His brother and sister Leila suffered and were punished because of what Han did. This is mentioned in the conversation between Nathan and Sirine, when Nathan says:

*"I never realized that Han held himself responsible for Leila's death. I should have guessed it, I suppose. They say that for some people, the guilt of surviving the people they love is worse than death itself. At this time, I kept quiet about what really happened – I thought of that as my own punishment. To live like this – shut away from everything, and to never, never tell anyone what happened. I couldn't stand the shame of it. I couldn't stand myself. I thought of killing myself but living seemed a better punishment. I'm responsible for Leila's death. My carelessness drew the police to her."* (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 334)

Sena (2011) argues here that Han and Nathan, according to Sena, "live with the guilt of being responsible for the death of his beloved one" (p. 95). Abu Jaber tries to give Han justification for leaving Iraq and why he was not able to stay there. She does this through Han's revealing of his memories and thoughts to Sirine. Han tells Sirine that he, and all Iraqis do not feel safe in Iraq and always have the feeling of running away (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 82). This is also highlighted and enhanced by Nathan when he says that the Iraqis in Iraq were living under dictatorship (Abu Jaber 2003, p. 99). Here Nathan and Han are both describing the effect of occupation on the Iraqis and how this feeling forces them to think of leaving their home country. Through the points that Abu Jaber presents, we can easily see how she has taken the role of presenting the real picture of the Arabs and how they cannot be called terrorists when they are mistreated in their own country. She does this by presenting the same story from the narratives and points-of-view of different characters.

### **Naomi Shihab Nye's *Habibi***

Naomi Shihab Nye is also considered one of the diasporic Arab writers, who try to introduce the Arabic world, politics and culture to the West. Majaj (2008) comments on the same point saying that Nye succeeds in presenting the Arab culture and politics to the United States of America, especially in her novel, *Habibi* (Majaj 2008, p. 26). Feldman (2002) also adds that Nye shows the culture and people of a place which is only introduced to non-Arabs by the daily news media. Nye tries to negate what people watch in the media and to show the real picture of Palestine (p. 4). Majaj (2008) declares that Nye does this through her character Liyana in *Habibi*. The author expresses that, through Liyana, she wants to reveal what really happens in Palestine and how its people truly suffer (Majaj 2008, 26). Al-Maleh (2009) argues that what Shihab reflects in her novel, *Habibi*, is what she really witnessed when she visited Palestine with her family (p. 26). According to Masood (2017), the reader can live the life of an Arab in Jerusalem through the eyes of Liyana and can, therefore, what life is really like there (p. 6126).

From what she witnessed Palestine being exposed to, Shihab Nye reaches the end of her novel at a point where she wishes peace for Palestine and its people. Her wish can be seen through the relationship she presents between Liyana and Omer. Al Khadra (2013) declares that Nye chooses a Jew to be Liyana's beloved because of her hope for peace in Palestine. Her concern is not peace itself, but the consequences of peace which people in Palestine were and are still suffering from. As a result, it is only peace that can rescue the Palestinians from their situation and put an end to the violence against Palestinians that is orchestrated by the Israelis (p. 188). Likewise, Irving (2017) discusses the idea that the narrative of Nye reflects her positive view not for the peace itself but for the consequences that come after the peace (p. 42). Added to that is the declaration by Yousef (2015) that *Habibi* is a novel which reflects hope for the Palestinians that may only happen with peace replacing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, thus resembling Nye's view (p. 47). Al-Mahadin (2017) agrees about the previous comments saying that the hope for peace was placed in the Palestinians since the mid-1990s and it was their wish for the sake of stopping the abuse of its people by the Israelis. This is why the true portrayal of Palestinians and their suffering increased in literature, and thus began to spread awareness of the Palestinians plight (p. 44).

