The poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye exemplifies the complexities of identity issues operating in a culture that is fraught with racial and political intensity. Although the poet has repeatedly mentioned the impact of her experience in Palestine on the formation of her poetic vision and consciousness, she does not resist—or separate herself from—the influence of American literary tradition and culture. Her multicultural identity embraces the two cultures by presenting the amalgamation of both Arab heritage and American experience. Thus, Nye’s poetry shows how this Arab-American identity develops to be cosmopolitan as she sees herself as a "citizen of the world". This cosmopolitanism plays an important role in cross-cultural conversation which is based on acceptance and respect of difference. Her poetry is a message to all people and other hyphenated literary writers to celebrate their difference and use it to connect the various cultures in the world.

الخلاصة
الهوية المتعددة الثقافات والعالمية وعلاقتها بحوار الحضارات في الشعر العربي
الأميركي: ناعومي شهاب ناي

يمثل شعر ناعومي شهاب ناي تقديره للهوية في ثقافة ملؤها التوتر العرقي والسياسي. فعلى الرغم من أن الشاعرة قد ذكرت مراراً الآثار التي خلفتها تجربتها الفلسطينية في تكوين رؤيتها ووعيها الشعبيين، إلا أنها لاتبدي مقاومة أو انفصالا عن تأثير الثقافة والتقاليد الأبدية الأميركية. أن هوية الشاعرة المتعددة الثقافات تحتضن الثقافتين معا-الفلسطينية والأميركية. من خلال تقديمها لمزيج من الأثر العربي والتجربة الأميركية. وهكذا يظهر شعر الشاعرة تطور مفهوم الهوية من هوية متعددة الثقافات إلى هوية عالمية فالشاعرة ترى نفسها على أنها مواطنة في هذا العالم. تلعب هذه العالمية دوراً مهماً في حوار الحضارات العالم على تقبل واحترام الاختلاف. يعتبر شعر ناي رسالة موجهة للناس عامة والأدباء خاصة ليحتفوا باختلافهم وإلى استخدامه لتدوير التواصل بين مختلف الحضارات والثقافات في العالم.
Introduction

Born in 1952 to a Palestinian father and an American mother of German descent, at St. Louis, Missouri, Naomi Shihab Nye grew up in a multicultural home (Lauther, 2975). Her biculturalism and her cosmopolitanism are, clearly, a product of her bi- (even multi-) cultural and racial family: a Palestinian father, who is very conscious and assertive of his roots, a mother who is very tolerant, and grandparents on both ends who—though they have some tensions regarding place and culture—do ultimately accept it. It is due to these tensions and celebrations, acceptance and some resistance, that Nye's sense of biculturalism is both complex and unique (Ibid. )

She was introduced to the world of writing at an early age. Her father was one of the few Arab-Americans working in a major daily newspaper as an editor. Nye grew up in St. Antonio, Texas, where she graduated from Trinity University (Ibid., 2976).

Nye's recognition as a poet came in the 1980s. Over the years she has published number of poetry collections, edited anthologies and written a novel Habibi (1997) for young adults. Her work has been praised and acknowledged by leading literary and educational institutions, and has earned many awards and fellowships. They include four Pushcart Prizes, I. B. Lavan Award from the Academy of American poets, Launan Foundation Fellowship, the Witter Bynner Fellowship from the Library of Congress to name a few. S. K. Jayussi has anthologized some of her poetry in the Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature (356-362), and critics like Orfalea have called her “the outstanding American poet of Palestinian origin” (Ibid., 56). Naomi Shihab is a frequently invited speaker and a well-known folksinger in the southwest with two record albums to her name (Ibid). To be in the scene, one should be introduced to the development of the definition of identity in American culture to see the place of Arab-Americans.
American Identity: From the Melting Pot to Multiculturalism

In American literature and culture, identity is a major theme from Puritanism to Postmodernism. In Modernism and Postmodernism, the discourse on identity takes on more direct and explicit social, ethnic, racial and political overtones (Michaels, 1995). Up until Modernism, identity is discussed generally within the context of the melting-pot formula: i.e. that there is one American self (predominantly male, white, and Anglo-Saxon) within which Americans – from all origins, races, cultures, and backgrounds – "melt" (Alkhadra, 184).

