

‘The Gift of a bridge is you can see both sides:’ A Postcolonial Approach to Intercultural Communication in Leila Buck’s *In the Crossing*

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Abstract

The paper focuses on intercultural communication in Leila Buck's play *In the Crossing*, with a significant reliance on a Postcolonial Approach. Intercultural communication manifests through the intersection of two intrinsically and ideologically different cultures. Buck uses various strategies to deconstruct the binary opposition between the East and the West: adaptation is achieved through translation, intelligibility, and meaningfulness. Intercultural communication in *the Crossing* will be analyzed with a significant reliance on Milton Bennett's interpretation of adaptation as the key to crossing bridges and creating a cultural dialogue. Accordingly, the present paper will focus on the similarities between Postcolonialism and Intercultural Communication to study Arab American identity, to criticize the notion of otherness, and to subvert stereotypes against Arab American Muslims after the 9-11 events. Like Said's postcolonial project, which aims to blur ethnic boundaries, intercultural communication is meant to create a multicultural fabric. The ultimate goal of this study is to show Buck's criticism of the monocultural mindset, her challenge to the politicized discourse, and her success in creating cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Arab American identity, crossing boundaries, Intercultural Communication, Leila Buck’s *In the Crossing*, Postcolonial Approach

المخلص

تركّز ورقة البحث على التواصل بين الثقافات في مسرحية ليلي باك في *المعبر*، مع اعتماد كبير على منهج ما بعد الاستعمار. يتجلى التواصل بين الثقافات من خلال التقاء ثقافتين مختلفتين جوهرياً وأيديولوجياً. تستخدم باك استراتيجيات متنوعة لتفكيك الثنائية المتضادة بين الشرق والغرب؛ إذ يتحقّق التكيف من خلال الترجمة والفهم وإنتاج المعنى. سيتم تحليل التواصل بين الثقافات في «في *المعبر*» بالاعتماد بشكل كبير على تفسير ميلتون بينيت للتكيف بوصفه مفتاحاً لعبور الجسور وخلق حوار ثقافي. وبناءً على ذلك، ستركّز هذه الورقة على أوجه التشابه بين ما بعد الاستعمار والتواصل بين الثقافات لدراسة الهوية العربية الأمريكية وتقويض الصور النمطية ضد المسلمين العرب الأمريكيين بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر. وكما هو الحال في مشروع إدوارد سعيد ما بعد الاستعماري، الذي يهدف إلى طمس الحدود العرقية، فإنّ التواصل بين الثقافات يهدف إلى خلق نسيج متعدّد الثقافات. يهدف هذا البحث في جوهريه إلى إبراز نقد ليلي باك للعقلية أحادية الثقافة، وتحديّها للخطاب المُسيّس، ونجاحها في بناء جسور التواصل بين الثقافات.

كلمات مفتاحية: الهوية العربية الأمريكية، تجاوز الحدود، التواصل بين الثقافات، كتاب ليلي باك في *المعبر*، المنهج ما بعد الاستعماري

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Introduction

Buck is a challenging playwright with distinct voices, and she raises the issue of cultural miscommunication from various perspectives. "As a storyteller and a performer, she can weave the complicated Lebanese, Jewish, Palestinian and American narratives together to create the journey that allows audiences with little experience with Middle Eastern stories crossing into worlds they would otherwise never know" (Najar, 2021, p. 71). She narrates the story of her life and the crossing has some biographical notes because it reflects the dilemma of Buck and her mixed heritage. She is identified as an "intercultural facilitator" (George, 2017, p. 254) because she tried to bridge the gap, between two intrinsically and ideologically different cultures. She recounts the dilemma of the Arab American old generation, who want to teach the new generation lessons about glory, rich heritage, and distinguished identity, and the self of the young generation, whose members are ashamed of their ethnic difference, which excludes them from mainstream American culture. Leila Buck defines theater as a space for cultural communication among the Arab, Jewish, and American selves. She believes that drama has a didactic function and "she runs an international program using drama to teach about the Arab world" (Arida & Ameri, 2004, p. 77). She introduces the American audience to the specifics of Arab culture and adopts a neutral stance when she mentions Jewish history. The aim of this paper lies in showing the importance of cross-cultural communication in creating a multicultural context. Buck stresses the role of cultural dialogue in generating a heterogeneous society based on tolerance and cohabitation between different cultures. Buck subverts the stereotypes against Arab-American citizens and she redefines Arab-American identity in a society where some Lebanese families face cultural barriers.