Nye tries to show the suffering of the Palestinians through Dr. Abboud's family's return to Palestine. The reader is then introduced to how the Palestinians live their everyday lives when she shows how the Israelis prevent Palestinians from even entering their own home country. On the other hand, Westerners are welcomed any time and are treated like VIPs when they enter Palestine. As an example, when Abboud's family landed in Tel Aviv, the Israeli agents asked Liyana's family to stand in the troublemakers' line while other travelers from Europe and America went through easily (Shihab Nye 1999, p. 34). Although Dr. Abboud is from America, he is not treated like a Westerner since he is a Palestinian. Liyana is shocked and frustrated by the way the Israelis look and deal with them and with the other Palestinians. She describes the women soldiers as so mean, even meaner than the men soldiers (Nye 1999, p. 34). Another description is mentioned in the same pages where the Israelis are described as very alert and so untrusting of anyone that they standing in such a way as if they are really ready to jump on someone (Shihab Nye 1999, 36). Yousef (2013) declares that Poppy is seen by the Jews much the same as Palestinians are seen by the West - as an alien who has to be checked before entering the gates (p. 44). These acts, which are committed by the Israelis show how they consider Palestine *their* home and not the Palestinian's home. This is what Yousef (2013) means when he says that the Israelis deal with and treat the Palestinians as if they are living in their (the Israeli's) home country (p. 44). All of these things are consequences of occupation in which the occupier behaves as if the occupied country is their own country. This is what happened in Palestine where, according to Yousef (2013), occupation has caused much devastation in Palestine (p. 48).

As Abu Jaber does, Nye presents the conditions happening in Palestine through different characters in the novel to highlight the truth and

that it is the same truth presented by these characters. This is to show the relativity of truth and how each person has his own point-of-view or perspective. Here in Nye's novel, we are presented with the characters of Dr. Abboud and Liyana and the stories of their relatives in Palestine, all narrating what happens in Palestine in a way that the reader finds all the narrations nearly identical. For example, there is the time when Aunt Amal tells Dr. Abboud and Liyana that it is so difficult to pass the Israeli checkpoint to enter Jerusalem and the doctor and Liyana witness this first hand (Nye 1999, 44). Aunt Amal says this after she hears that the soldiers have asked Dr. Abboud about the reason why they left American and their stay in Jerusalem. Dr. Abboud then answers that he has come for a new job (Nye 1999, 35). His other relatives add on to the stories about how the soldiers were passing through Jerusalem. The soldiers were carrying guns and shouting and one of them then tossed the pass of uncle Daoud onto the ground and told him to pick up (Nye 1999, p. 44). They all agree on the fact that this kind of treatment does not include the Westerners, just the Arabs and the Arab Westerners (Nye 1999, p. 34).

Through Dr. Abboud's stay in Jerusalem with his family, they witness many incidents of abuse of Palestinians by the Israelis. These incidents remind Liyana about the time when her teacher told her that Palestinians were uncivilized (Nye 1999, p. 27). Mr. Hathaway asks her "why do you think people have had so much trouble acting civilized there?" ("there" meaning Jerusalem) (Nye 1999, p. 27). These situations and incidents are the reasons behind Liyana reflecting on what she already knows about the East from the people in America, who say things like the Arabs are backward people (Bayeh 2017, p. 22). Another example that shows how the Arabs are viewed is what the Jew says when Liyana was talking to Bassam. The Jew passed by and told Liyana in English to "be careful about such animals" while pointing to Bassam. This is because the Jew thought Liyana was Jewish and continues by telling her to go to their stores and to be smart (Nye 1999, p. 95). This resembles what Yousef (2015) states which is that the Jews or the Israelis see themselves as superior to the Palestinians and that their lands have to be owned by them because of their superiority (p. 49).

Liyana adds to her thoughts of the Israeli's abuse of the Palestinians through the things her grandmother, Sitti, tells her. For example, Sitti keeps dreaming of the Israeli soldiers and what they do to them. She says they do what they do to them without even knowing who they are (Nye 1999, p. 137). One of the things done to them making a big hole in Sitti's bed, and when Liyana discovers this big hole, Sitti explains that it was made by an angry Israeli (p. 92). This shows how the Israelis enter Palestinians houses and ruin everything in them without any reason. This act may follow an act of defense or resistance performed by any native Palestinian towards the Israelis, so the only thing that they can do as a response is to go to the natives' houses and ruin everything inside. Along with that they often take residents of the house prisoners without any cause whatsoever. Yousef (2015) discusses these acts conducted by the Israelis towards the Palestinians saying that the Israelis' "violent and destructive actions" are all done for no reason. The reason behind them going to houses and ruining them is because these houses have great significance. The symbolize "their identity and their nationhood" (p. 49).