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the playwright Israel Zangwill coined the phrase The Melting Pot to describe how immigrants from many cultures assimilated in the United States. In Zangwill’s play, feuding Russian Jewish and Cossack families immigrate to America where they learn that hatred and intolerance have no place (Green, 1999). The “melting pot” metaphor assumed that over time the distinct habits, customs, and traditions associated with particular groups would disappear as people assimilated into the larger culture. The result of this complete assimilation is a uniquely American culture that would accommodate elements of diverse immigrant cultures in a new context (Fuchs, 1990).

As Ben Wattenberg in The First Century Measured observes, “Zangwill had found exactly the right metaphor to translate the urban immigrant experience into American Exceptionalism” (2001) which is rooted in the conviction that the country’s vast frontier offers boundless and equal opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals through hard work and self-sacrifice. As Alexis de Tocqueville put it in Democracy in America: “For 50 years, it has been constantly repeated to the inhabitants of the United States that they form the only religious, enlightened, and free people. They see that up to now, democratic institutions have prospered among them; they therefore have an immense opinion of themselves, and they are not far from believing that they form a species apart in the human race” (2001).

This is clearly stated in Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur's widely-known argument "What is an American" (in 1782):
What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European or the descendent of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son marries a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners and receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced….. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men …. (Letter 3, 3).

Thus, total assimilation within American society is required. The immigrant has to suppress and erase his roots and his ethnic or racial backgrounds. The metaphor of "melting" is quite revealing here. This is the archetypal model for identity in the context of American literature, from the beginning to well after the mid of the twentieth-century.

But as Modernism approaches, and later in Postmodernism, this condition of assimilation and melting pot model begins to be challenged, and eventually deconstructed and reconstructed, by several American authors of various ethnic backgrounds, feminists, anthropologists, philosophers and theorists. Advocates of pluralism and multiculturalism suggest a different model of what an American is (or should be), a model radically different from what Crevecoeur suggests: one which respects gender, race, ethnic and cultural roots and differences (Michaels, 1995). Many authors have attacked and deconstructed this model suggesting a different one that is based more on the hyphenated- or multi-identity formula (Owen, 2).

It is since the 1960s that scholars and political activists have recognized that immigrant groups should not, entirely abandon their distinct identities but embrace multiculturalism and diversity. People began to employ the alternative notion of the “American mosaic” (Rico and Mano, 1991). Multiculturalism, in the context of the “American mosaic,” celebrates the unique cultural heritage of racial and ethnic groups, some of whom seek to preserve their native languages and lifestyles. In a sense, individuals can be Americans and at the same time claim other identities, including those based on racial and ethnic heritage (Ibid.).
Multicultural Identity and Double-Consciousness

Muticulturalism is the solution for the sense of "twoness" or "double-consciousness"- in Du bois terms- that immigrants or hyphenated people suffer from. This duality stems from the struggle of the marginalized and the minority (the immigrants) which is a result of their continuous attempts to be in affinity with the dominant and the majority (the Americans) (Abdul-Jabbar, 3-4). Du bois believes that immigrants feel this sense of twoness as they live "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism" (Du Bois 1903, 202). This notion of twoness– is often compared to, and described as, that of the postcolonial subject in relation to the colonial power – applying to indigenous "natives" or inhabitants of countries or cultures dominated or occupied by "foreign" world colonial powers. Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today: A Use Friendly Guide* phrases this linkage thus:

Many of these individuals [the colonial subjects] tried to imitate the colonizers, as much as possible, in dress, speech, behavior, and lifestyle, a phenomenon postcolonial critics refer to as mimicry. Postcolonial theorists often describe the colonial subject as having a double consciousness or double vision, in other words, a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures: that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community (368).

Within the context of the American culture, the "colonizer" is the "white" culture, and the "colonized" is not only "the indigenous community" (i.e. native Americans) but all other minorities, including African-Americans, Russian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Arab-Americans. Multiculturalism in Postmodernism means recognizing the self as being two or double at once: "American" and "other" – hence the reference to Americans of native origins (by themselves and others), as native-American; of African origins, as African-American; of Chinese origins, as Chinese-American; and of Arab origins, as Arab-American.
In discussing the question of identity in Naomi Shihab Nye's poetry, the time factor is crucial. She has emerged to the literary scene in postmodern times in which the challenges of hyphenation, double-consciousness or twoness have been settled. Instead of assimilating her native culture in American culture or resisting it, she celebrates being bicultural. This is obvious in Nye's poetry. In an article published in *The New Advocate*, Nye states:

I receive letters from people I never met, asking, '... Are you offended to be called a Palestinian-American?' Not at all. I now call myself that. I am [sic] that. For me, the word 'different' always felt like a compliment, not an insult (121).