Hints about Arab American Theatre

The rebirth of the Arab American theater has meant to debunk stereotypes against Arab citizens as terrorists, savages, and barbaric people. Indeed, "9\1 forces Arab Americans to grapple with their identity" (Giese, 2016, p. 169). The negative images about the Arab world are sustained by the US media, which present the Arab people as killers and trouble-makers. For example, "main media sources used caricatures of Arabs and Muslims portraying them as mad religious figures or depicting them with bombs in their turbans" (Tan & Vishneyskaya, 2022, p. 13). Even children are raised with stereotypes against Arabs, and they perceive them as criminals and as a threat to American stability, peace, and freedom. Arab American theater emerges as a reaction against cultural bias and miscommunication. In fact, Arab American

plays discuss “issues such as Arabophobia, Islamophobia, and the complicated relationship between mainstream American society and Muslim American culture” (Najar, 2021, p. 96). The aim is to examine the psychological effects of stereotypes on the Arab American self, redefine Arab American identity, and move from invisibility to visibility. In one of her interviews, Buck states the positive effects of Arab American theater on the multicultural audience: “every audience thanks me effusively for my work, and for the perspective it showed them. A perspective many of them never realized existed” (qtd in Arida & Ameri, 2004, p. 62). Buck offers the audience new insights into Arab American culture, and she succeeds in fostering an intercultural dialogue between the East and the West. She exists in the meeting zone between different cultures. *In the Crossing*, she crosses ethnic boundaries and creates new hybrid selves. The present paper focuses on a postcolonial approach to intercultural communication to examine how Buck dismantles the walls of cultural dissonance.

Theoretical Framework

Both intercultural communication studies and postcolonial approaches raise questions about cultural differences and call for a reconciliation and a smooth connection between cultures. However, the two methods are not easily reconcilable because “an integration of postcolonial insights would discuss the ways that previous and current intercultural communication approach perpetuates imperial domination” (Asante et al., 2000, p. 181). Indeed, it is believed that intercultural communication offers fixed definitions of culture and fails to grasp that culture is dynamic and open to change. In this context, Gonzales and Cantu argue that “if intercultural communication can meet the challenges of postcolonialism, we believe that it will (...), offer a more complete understanding of human communication” (Cooks & Simpson, 2008, p. 132).

This paper challenges this view by drawing parallels between intercultural communication and postcolonialism. To start with, in his *Orientalism*, Said (1994) raises questions about the relationship between cultures: “How does one represent other cultures?” (p. 325). Said offers cultural dialogue as the solution for maintaining peace, avoiding cultural conflicts, and ending the clash of civilizations. In his response to the Palestinian-Israeli continuous conflict, Said writes: ‘ I suggested instead, a critical look at the Arab environment, Palestinian history, and the Israeli realities, with the explicit conclusion that only a negotiated settlement, between the two communities of suffering Arab and Jewish, would provide respite from the unending war’ (p. 338). The postcolonial theoretician offers negotiation and intercultural communication as solutions to end the never-ending war. In the same context of commenting on cultural differences, the prominent researcher Bennet (2017) perceives ethnocentrism as a barrier to

intercultural communication and develops a scale that encourages a progressive movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. He affirms: "I coined the term 'ethnorelativism' to mean the opposite of ethnocentrism— The more ethnorelative worldviews are ways of *seeking cultural difference*, either by accepting its importance, by adapting perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity" (p. 1). As Said said, Bennett calls for considering cultural differences, fostering intercultural dialogue, and integrating with others of different ethnicities. A postcolonial approach to intercultural communication emphasizes that it is a process of adaptation and openness to cultural exchange. *In the Crossing*, Buck uses videoconferencing to visualize the Arab American plight. Indeed, "the play takes the format of a conference speech that Buck is delivering for what is called the National Association for Cross-Cultural Education and Transformation" (Najar, 2021, p. 69). The main aim of the association is to foster a multicultural atmosphere in which both Arab and Jewish selves can express their dilemmas and create an intercultural space of convergence. The postcolonial reading of intercultural communication in *The Crossing* will focus on Said's arguments about ethnic identity and Bennett's scale of crossing cultural boundaries. Each step of the scale will be defined and applied to the play under examination.

Analysis

The theme of intercultural communication and Buck's (2011) attempts to erase cultural dichotomies are made clear in the décor of the opening scene. The setting is adorned with high technology gadgets and, above the stage, a PowerPoint slide with SIDE logo and the words "Bridging the Gap: Staying Connected in a Polarized World...Center stage, a music stand and standing microphone" (Buck, 2011, p. 4). The mottoes about bridging cultural barriers and 'staying connected' reveal Buck's call to reconsider cultural homogeneity and to debunk cultural polarities. The microphone's presence in the opening stage directions evokes Buck's attempts to give voice to the muffled Arab and Jewish voices. The newly created cultural association is meant to give voice to the voiceless and to help downtrodden citizens move from invisibility to visibility. The association is defined by its president, Joan Hirsch, as:

An organization dedicated to bringing together people of all faiths, political views, and backgrounds to address the social and cultural issues that so often divide us. Born out of the civil rights movement in the 60s, SIDE has hosted presentations and dialogues on the Vietnam War, apartheid, racial segregation and civil rights, September 11th and its aftermath, the Iraq War, and gay marriage, to name just a few. (p. 5)

The organization is meant to defend the rights of voices from the margins and to bring their suffering into the light. The 1960s were an active period in terms of Arab-American

struggle against ethnic segregation, and the second wave of Arab immigrants faced many challenges because they were misrepresented in the American media. In fact, "after the 1967 Israeli military conquest of the rest of Palestine, Israelis were widely represented in the US as virtuous heroes while Arabs were represented as backward people undeserving of freedom. Arabs (...) were looked upon and treated as adversaries and enemies by US government agencies" (Amer & Awad, 2016, p. 23). The prejudice against Arabs is an example of the monolithic view of culture and the absence of any intercultural communication. The American mainstream culture accepts Israeli citizens, but it intimidates Arab citizens because they are ethnically and culturally different. This cultural preference is defined by Bennett (2017) as ethnocentrism: "I used the term 'ethnocentrism' to refer to the experience of one's own culture as 'central to reality'. By this I mean that the beliefs and behaviors that people receive in their primary socialization are unquestioned" (p. 1). Ethnocentrism is intensely criticized by Buck, who adopts a balanced view by questioning assumptions about Arab and Israeli cultures.