Commenting on the Israelis putting the Palestinians in prison without reason, Poppy, as an example, is used by the author to take the readers on a tour of the Israeli prisons when he is taken by the Israelis to jail. Poppy didn't stop thinking about all the people in Israeli jails, who are there for ridiculous reasons. Poppy also notices that many prisoners are ill and need treatment such as the man he heard coughing (Nye 1999, p. 238). What adds to this idea in Poppy's mind, is that he himself is jailed and imprisoned for no reason. It is only because he wanted to stop the soldiers from shooting Khaled and then he wanted to cure him after they shot him (Nye 1999, pp. 226-227). He shouts at the Israelis saying, "Since when do you arrest doctors on the scene of an injury?" (Nye 1999, p. 230).

From what have been discussed, it could be noticed how the Palestinians are treated by the Israelis and the situations that they are exposed to. They cannot show their flag and they do not have equal rights the Israelis have (Nye 1999, pp. 165-166). Their wells are closed (Nye 1999, p. 144), their phone lines are cut (p. 187) and their houses, streets, and cities are demolished and replaced by houses for the Israeli occupiers and replaced by houses for the Israelis (Nye 1999, p. 186). "Military checkpoints are erected everywhere" (Nye 1999, pp. 44 & 101), "barbed wire fences and no-entry signs are frequently seen" (Nye 1999, 102) and "all Palestinians are threatened with Israeli guns and abuse" (Nye 1999, p. 51). All these examples mentioned by Nye are to show the taboos of occupation in Palestine and to negate what is said about the Palestinians as terrorists because they are defending their people and lands. Al Soud (2015) relates all these actions conducted against the Palestinians as actions witnessed by Liyana, her father and the other characters in the novel which really reflects the true conditions in Palestine (p. 54).

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen from the discussion that Naomi Shihab Nye and Diana Abu Jaber try to reveal the taboos of occupation in Palestine and Iraq in such a way as to show the psychological and physical impact of these occupations on the natives. They both explore the actions and mistreatments conducted on the people of Iraq and Palestine, respectively, without any reason. Added to that is that they both try to present the incidents from different characters to enhance the story and to show that what is happening is real, therefore negating the idea that the Palestinians and the Iraqis are both terrorists just because they are defending their people and lands.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Middle East University in Amman, Jordan, for their financial support granted to cover the publication fees of this research article.

### References

- Abu-Jaber, D. (2003). *Crescent*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Al Soud, Y. (2015). *Susan Abulhawa's Mornings in Jenin, Naomi Nye's Habibi, and Shaw Dallal's Scattered Like Seeds: A Critical Insight*