And this is the bottom line in Nye's thinking.

She is perfectly at ease writing about the old world and the new world, Jerusalem and Texas, her Palestinian grandmother in West Bank and her life in St. Antonio. Nye is a poet who has her feet firmly anchored on both cultures. Yet, her poems in which the subject matter extends to Palestinian identity, exile, Arabness, demand much consideration and importance. Affirmation of ethnic origin is a powerful statement, vital to the Arab-American identity.

Most, if not all the Arab American poets ... have gone back to their culture of origin and tried to understand it, be part of it, nourish it and expand it into their lives and beings, while remaining in an American context or background. Indeed a notion of our origin is a principal element in defining who we are (Handal,44).

Nye refers constantly to her Arabic roots. Olives, palm trees, camels, her attachment to the bigger family living in Palestine, folktales place her poetry deep in the Arabic context. As a Palestinian, she raises her voice on political issues, affirming loyalty to the Arab cause. She considers herself political. Further, she strongly believes politics is about people and as a poet, engrosses herself in personal ramifications of everything for everyone.
Speaking about biculturalism in "The Gravities of Ancestry," Nye makes it clear that it is in fact a blessing – and not a source of confusion or perplexity:

Being bicultural has always been important to me: even as a child I knew there was more than one way to dress, to eat, to speak, or to think. I felt lucky to have this dual perspective inherent in my parentage, and I was encouraged to explore other ethnic and cultural perspectives as well. Perhaps being bicultural helped me maintain some sense of “otherness” or detachment: while I was growing up in the United States, there was a quiet, old-world part of me which stood back and observed. It took a year’s residence among the Arabs and Americans of Old City Jerusalem to make me feel distinctly American, as well (266).

Nye's sense of bicultural (even multicultural) identity is close to that explained by Amin Maalouf. As indicated by Maalouf, one's character cannot be separated up or compartmentalized, regardless of what number of layers or segments it is made up. Explaining this notion, he says in In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong

So am I half French and half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can't be compartmentalized. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of many components combined together in a mixture that is unique to every individual. (2)

Because Nye feels exactly this same feeling about herself, one finds her in America seeing these disparate components or layers, but accepting them as normal and as contributing to a totality of experience, or personality. In "Singing the Long Song," she makes this notion crystal clear: "People have asked if I felt like an Arab-American as a child, and I say, 'No, I just felt like a kid [sic]'" (119). In America, her world can be made up of American and Palestinian/Arab/Moslem elements, and yet feels one. Similarly, when she visits Palestine she identifies with it easily.

With respect to Palestine, several poems illustrate her feelings of both belonging and harmony to the world of her heritage and roots. In "Words
Under the Words," she reveals her entire identification and sense of comfort with her Palestinian grandmother, just as she identifies in "Grandfather's Heaven" with her American grandmother. In the former poem, she describes the effect of Sitti Khadra's touches, upon her falling sick, thus:

My grandmother's hands recognize grapes,

the damp shine of a goat's new skin.

When I was sick they followed me,

I woke from the long fever to find them

covering my head like cool prayers. (1-5)

In "Different Ways to Pray," a poem set in Palestine and Mecca (her Palestinian/Moslem heritage), Nye celebrates difference as something positive. She – whose American grandfather tells her in "Grandfather's Heaven," upon hearing that she is studying religion, that "That's how people get confused" and that she should "Keep it simple" (16-18) – identifies perfectly with those Moslems who go to Mecca for pilgrimage, just as she understands the position of those who do not go:

Some prized the pilgrimage,

wrapping themselves in new white linen

to ride buses across miles of vacant sand.

When they arrived at Mecca

they would circle the holy places,

on foot, many times,

they would bend to kiss the earth

and return, their lean faces housing mystery. (20-27)
And she tells us later in the poem, without any negative implications, that "There were those who did not care about praying" (36).