Buck (2011) states under the tongue of the Side president that the aim of *In the Crossing* is "Bridging the Gap: 'Staying Connected in a Polarized World'– Which feels especially fitting at this time of [international upheaval and domestic discord/discontent]" (p. 5). The idea of connection gives hints about the playwright's insistence on cultural dialogue in a world based on polarization and on the Manichean discourse of 'We' vs. 'them'. Cultural polarization has increased after the 9-11 attacks and Arab American citizens were not accepted within the American social fabric. In this context, Islamic cultural institutions were threatened and some American citizens wanted to erase Arab culture and institutions. For example, "on August 24, 2022, federal authorities announced they had discovered a plan by a doctor in Tampa Bay to bomb and destroy approximately 50 mosques and Islamic cultural centers in South Florida. The doctor's home contained rocket launchers, sniper rifles and twenty bombs" (Singh, 2022, p. 21). The violence inflicted upon Arab culture is an example of ethnocentric and the rejection of the ethnically different other. This physical and cultural violence is not accepted by some American presidents like George Bush who declares: "the terrorists are traitors of their own faith, trying, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends...Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them"(Kidd, 2009, p. 145). Bush seems to use a diplomatic tone regarding Muslims and he politicizes the war on terror. However, some American citizens make an over-generalization by identifying Arabs as terrorists and traitors of the American system.

Denial

Some American citizens deny the existence of Arab American citizens, and they do not respect their belonging to the American soil, which is supposed to be an icon for

multiculturalism. Bennet identifies this act of denial as the first example of ethnocentrism; for Bennett, denial "means that an individual does not perceive cultural difference" (Coleman, 2021, p. 40). For example, Maya is irritated in the Crossing because cultural differences are not recognized in her American neighborhood. The Lebanese young lady is impressed by the American green spaces. Still, she experiences feelings of self-estrangement as she has doubts about the Yankees' attitude toward the culturally different other. She is happy about crossing the Brooklyn Bridge, but she is implicitly aware of the process of denial, the absence of tolerance, and the stereotypes against Lebanese Americans. She confesses to her audience: "-- on a street lined with trees and American flags. At dusk, you can hear kids playing on stoops and neighbors greeting each other by name. It's peaceful and comforting. Worlds away from what we left behind. But I can't help wondering what our neighbors would say if they knew where we came from" (p. 56). The presence of trees and 'neighbors greeting each other' evokes feelings of comfort and conveys a sense of harmony and respect. However, May's anxious feelings about her identity suggest the absence of tolerance, cultural heterogeneity, and the exclusion of the ethnically different other. The image of heterogeneity is further sustained by the presence of the American flag, which represents mainstream culture. Indeed, the American flag symbolizes American globalization and the dominance of a single culture.

The idea of denial can be further developed in reference to Said's arguments about the role of imperial discourse in generating feelings of self-denial. It is "a denial of the ability to represent oneself, a surrender to orientalist discourse, and a complicit affirmation of the truth of orientalist denial" (Aschroft, 2010, p. 75). The discourse internalizes in Orientalists the feeling of self-denial and convinces them about the superiority of the mainstream culture. This self-denial is triggered by the discourse of power, which denies oriental culture. Said (1994) adds: "the Oriental culture whose ability to represent itself, they systematically deny" (pp. 6-7). Oriental culture fails to represent itself because it encounters many obstacles related to self-denial and estrangement. In this respect, when Maya and David visit Lebanon, her relatives advise her to go back to the United States, where peace reigns supreme, and they depict Lebanon as a place of terrorists. They address her using the following terms: "Isma3ee MAYA: If something happens to you or DAVID, God forbid, we will never forgive ourselves. Nehna, we live here, we have no choice – we cannot leave our home. Intu, your home is over there. Please habibti. Go" (p. 47). The dichotomy between the pronouns 'We' and 'You' shows that the Arab American citizens are looking for immigrants as superior citizens who should not come back to Lebanon, and they should deny the Arab self. This denial is evident in the advisor's words, which describe America as a safe home and Lebanon as an insecure place.

Mother Nadine also has a self-critical view of Lebanon, and she condemns the violent acts of some political parties. Self-estrangement appears when she describes her daughter and her son-in-law as American citizens, and she protects them from Lebanese violence and political atrocities. She screams: "Yee Huda, you can't blame everything on the West! I'm talking about my daughter, about MAYA and DAVID! They are American citizens, uh? What if these Hezbollah start kidnapping Americans?" (p. 39). Nadine's voice is tinged with nervousness and fear for her children, and she feels their presence in Lebanon threatens their existence. She argues that the West should not be blamed, but national peace should be attained. She condemns the violent deeds of 'Hezbollah,' and she criticizes Hezbollah's rejection of American citizens. She tries to create a more balanced view and to convey to the American audience the peaceful nature of Arab citizens and their tolerant attitudes. Buck takes an objective view of the West and the East, criticizing the flaws of both cultures. She uses theater to voice her rejection of terrorism and her intercultural orientation. She shares with the Arab American playwrights "[the condemnation of] all acts of terrorism pressured to be Jihadi, to apologize for those acts and to regularly assure our non-Arab friends and neighbors that we pose them no threat" (Pickens). She shows that even Arab citizens are affected by the repercussions of terrorism and political violence. She laments the physical destruction of Lebanon and the feelings of homelessness within the native soil.