- into the Dialectic of Past and Present in Contemporary Arab American Literature*. In BSU Master's Theses and Projects. Item 12. Retrieved from <http://vc.bridgew.edu/theses/12> Copyright © 2015 Yassir Al Soud
- Al-Khadra, W. (2013). Identity in Naomi Shihab Nye: The Dynamics of Biculturalism. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 40(1), 184-193. <https://doi.org/10.12816/0000628>
- Al-Mahadin, L. (2017). Naomi Shihab Nye's Sitti's Secrets: Poetics of Homeland. *Al-Balqa for Research and Studies*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.35875/1105-020-001-009>
- Al-Maleh, L. (ed.). (2009). *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*. New York: Rodopi. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042027190>
- Ball, A. (2012). *Palestinian Literature and Film in Postcolonial Feminist Perspective*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203098660>
- Bayeh, J. (2017). Anglophone Arab or Diasporic? The Arab Novel in Australia, Britain, Canada, the United States of America. *Anglo-Arab Literatures*, 2(39), 12-26. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.4593>
- Berrebah, I. (2021). The Mosaics of National Identity in the Arab American Diaspora: Exploring Long-Distance Nationalism in Diana Abu-Jaber's Crescent. *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*. AoP. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2021-0001>
- Brenner, R., F. (2003). *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli and Arab Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture*. Madison: Wisconsin UP.
- Danju, I., Maasoglu, Y., & Maasoglu, N. (2012). The Reasons Behind U.S. Invasion of Iraq. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 81, 682-690. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.06.496>
- Djohar, H. I. (2019). Making Homes in Diana Abu-Jaber's Crescent. ELITE 2019 - *English Linguistics Literature, and Education Conference*, 82-98. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0009984600830089>
- Evans, E. B. (2003). Iraq and the New American Colonialism. *Moebius*, 1, 2. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius/vol1/iss2/10>
- Farag, J. (2016). *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story*. Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350987531>
- Feldman, R. (2002). Naomi Shihab Nye and the Power of Stories. *Cobblestone*, 23, 5.
- Gana, N. (2008). In Search of Andalusia: Reconfiguring Arabness in Diana Abu Jaber's Crescent. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45(2), 228-246. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25659651>
- Harlow, B. (1987). *Resistance Literature*. London: Methuen.
- Hassan, W. (2011). *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. New York: Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199792061.001.0001>
- Irving, S. (2017). Love as a Peace Process? Arab-Jewish Love in the Anglophone Palestinian Novels of Naomi Shihab Nye and Samir El-Youssef. *Anglo-Arab Literatures*, 39(2), 39-49. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.4611>
- Kamal, A. (2005). *The Rhetoric of Violence: Arab-Jewish Encounters in Contemporary Palestinian Literature and Film*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York.
- Kanafani, G. (1968). *Al-Adab al-Filastini al-Muqawim*, 1948-1968 (Palestinian Resistance Literature, 1948-1968). Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb.
- Lebedko, G., M. (2014). Interaction of Ethnic Stereotypes and Shared Identity in Intercultural Communication. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 179-183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.10.132>
- Majaj, L. (2008). Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments. *American Studies Journal*, 25(2).
- Mar, R., & Oatley, K. (2008). The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience. *Perspective on Psychological Science*, 3(3), 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00073.x>
- Masalha, N. (2012). *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd. Print.
- Masood, K., M. (2017). Socio-Political Aspects in Selected Literary Works of Naomi Shihab Nye. *International Journal of Current Advanced Research*, 5, 10.
- Mohasien, A. G. (2020). Al Shismma's Character as a Justice Seeker and an Avenger in Ahmed Saadawi's Novel "Frankenstein in Baghdad". *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(05). <https://doi.org/10.37200/IJPR/V24I5/PR2020113>
- Monten, J. (2013). *Intervention, aid, and institution-building in Iraq and Afghanistan: A review and critique of comparative lessons*, Wider Working Paper, No. 2013/108, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki.
- Rezende, C. B. (2008). Stereotypes and National Identity: Experiencing the Emotional Brazilian. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and*

- Power*, 15(1), 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890701801866>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. 25th Anniversary ed. New York: Vintage Books.
- Said, E. (1993). *Holding Nations and Traditions at Bay. Representations of the Intellectual*. The 1993 Reith Lectures. London: Vintage: 25-46.
- Salaita, S. (2007). *Searching Diversities: Observations of an Arab Ex-student*. In Arab American Literary Fiction, Cultures, and Politics, 1-17. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230603370\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230603370_1)
- Salih, R., & Richter-Devroe, S. (2011). *Cultures of Resistance in Palestine and Beyond: on the Politics of Art, Aesthetics, and Affect*. Retrieved from <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/19081/1>
- Sena, M. (2011). *The Politics of Food and Memory in Diana Abu Jaber's Crescent*. Retrieved from [https://repositorio.ufmg.br/bitstream/1843/ECAP-8FGR89/1/disserta\\_ao\\_milton\\_junior\\_ferreira\\_de\\_sena.pdf](https://repositorio.ufmg.br/bitstream/1843/ECAP-8FGR89/1/disserta_ao_milton_junior_ferreira_de_sena.pdf)
- Shihab, N. (1999). *Habibi*. New York.: Simon & Schuster Books.
- Yousef, T. (2015). The Dialectic of Borders and Multiculturalism in Naomi Nye's *Habibi*. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 12(1), 44-62. <https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2015.01.007>

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).