Just as Nye feels at home in America, she also feels at home in Palestine. In many poems, she identifies with many of her relatives in Palestine, and speaks as if she were Palestinian. She is at home with the surroundings, and comfortable with whatever she does. In "Lunch in Nablus City Park," she describes an experience she has at a café, in which she is ecstatic: "In summers, this café is full./ Today only our table sends laughter into the trees" (28-29). Then she takes note of "shooting in the valleys" and, in a statement which condemns Israeli violence and occupation, she says: "What makes a man with a gun seem bigger/than a man with almonds?" (34-35). This proves correct what she says in "Two Countries," "love means you breathe in two countries" (1.15). This is in line also with what Maalouf says about identity:

Anyone who claims a more complex identity is marginalized.  
But a young man born in France of Algerian parents clearly carries within him two different allegiances or 'belongings,' and he ought to be allowed to use both (3).

Nye incarnates this very principle in her poetry, and in her interviews. In an interview published in World Literature Today, she says:

I do not agree with Americans who suggest that being an ethnic American diminishes this country's dignity or significance…. We are all fourths and eighths and sixteenths of all sorts … President Obama is a perfect iconic figure in the moment – he does not stress the halves, but accepts them … (32).

In her commitment to the subject of biculturality, Nye synchronizes Arab heritage and American experience. Her poems expresses a mixture of both to create a unique identity as the Palestinian American writer, Lisa Majaj explains that it is a "process of ethno genesis, the creation of something new and different out of the conjunction of Arab and American culture" (Majaj, "Hyphenated Author") which is pivotal to Arab American identity. For example, in her poem, "Darling", "All day the sky in Texas which has
Nye has always been conscious of her two worlds; a matter which she believes helps bicultural writes to identify themselves. Her poem "My Father and the Fig Tree" is a case in point.

"I am telling about a fig straight from the earth -
gift of Allah! - on a branch so heavy it touches the ground.
I am talking about picking the largest, fattest, sweetest fig
in the: world and putting it in mouth."

(Here he'd stop and close his eyes.) (14-18)

She places the fig tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the middle of Dallas, Texas. And alongside an exultant father, singing a fig tree song in Arabic. Similarly, in "Trade" she writes about her sitti (grandmother) aged 105, in Jerusalem; "And my sitti eating praline from Texas said in Arabic, "Do you think she would trade places with me?"(13-15).

Though Nye is settled in St. Antonio, where she lives with her family, she believes the sense of connection to her big family in Middle East crucial to her existence. As she writes in "Gravities of Ancestry", her mind wonders to West Bank to her grandmother while she sits in Texas.

**Cosmopolitan Identity and Cross-Cultural Conversation**

Beside expressing a bi- and multicultural identity, Nye's sense of identity goes beyond that to be cosmopolitan. Instead of only celebrating her two cultures, Nye celebrates her being part of this world which is considered as one country for all people from all cultures as "citizens of the world"
and who are supposed to live together without boundaries of any kind.

The approach to rooted cosmopolitanism is inspired by the recent work of the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (Appiah, 2005, 213-72). “A cosmopolitanism with prospects,” he writes, “must reconcile a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms of partiality” (Ibid, 222-223). Indeed, for Appiah, the terms “partial” and “rooted” cosmopolitanism are interchangeable. He argues that cosmopolitans must acknowledge that they are, in fact, partial to certain places—specifically, to their native countries and other places where they might have spent a considerable amount of time. Appiah believes that it is possible to retain one’s roots while cultivating a cosmopolitanism that does not efface the cultures of other places, but instead affirms our shared humanity. The two ideals that he identifies as the foundation for rooted cosmopolitanism are “universal concern” and “respect for human difference” (Ibid, 2006, xv). Building this sort of cosmopolitanism practically requires strong partiality to one or two places, since loyalty to one’s own culture or to another culture held close to one’s heart enables compassion for other, foreign cultures.

The model that Appiah proposes for this type of cosmopolitanism is that of the conversation: individuals, rooted in particular places, communicating with one another and weighing the good and the bad in their respective cultures, without forcing their beliefs on each other (Ibid, 2005, 267-68). Essentially, this amounts to an open exchange of ideas, a dialogue, through which a given culture—or even a given individual—has the freedom to choose whether to adopt a particular “foreign” idea. In fact, Appiah uses the reading of literature as an example of “the sort of imaginative engagement” that cross-cultural conversation requires (Appiah, 2006, 85). Moreover, a person needn’t only be partial to a single place. One might even argue that our cosmopolitanism becomes stronger when we are rooted in multiple places, since the scope of our empathy is widened (Ibid.).