The Israeli-Lebanese war has destroyed the infrastructure of Lebanon, and it has created psychological troubles. Destruction is the effect of cultural miscommunication between the West and the East and the political clash of civilizations. In this respect, Maya appreciates that her family fears for her, but she worries about her family's future in Lebanon and the country's future. She states: "We want them to start worrying about their own. But if we do need to evacuate, it will have to be from Beirut. And as more roads and bridges are destroyed, we realize that if we don't leave soon, there may be no way home" (p. 32). Beirut, which used to be a symbol of advanced civilization, progress, success, and the acceptance of different cultures, has become a haven of chaos due to cultural clashes and intolerance. Maya's sympathetic tone reflects her disappointment upon returning to the homeland and her pessimistic view of Lebanon. Accordingly, mother Nadine urges her children to leave Lebanon, where political, economic, and social deterioration reigns. Her friend, Huda, criticizes her amplified behavior and her deep concern about Maya and David: "Ya Nadine don't be dramatic! Just stay another day habibti, wait for the next American ship" (p. 39). The ship symbolizes mobility and leaving the native land due to cultural conflicts. Mother Nadine is the symbol of Mother Lebanon, who wants her progeny to leave the native land to find better opportunities and a more peaceful

lifestyle in the United States. This self-loathing stems from cultural clashes and ideological conflicts.

To conclude, Bennett's criticism of the denial of other cultures and Said's arguments about self-denial as the outcome of imperial discourse on power echo Buck's condemnation of the clash of civilizations and its role in fostering self-denial and various forms of destruction.

Defense Stage

Bennett (2017) moves to the defense stage as the second step of intercultural communication, and he contends that the recognition of other cultures marks the movement from denial to the defense stage, but the minimization of the culturally different other (p. 3). It is the stage when "other cultures are recognized, but seen as being inferior, and are often stereotyped" (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010, p. 69). This view correlates with Edward Said's rejection of the sense of superiority developed by imperial forces. He criticizes the mainstream culture for degrading the Arabs: 'the Arabs were seen as synonymous with everything degraded, fearsome, irrational and brutal' (Said, 2021, p. 145). He renders military and political leaders responsible for the denigration of Arabs and for perpetuating fake stereotypes about violence, criminality, and terrorism. In this context, Said analyzes Abraham Avidan's discourse as biased. Avidan declares: "Under no circumstances should an Arab be trusted, even if he gives the impression of being civilized" (qtd. in Said, 2021, p. 148). The use of negation suggests the deep animosity against Arabs and the classification of Arabs as an inferior group. Avidan's firm tone and determination to mistrust Arabs are a fine example of cultural miscommunication. His speech is purely subjective, and he overgeneralizes and considers all Arabs as 'non-civilized' citizens.

This prejudice against Arabs is further sustained through children's literature and the negative connotations associated with Arabs. Said argues that Jewish tales are teeming with the stereotypical image of "the Arab who murders Jews out of pleasure, and the pure Jewish boy who defeats the Coward Swine" (p. 145). Jewish children are obviously brainwashed and taught that Arabs are 'serial killers' and metaphorically associated with the 'coward swine', which ends up being a loser. The biased images enhance the discourse of physical, cultural, moral, material, and military power of the non-Arab culture. The defense stage is thus marked by the denigration of the culturally different other, and Edward Said believes that the discourse of imperial power widens cultural gaps.

In the play, the minimization of the culturally different other is made clear through the characterization of Joan and his prejudice against Arabs. He is surprised by David's visit to Lebanon and asks him, "But you can't tell me you didn't feel a sense of danger if people knew

you were a Jew" (p. 88). He implicitly believes that Jews are targeted and murdered in Lebanon because they are culturally different. The use of the noun 'danger' shows that Joan defines Arab regions as the den of violence where any Jew can be easily exterminated. Joan seems to internalize the discourse on the backwardness and intolerance of Arabs. He contends that David might be slaughtered in Lebanon, where the culturally different Jew is destroyed. Joan adds: 'I'm sorry, but some things are simple. I've heard their speeches. They call for the destruction of the Jewish state. It doesn't get much simpler than that' (p. 88). Joan insists on the dangerous situation of Jews in Lebanon, and he supports his arguments with the political speeches of some political parties, which are determined to avenge the Jews and to destroy them. This biased view is firmly rejected by Maya and David, who offer a more positive image of the Lebanese citizen. David mocks Joan, and he informs him: 'It's not like people were standing on corners with Jewdar/ waiting to—" (p. 88). David is interrupted by Joan, who firmly believes that Lebanese citizens exterminate Jewish visitors because of their cultural differences. He affirms: "--Sweetheart, this is not a joke! There are [still] people in the world who think the only good Jew is a dead Jew, and Hezbollah is one of them" (p. 88). Maya is equally irritated because of Joan's biased words, and she tries to change the mindset by giving new insights into the peaceful nature of Lebanese citizens who are also affected by the Israeli-Lebanese war. She calls for a separation between politics and ideological battles, and between the humble nature of Lebanese civilians and neutral citizens. Maya interrupts the two Jewish characters and tries to ease the tension by arguing, "You know not all the Lebanese support Hezbollah" (p. 88). Mays's voice reflects Leila Buck's attempts at debunking stereotypes by showing that Arabs should not be taken as criminals and that the political minority does not represent the multicultural spirit of Lebanese people.