Nye’s biculturalism and cosmopolitanism may primarily be attributed to her bi-racial, bi-cultural parents. Appiah make this clear:
Raised with this father [from Ghana] and an English mother, who was deeply connected to our family in England and fully rooted in Ghana, where she has now lived for half a century, I always had a sense of family and tribe that was multiple and overlapping: nothing could have seemed more commonplace (2006, xvi).

The same can be said about Nye. For her, identity not only cuts across American-Palestinian borders, but across global lines. What Appiah says about cosmopolitan identity applies to Nye almost completely. Illustrating what cosmopolitan identity, in the postmodern world means, Appiah says:

In the final message my father left for me and my sisters, he wrote: 'Remember you are citizens of the world.' But as a leader of the independence movement in what was then the Gold Cost, he never saw a conflict between local particularities and a universal morality – between being part of the place you were and a part of the broader human community (2006, xvi).

This – being "citizens of the world" – is a postmodern idea, in which there is no "conflict" between "local particularities" and "universal morality" and between "being part of the place you were" and "a part of the broader human community" (Ibid.).

In “Lights in the Window,” Nye writes, “we need to know one another. It is an imperative, not a luxury” (p. 6). This knowledge plays an important role in stopping perpetuating hate and deepening misunderstanding among cultures.

Nye positively embraces her bi-cultural heritage, perceiving the dual perspectives of her parentage as a source of enrichment that drew her closer to other cultures. She feels very close to Mexican culture because of the sense of otherness that Mexicans feel in the United States; a sense of otherness that she can identify with. In an interview with Phoebe Davidson, she explains her attachment to other cultures, and particularly Latin American culture: "It doesn’t matter it isn’t my culture, I’ve always felt that any little bit of other in our lives …gives much more than it takes away" (1998,162).
Nye interprets her multiple identities as extending herself in each of these worlds, countries and cultures. In an interview with Bill Moyer, Nye remarks:

You can't stay in your little comfortable spot…it's a challenge and-- whether it's loving another culture far away that suddenly has been represented by an act of violence—or whether it's loving another person…that always involves—you know—all kinds of growing-- we're challenged. And so every time you care about something or somebody that relates to a different place in the world, then your empathy grows. (2002)

The poet’s interpretation of her multiple belonging and diverse cultural heritage originates from a vision that is similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of "the new mestiza" presented in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). As a multiculturalist scholar, Anzaldúa insists on the necessity of action to activate communication. She contends that feminists of colour are bridge persons who connect and make links between their ethnic communities and academic ones, between their feminist groups and non-political ones, and between languages (2009,106-7). In a parallel way, Nye seeks to occupy this position of cultural bridge to link her Arab and American cultures.

Nye's poetry is about connections, human relationships, places, biculture, and cosmopolitanism. In several of her poems, she expresses universal themes, and experiences of peoples and countries other than American and Palestinian. According to Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom in "Counter Narratives: Cooking up Stories of Love and Loss in Naomi Shihab Nye's Poetry and Diana Abu-Jaber's "Crescent", "Her poems convey the idea that through observing the lives of others, we begin to dissolve the imaginary boundaries separating individuals, cultures, and countries" (34).

The year Nye spent in the occupied territories, and later in her life in Texas, have impacted the poet’s sense of belonging and placed her in a place to assume the mission of linking her two conflicting geographical spaces, which enables her to define her role as a mediator. By offering folktale stories from her ancestral land, Palestine, the poet attempts to inscribe
possibilities of peace, love and community by reinforcing the idea that sharing acts of everyday life can help us cross ‘the imaginary boundaries separating individuals, cultures, and countries’ (Mercer and Storm, 34). The poet used her Arab heritage to establish herself a literary reputation in the mainstream culture, and reap more social and economic privileges accordingly.

Obviously, cosmopolitanism means several things to several people; one meaning, however, which is acceptable to all in the context of postmodernism, is acceptance and respect of difference, which is generally what is meant by diversity. This meaning is embodied in Nye's collection, Different Ways to Pray, across its various poems.

An aspect of Nye’s vision of cross-cultural conversation is revealed in her poem "Kindness". It refers to the necessity of compassion and empathy amongst human beings as a means of achieving full understanding and appreciation of humanity regardless of ethnicity or race, economic status, education or any other defining characteristics that divide nations of the world, or even citizens from one nation. In Colombia, the poorest and harshest country in the northwest of South America, the poet found a world where the future would "dissolve in a moment" (l.3), the landscape "between the regions of kindness" is barren (l.9), and the kind is matched equally to the mean-spirited. Nevertheless, the poet found that this world also overwhelms the globe and is not restricted to Colombia, which had inspired this poem during her visit to Colombia in 1978 (l.35).

In “Kindness”, Nye introduces kindness as the culmination of the deep meaning of one’s life. Throughout the poem, she identifies three important steps to reach deep kindness: experiencing intense loss" Before you know what kindness really is / you must lose things, " (ll.1-2), empathy—through recognising the universality of death "feel the future dissolve in a moment/ like salt in a weakened broth" (ll.3-4) , and sorrow "you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing" (l.22).

Instead of offering a direct definition of, or explanation for, kindness, the poet forces the reader to examine the opposite of kindness to attain a
better understanding of it. To recognise kindness, readers must experience loss, and "feel the future dissolve in a moment / like salt in a weakened broth" (ll.3-4). The poet employs metaphor and personification to expound her belief in the necessity of kindness in humans’ lives. For example, the metaphor of bus riders (ll. 10-13), identifies kindness as a destination towards which all people should head. Also, the metaphor "the passengers eating maize and chicken" (l.12) signifies the poet’s identification with minorities such as Native Americans. The use of "maize" implies that other passengers might be natives, apparently different from most readers, since the word ‘maize’ is a synonym for corn derived from an extinct Latin American language and translated by the Spanish (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maize).

In the second stanza, the picture gets more depressing when readers face the lonely death of an unknown Indian on the road. Nye explains to her readers:

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,

you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho

lies dead by the side of the road.

You must see how this could be you,

how he too was someone

who journeyed through the night with plans

and the simple breath that kept him alive. (ll.14-20)

The phrase "the tender gravity" suggests that kindness is a powerfully attractive force. The word tender here is opposed to the inhumanity implied in abandoning the dead on the road, which shows neither remorse nor respect. Following this image of the dead Indian in a white poncho, the poet addresses her readers and urges them to imagine that this person could be them and how that unknown Indian is not different from any one else. He was once a person who had dreams and plans for his life. Death here is mentioned to summon the universality of death as an experience that connects all human
beings. Readers are forced to see death coming to all people and that understanding this fact should pave the way to connect with others and recognise them as fellow travellers in life, regardless of their ethnicity, race, economic status or education.

In the final stanza, the poet relies on personification to cast "kindness" as the ultimate end of such deep experiences as loss, empathy and sorrow. Kindness is personified as raising its head from the crowds of the world to say

it is I you have been looking for

and then goes with you everywhere

like a shadow or a friend (ll.31-34)

Sympathy, understanding, and putting one's self in the place of the other are expressed in this poem. Kindness is a solution and a condition to cross-cultural conversation.

Nye identifies with the Indian in another poem, "The Indian in the Kitchen," in which she shows clearly her ability to identify with peoples from other cultures. The first stanza begins with the following assertion: "Her face is central America –/ from the edges, oceans stretch out" (1-2). In the second stanza, she opens herself to the narrative of a culture different from hers, and totally identifies with it:

To this one I would say, Tell me the story

you have not told anyone,

the tale braided into your skull and tied with a string.

Describe the sky on the night you wandered out into

the village,
calling for your father who left Huehuetenango

and never returned. (5-10)

This cosmopolitan spirit is expressed powerfully at the end of "For Lost and Found Brothers." Says the speaker:

… how strangely and suddenly, on the lonely porches,
in the sleepless mouth of the night,
the sadness drops away, we move forward,
confident were born into a large family,
our brothers cover the earth. (23-27)

Being "born into a large family" and "our brothers cover the earth" articulate the cosmopolitan spirit most eloquently.

Nye's cosmopolitanism is a result of her interest in world cultures, into many of whose countries she travels, either literally or through books and maps. In "The Passport Photo," in which she speaks about Chile (where she plans to travel), she says: "I swallow the map of South America tacked to my kitchen door" (1.7).

To Nye, poetry is "a house with thousands of glittering lights. Our words and images, land to land, era to era, shed light on one another" (Lights in the Windows, 1). Words and images; help dissolve old enmities and pave way for better understanding.