Joan justifies collective punishment and bombing Lebanese roads and harming civilians by blaming the culturally different other and by claiming that Israel works for its self-defense against external evil powers. He argues: "Israel never acts except in its own defense! I'm sorry, but we're talking about one tiny country surrounded by 22 hostile neighbors—(p 85). Joan clearly places the blame on others, and his Manichean discourse reveals his bias and self-righteousness. He firmly believes that Israel has the right to use violence to defend itself against hostile countries. Hostility arises from the politicization of ideological differences, cultural miscommunication, and the greedy desire to gain geopolitical power. Joan's subjective view is criticized by David, who gives historical arguments by criticizing the Balfour Declaration, which gave Jews the right to settle down within the originally Palestinian land. David addresses Joan: "Jews were less than 10% of the population of (Deliberately choosing the word) Palestine/ before the Balfour declaration" (p. 86). The use of a low rate indicates that the Jews

were a minority before the Balfour declaration, and they gained power because of their Western allies.

Buck is clearly among the Arab American playwrights who criticized the role of the Balfour Declaration in deepening cultural gaps and treating Arab culture as inferior. Her view recalls Najar's witty remarks against the Balfour declaration. Najar (2021) asserts that the Balfour declaration affects Arab identity because it: "decreed that a stranger enters a house occupied by its people and he enters it forcibly and with the armed support of the British sovereign" (p. 76). The British colonial powers are responsible for the homelessness of Arab citizens due to the seizure of their native lands. As argued previously, in Bennett's scale, the defense stage is not considered a stage of cultural development because it is based on the denigration of the culturally other.

This denigration is manifest in the Balfour Declaration, which has deeply affected Arab American identity. The clash between civilizations and the disrespect for other cultures are also rejected by Said, who condemns the Balfour Declaration. He writes, 'Balfour's statements in the declaration take for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit' (Said, 1986, p. 16). Colonial forces are thus responsible for widening cultural gaps and for affecting Arab American identity. Arab American identity is deeply affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Said enumerates the repercussions of the Balfour Declaration and its effects on the whole Arab community. It brings about otherness, and it creates deep wounds. Said declares: 'We are the other, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil the heart, slow the body scars, soothe the sting of loss' (Said, 1986, pp. 16-17). Otherness affects physical, mental, and psychological health, and it creates feelings of self-estrangement. In Buck's play, estrangement is evident in the biased attitudes toward the Middle Eastern community. In this respect, Noura criticizes Hilary Clinton and American politics for legitimizing Israeli violence instead of creating an intercultural communication. Noura reveals: "Then Hillary Clinton at a rally in New York, saying the same thing that he does: 'Israel has the right to defend itself. I wonder who's supposed to defend Lebanon'" (p. 34). Buck is clearly opposed to the subjective comments of American icons like Hilary Clinton, and she is implicitly calling for an objective treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a nutshell, intercultural communication is not achieved in the climactic scene of the play because of the biased attitude of Clinton, the legitimization of violence, and the otherness of the Arab American citizen. Maya depicts the atrocities of Israeli apartheid, and Joan is still legitimizing the use of violence, the destruction of Lebanese roads, and the killing of innocent

civilians. The ethnically different other is still not accepted. The falling action of the play marks the beginning of compromise and corresponds to Bennett's third stage, called minimization. The next part will focus on minimization as a more advanced step in the scale of intercultural sensitivity.

Minimization

Bennett defines minimization as a more developed phase because it involves ignoring differences and paves the way for the acceptance of the other (Bennett, 2017, p. 67). At this juncture, "differences are minimized, and other cultures are seen as part of humanity" (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010, p. 69). The minimization of differences in the play is evident when the mixed couple visits the Jewish family after their trip to Lebanon and is received with warmth. Maya reveals to her acquaintances: "I am anxious about this visit, not sure what to say - or not say. His grandparents hug us longer than usual, tell us how worried they were, so worried all the time. We show them our pictures, and they look and listen. They say nothing of politics, and neither do we. We've agreed to disagree, without saying a word" (p. 56). Silence implicitly reveals the disagreement of David's family over his visit to Lebanon and their fear for their grandson. Maya's anxiety shows her uncertainty about the reaction of the Jewish family and her fear of being stereotyped as an inferior Arab American citizen. The family's refusal to comment on the couple's pictures in Lebanon and its silence indicate a desire to minimize cultural differences and to respect Maya as an equal human being. The agreement to disagree over politics suggests the role of politics in generating cultural clashes. The role of politics can also be studied through the mixed marriage of May's grandparents and the way they crossed religious boundaries to be able to get married. Storytelling techniques are used to narrate the story of the Lebanese grandparents who escaped Lebanon due to ideological and cultural conflicts and chose Washington as a new warm home. In one of her interviews, Leila Buck ascertains that storytelling adds credibility to the literary work because it invites the audience to share the experience of imaginary characters and the real experience of the storyteller. She announces: "personal storytelling is doubly powerful because the skeptic is confronted with not just a real person, but an eyewitness-someone who can say not only did this really happen-it happened to me" (qtd. in Schmidt, 2010, p. 126).

In the Crossing, the audience is engaged with the story of the grandparents who got married despite religious differences, the story of the parents who belong to different cultural origins (a Catholic Muslim mother and an American father), the story of the Arab American protagonist who gets married to a culturally different husband and the story of Leila Buck herself who visited Lebanon with her Jewish husband. *The Crossing* has biographical notes,

which add authenticity to the experience of crossing ethnic boundaries and going beyond the political and religious conflicts. Through Maya's voice, Buck (2011) argues for minimizing differences and opening new horizons for intercultural communication. Maya learns from her wise grandparents that "the root of all religions is the same: Give to those less fortunate, help those in need, and love one another. Khalas. Basseeta. Everything else is politics" (p. 9). The politicization of religion is responsible for heightening the cultural chasm and for disseminating the roots of intolerance. The successive mixed marriages in the play are based on love, ignoring politics, going beyond religious differences, and creating cultural diversity. The acceptance phase follows the minimization of differences in Bennet's scale.

Acceptance

Bennett (2017) defines acceptance as the moment when the other, who is newly perceived as "different from themselves, but equally human" (p. 68). Edward Said criticizes acceptance because it entails tolerance and "tolerance itself reconstructs self-other reconstruction" (Barthet, 2009, p. 38). Said argues that acceptance is rather an ethical act because it is based on respecting humanity and going beyond the limited cultural stratifications and postcolonial classifications Said adds: "the West must not continue to use its political, economic and military might to bring the East under its control and domination but must ultimately learn to accept its humanity based on ethics" (Shah, 2005, p. 92). Accepting humanity is suggested through Yale's characterization.

In *the Crossing*, both Maya and her friend Yale reject cultural conflicts and sympathize with victims regardless of their ethnic background. In this context, Yale divulges: 'One of the worst things about conflict is what it does to people who under any other circumstances would have all the chances to love each other. I have lost people very dear to me when these walls went up, and there was no way to pass them. And I don't want that to happen with you. So we have to speak honestly to one another, always, ok? Or nothing will ever change' (p. 55). Yale's dramatic voice shows that she is a victim of cultural conflict, and she suggests intercultural communication as the best means to dismantle cultural barriers and achieve peace. Buck (2011) suggests acceptance as the best alternative for alleviating feelings of estrangement and loss and for recreating a multicultural space where different cultures can meet, and human respect can be attained.

Said deepens the concept of humanism by asserting that it should be based on universality and crossing all types of differences. He argues that 'overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites dwellers in the metropolis and in

the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history' (qtd. in Rubin, 2012, p. 102). Humanism is achieved in *the Crossing* through mixed marriage, by accepting the culturally different other, by crossing physical and cultural boundaries, and by completing a harmonious union between characters with different roots. Union is made clear through the adaptation and integration processes, which are considered the highest forms of intercultural communication. The next part deals with adaptation and integration as the highest forms of intercultural communication.

Adaptation

Bennett defines adaptation to cultural differences as the process of respecting other cultures and remaining faithful to the native roots. Bennett (2017) further explains: "adaptation offers an alternative to assimilation. Adaptation involves extending your repertoire of beliefs and behaviors, not substituting one set for another. So you don't need to lose your primary cultural identity to operate effectively in a different cultural context" (p. 13). The process of adaptation is achieved through David's success at getting involved within the Arab-American family and Maya's success at merging with the Jewish family without losing their native identity. The Lebanese family invites their Jewish in-laws to get acquainted with Arab culture through means of intelligibility and meaningfulness, using music and food as adaptation strategies.

To start with language, Lebanese people tend to use Arabic words to invite their Jewish friends to discover the beauty of Arabic and become familiar with Arabic slogans and warm mottoes. The use of intelligibility is made conspicuous through the word-for-word translation of some phrases. Intelligibility consists of "the ability to understand other speakers who are speaking different variations of the language of communication" (Bringuglio, 2012, p. 66). David understands the Lebanese dialect thanks to the accurate translations provided by the Lebanese American characters. For example, Noura addresses David: "Thank you, David - habibi inta. (You're a darling)" (p. 13). The semantic register of endearment gives hints about the Arab family and the warmth of its members. Soft language reflects the strong bonds between family members and David's adaptation and ability to cross cultural boundaries. David himself uses the Lebanese dialect, and he impresses Noura when he tells her: "Mish mishkila. (No problem) DAVID makes "a little" gesture – maybe says "Shway" (A little) or "A3m bita3lam" (I'm learning) (p. 13). David is learning the Lebanese dialect to communicate with his in-laws and achieve acculturation. David succeeds in creating intercultural communication between Western and Eastern cultures. Lebanese characters smooth the process of intercultural

communication by using meaningfulness, and they translate some culturally bound Lebanese words for David and the American audience. For example, Maya introduces Lebanese words of gratitude; she avoids literal translation and uses adaptation by seeking a cultural substitute for the word "Tikrama3inik" (p. 23), which is translated into English as "As you wish" (p. 23). This attempt to find the correct meaning or meaningfulness shows that Maya bridges the gap between cultures and creates an intercultural dialogue. Under Maya's tongue, Buck reveals that adaptation is a necessary step toward peace, cultural richness, and cross-cultural dialogue.