If poetry comes out of the deepest places in the human soul and experience, shouldn't it be as important to learn about one another's poetry, country to country, as one another's weather or gross national products? It seems critical to me (Lights in the Windows, 1).
Poetry enables us to see beyond our locked doors and cities, and feel the world again and most importantly feel connected. Poetry needs no passport to cross borders. It travels everywhere. In one of her poems "Cross That Line", she writes,

He sang into Canada.

His voice left the USA

when his body was not allowed

to cross that line. (7-10)

As an Arab-American, a bicultural person, she understands the importance of knowing one another. She knows that failing to do so, comes with a heavy price. As a daughter of a Palestinian immigrant, she was brought up in a world of old country folktales. As an adult, she has realized that it's vital to read Israeli-Jewish writers, to know, in her own words "how many links we had" (Lights in the Window, 2).

Nye’s Collection of poetry, 19 Varieties of Gazelles contains graceful imagery and loving portrayal of Arabic traditions, places and people is a memorable testament to the importance of cross-cultural understanding. It has some openly anti-war and pro-humanitarian poems beginning with the grace and innocence of the gazelles as described in the book’s namesake. The other aspect of the collection relates to the injustice and futility of violence and war. These poems are an important aspect of the work in that they leave the reader with a deeper sense among many Arab people that war has cost them dearly and scared them deeply (Layton, 58-70)

Nye’s broad take on the Middle East includes poems on the devastating earthquake in Iran, a message from Saudi women, an account of a visit to Abu Dhabi and to the island of Bahrain. However, her book is
grounded in her depiction of Palestinian anguish, her willingness to see Israelis as individuals, her recognition that both sides are perpetuating violence, and her call for change. In the poem "All Things not Considered" she writes of the people dying on both sides of the conflict and suggests:

No one was right.

Everyone was wrong.

*What if they’d get together*

*And say that?*

..........  

Jewish and Arab women

Standing silently together.

Generations of black.

*Are people the only holy land?* (ll.25-28, 47-50)

Nye creates sympathy through celebrating small details which show that Arabs are not all similar. She tells stories of simple people, shepherds, old men, and countryside women working, etc.

Most of the poems in this collection show pictures of Arabs, bits of their lives spent in villages with one cow, or in refugee camps, or in self-imposed exile elsewhere, but still longing for home. As one looks at the details, he sees individuals suffering: an Iranian man holding his limp child after an earthquake, Palestinian girls who stand in line for bread for seven hours, and students gathering for their last day of the school year, but then the school door is blown off, and one can see
Empty chairs where laughter used to sit.

Laughter lived here

Jingling its pocket of thin coins

And now it is in hiding. ("The Palastinians Have given up Parties"

Il.30-33)

“Blood” considers how, in our post-9/11 world, a true Arab behaves. Nye slides into the theme diagonally, proposing different answers. Is it through the little habits or customs that mark a person as "Arab"? Is it through an attitude, a point of view or a perspective that uncovers an Arab Philosophy? Is there a flag that unites Arabs? Nye's father distinguished her untainted wonder at the world, her kindness, as being genuinely and truly Arab. Or, does it mean that to be Arab means living with grief and violence, with a “tragedy with a terrible root /[that] is too big for us” (Il.18-19).

And so, after another horrific headline, Nye and her father talk “around the news,” (l.16) because his pain or torment is so profound and crude that “neither of his two languages can reach it” (l.18). Nye herself goes to the countryside in this last poem. She “plead[s], with the air,” (l.26) and, like those shepherds, looks for a place to store her agony. But now there is no settling down to good food, to those simple pleasures of being alive in order to balance the despair. We’ve come too far and have seen too much. Now there are only anguished cries: “What does a true Arab do now? (l.29).

Nye’s work sustains the belief in the power of poetry to bring knowledge and empathy that enables its advocates to connect with those who are unlike them. Reflecting on the significance of poetry in American society after September 11, she contends:

As a direct line to human feeling, emphatic experience, genuine language, and detail, poetry is everything that headlines news is not. It takes us inside situations, helps us imagine life from more
than one perspective, honours imagery and metaphor – those great tools of thought - and deepens our confidence in a meaningful world. (Shihab Nye 2002,86)
Works Cited

27. Olson, Jamie L.."Rooted Cosmopolitanism in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, and Joseph Brodsky" .Doctor of Philosophy (English Language and Literature) in The University of Michigan, 2008