Maya argues that adaptation is one distinguishing feature of the Lebanese citizen, who knows how to bridge the gap between East and West because of Lebanon's rich history and diverse civilizations. Maya reveals:

And you know Lebanon's unique geography has shaped more than its tourism. Over time, various groups began taking an interest in this tiny piece of land precisely because it exists in between – mountains and sea, West and East, modernity and tradition – More and more people wanted a say in shaping its history.... rather than fighting all those who sought to control them, the Lebanese learned to adapt, to survive –(p. 15)

Maya uses opposites 'mountains and sea,' 'West and East', and 'modernity and tradition' to show that Lebanon is associated with cultural richness, and it is the meeting zone between different cultures and lifestyles. Maya adds that Lebanese citizens learn that adaptation is the key to survival and continuity. We infer from Maya's arguments that cultural adaptation is necessary in a global climate of multiculturalism. That openness to other cultures is the root of personal and socio-cultural development.

The Lebanese characters also use food as an identity marker and as a way to remain faithful to their native culture. They adapt to the American way of life while preserving their culture by inviting their Western friends and audience to taste Lebanese dishes. According to social anthropologists like Levi Strauss, food and cooking "become cultural items through the workings of a set of rules (a language or grammar) that individuals unconsciously adopt within a physical and social space" (Oyangen, 2009, pp. 327-328). There is a close relationship between food and culture because food functions as a tool for cultural representation. Maya clings to the past, and she informs Joan and the audience about her grandfather, who introduces her to local dishes and teaches her that food is a powerful means of bridging cultural gaps and fostering intercultural communication. She uses the storytelling mode and reveals: "Other than that, he never said much except with his food - babaghanoush, usmaleeyih, and kibbe with ketchup – which I suppose was our way of reconciling two worlds. When he died, I lost a

connection to one of those worlds -the beautiful, tortured place where I could only go through [news flashes, pictures, and] other people's words" (p. 10). The traditional Lebanese dish "Kibbe," which is mixed with the American ingredient "Ketchup" is a fine example of intercultural communication and Maya's ability to keep faithful to the Lebanese roots and to adapt to the American way of life. Maya invites her Western guests to get used to the Lebanese cuisine and culture. She informs them: 'Well, I forgot to pass on the key information that if you finish your plate, it means you want more' (p. 23).

Maya is obviously giving hints about the generosity, warmth, and friendliness of Lebanese people, and she debunks the stereotypes about the association of the Arab American citizen with terrorism and animosity. Accordingly, Joan deduces that 'food is hospitality/and love' (p. 25), and his attitude has changed from denial of the ethnically different other to adaptability and a desire to discover Lebanese recipes. His positive attitude is noticed when he expresses his preferences for the Lebanese Baklava: 'Baklava! Well, this is perfect. I got some too, from the Middle Eastern bakery down the street' (p. 59). Maya has thus succeeded in inviting Joan to revise stereotypes about Arabs, and she has implicitly created a smooth negotiation between Arab and Jewish cultures. Cross-cultural adaptation is achieved through the motif of food and the fusion of Middle Eastern and Western tastes.

Adaptation to cultural differences is further reinforced through the use of music and the harmonious mixture of different melodies. Maya argues that Lebanese music is composed of a mosaic of other cultures: "The music is a mixture of Arabic pop, Latin beats and American hip-hop" (The techno medley of California Dreamin' is to die for, p. 21). Music functions as a universal language of cultural diversity because it encompasses Lebanese, American, and European chords. Maya informs the Western audience that music reflects the Lebanese mindset and the affluent, civilized native society where different cultures thrive. She convinces David about the openness of Lebanese people to a mosaic of other cultures: "More than anything, in Beirut, you feel a defiant joie de vivre - the word borrowed from the French, the style 100% Lebanese" (p. 21). Maya refers to the joy felt in Lebanon and to the adaptability to multiculturalism and interacting with other cultures.

Adaptation is thus achieved through translation, music, and food; both Lebanese American and Jewish American characters mingle, respect cultural differences, and remain faithful to their native roots. The finest example of adaptability is seen in Joan's movement from the pole of denying other cultures to learning about Lebanese cultural specificities, tasting Lebanese Baklava, and getting mixed up with Maya's family. Buck delivers a message about the repercussions of denying other cultures, being influenced by misjudgments and stereotypes, and she calls for the integration of cultural differences.

Integration

Integration is perceived as the highest form of intercultural development as it entails cultural diversity and the equal importance of the mainstream and the local cultures. Bennett argues that integration is the last step in the scale of intercultural sensitivity and, as stated by Spieb (2020), "Integration of cultural difference is the state in which one's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews" (p. 63). The new self is open to cultural differences and is a rich self because it can be hybrid and interact with others. Bennett adds that integration occurs when "people can experience themselves as multicultural beings who are constantly choosing the most appropriate cultural context for their behavior"(p. 63).

The multicultural self goes beyond seclusion because it is flexible with differences and a tolerant self that succeeds in achieving intercultural communication. Bennett's view of integration recalls the postcolonial call for considering hybridity and creating a meeting zone between cultures. In this respect, Said deduces that "All cultures are involved in one anothernone is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous" (Said, 1994, p. XXV). Said rejects the monolithic view of culture and he argues that cultures intercommunicate because they are not homogeneous, but they are involved and interconnected. Said rejects cultural seclusion or nativism, and he criticizes some Palestinian citizens for sticking to their local culture instead of communicating with other cultures and inviting them to learn about their customs, habits, and cultural specificities more flexibly. Said affirms: 'In all my works, I remained fundamentally critical of a gloating and uncritical nationalism.....My view of Palestine ...remains the same today: I expressed all sorts of reservations about the insouciant nativism, and militant militarism of the nationalist consensus' (Said, 1994, p. 338). In other words, nativism is another shape of miscommunications and isolation. Buck (2011) shares with Said and Bennett the same views about crossing cultural boundaries and creating a new thread of intercultural communication. In one of her interviews, Buck talks about her own experience of multiculturalism:

I grew up with my Lebanese mother and American diplomat father, constantly moving between the U.S. and the Arab world. In the process, I experienced firsthand how multiple cultures, lives, and daily realities exist simultaneously - equally real, sometimes in conflict, often intersecting. So I strive in all of my work to reflect both the uniqueness of our different experiences and the unexpected links between them. (qtd. In Perry, 2016, para. 10)

The main goal behind Buck's writing is to show the importance of integration and to highlight the necessity of finding cultural links. Buck is qualified to draw on the adverse effects

of cultural barriers because she has experienced the feeling of oscillation between sticking to bridges and crossing cultural and geographical ones.

The theme of crossing boundaries or integrating with different cultures is well developed in *Crossing*, where mixed couples discuss their experiences of intercultural communication and argue that crossing boundaries is necessary to establish continuity, depth, richness, and harmony. In this respect, Maya concludes in the final scene: ‘But if you really care about the people you’re trying to reach – It doesn’t matter how scary it is, or dangerous, or messy-- You...wade in, as deep as you have to – and hold out your hands. (Realizing – to JOAN and NOURA) Because—it isn’t in the bridge. It’s in the crossing” (p. 100). Maya divulges to the audience that marrying a culturally different husband is not easy. Still, it is a matter of conviction and a choice to cross boundaries rather than remain secluded within the shell of the native self. Integration provides Maya and her husband with psychological, emotional, and social comfort. When she faces the challenging question about the way of raising children, “You both seem very comfortable with moving back and forth between your cultures. Do you plan to have children, and if so, how will you raise them?” (p. 71). She responds positively “we do want our children to know where they come from”(p. 73).

The use of the emphatic form suggests her insistence on self-pride and her bright promises: she pledges to produce balanced children who will be aware of their mixed origins and multicultural selves. Maya adds that cultural plurality is one of her family’s distinguished features: “I exist because people chose to cross borders – to leave what they knew for who they loved. It began with my Teta and Jeddo” (p. 9). Maya and her ancestors succeed in crossing all boundaries and in establishing happy marriages, requited love, and a smooth integration between intrinsically different cultures. At the end of the play, “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness. A genuine polyphony of fully valid voices [emerge]” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). David, Maya, Noura, and Joan leave the stage after achieving integration and delivering the message about the importance of intercultural communication. They deduce that “it is a small world after all, it’s a small world after all...” (p. 38), and that cultural integration is necessary within a global context.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has been an attempt to create an interdisciplinarity between Bennett and Said’s approaches on intercultural communication. A postcolonial approach to intercultural communication leads to the conclusion that the multicultural self is expected to be flexible to integration and cultural differences. In *the Crossing*, some Jewish characters (namely Joan) do not accept the ethnically different Lebanese family and they are influenced by fabricated stereotypes which block the process of integration. On the other hand, some

Lebanese protagonists accuse the Jewish characters for being ‘violent’ and corrupt. Buck adopts an objective view when she revises stereotypes against both Jewish and Lebanese American characters and she calls for humanism. The Arab American playwright invites the audience to move from the phase of denial to the stage of integration and she shows through ‘Bridging the Gap Association,’ that crossing geographical, political, social and cultural boundaries is the root for intercultural communication. Buck has succeeded at revising the relationship between mainstream and local cultures, at calling for self-criticism and at creating a smooth cultural dialogue. Her call for cross- cultural communication has an authentic dimension because the play reflects her own experience of getting married to a Jewish husband, facing some cultural difficulties and crossing boundaries. In one of her interviews , she states that the aim of writing and performance is “creating and facilitating spaces of all kinds for people to connect and reflect and engage in different ways. And sometimes that's in the theatre’ (Nelson & Bergenstock 13:45)” *In the Crossing*, the playwright has thus succeeded at staging multiculturalism , creating cultural connections and at showing that bridges are unavoidable, but the mission of the multicultural self lies in crossing boundaries and looking to different sides of the bridge.

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AI Statement

This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of these technologies may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the author.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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