Identity in Naomi Shihab Nye: The Dynamics of Biculturalism

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ABSTRACT

The study examines Naomi Shihab Nye's position on biculturalism, which is viewed as both complex and straightforward, as reflected in many of her poems, especially those pertaining to her dual heritage: the Arab-American; and some of her interviews and prose works. The basic premise, on which the study is built, is that while there are some anxieties or tensions in the world that Nye depicts, regarding her dual heritage, Nye is largely not only comfortable with biculturalism, and with hyphenated-identity, but celebratory of it. One reason behind this is Nye's postmodernism (a movement which comes to recognize and celebrate bi- and multiculturalism); another is Nye's cosmopolitanism, which is perhaps the large context of her biculturalism.

Keywords: Hyphenated Identity, Biculturalism, American Literature, Cosmopolitanism, Postmodernism, Arab American Writers, Double-consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

Identity is a major theme in American literature (and the American culture at large), from Puritanism to Postmodernism. At times, the identity-related discourse takes the form of a debate on the relation of the individual self to itself, to others and to the world around it from a theological viewpoint, such as in much Puritanic literature, as explained fully (for example) in Sevan Bercovitch's classic study The Puritan Origins of the American Self; from a deistic, secular point of view, such as in Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur's "What is an American" in Letters from an American Farmer and Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography; from a Romantic perspective, such as in Emerson's Nature and "Self-Reliance," Herman Melville's Moby-Dick, and Walt Whitman's Song of Myself; from a Realist/Naturalist standpoint, such as in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and Henry James' Daisy Miller; from a Modernist angle, such as in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and The Wasteland or Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby; and from a Postmodernist view, such as in Kurt Vonnegutt's Slaughterhouse-Five and Ralph Waldo

Ellison's Invisible Man.

Throughout, but especially 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, talk on identity is seen 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". This position is clearly stated in Crevecoeur's widely-known argument (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

* I have relied, in my understanding and discussion of identity (seen as the relation of the self to itself, to others, and to the world) in the American context, on a number of classic studies: Perry Miller, F. O. Matthiessen, Sacvan Bercovitch, A. Y. Majdoubek, and others.
embraced.... Here individuals of all nations are *melted* into a new race of men .... (Letter 3, 3; All emphases, except "He," are mine).

This is the model, the archetype, for identity in the context of American literature, from the beginning to well after the mid of the twentieth-century. The patriarchal dimension of such formula is reflected in the repetition of "man" and "he" (and the reference to America as the "fatherland" in a sentence just preceding the citation). The ethnocentrism is evident in reference to immigrants of European origins only. The melting-pot formula is explicitly expressed in the word "melted" and in the "mixture" of blood – mixture aiming at oneness, being the antithesis of recognition of difference. The idea is simple (though highly problematic, as many pointed out later): if one immigrates to America, or if one lives in it; one has to entirely (and *apriori*) abandon or totally get rid of any ideas, beliefs, practices, customs or traditions that do not harmonize with those of the new "home" – "He is an American" who leaves behind "all ... prejudices and manners and receives new ones." Total assimilation within American society is required: roots have to be cut off, and ethnic or racial backgrounds have to be suppressed and erased. The metaphor of "melting" is quite revealing here.

As Modernism approaches, and later in Postmodernism, such ethnocentric, racist, and patriarchal 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 begin to speak out and 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). As early as Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, and W. E. B. Du Bois, and later in John Steinbeck, Alex Haley, Anzia Yezierska, Alice Walker, Malcolm X, Adrienne Rich, Edward Said, Elaine Showalter, Gayatri Roysarkoty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha; the melting-pot model has been fiercely attacked and deconstructed, with many authors showing in detail what is wrong with it and suggesting, instead, a model that is based more on the hyphenated- or multi-identity formula. Increasingly, the feeling is expressed that the monolithic melting pot does not suit many Americans, who are neither male nor white. Demographically, racially, ethnically, culturally, and sexually, Americans are too dynamic and diverse to be fit in or confined to one model. Slowly but steadily, many have started to adopt the "double-consciousness" notion suggested by Du Bois – after coming to terms with it, of course.

In his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois – in a vehement critique of the melting pot, and a scathing attack on his contemporary fellow African-American thinker Booker T. Washington who incarnates it – wrote:

... the negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness, - - an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (8).

It is obvious, in this citation, that Du Bois feels that being "American" (within the prevalent melting-pot formula of the times) can be achieved or acquired only at the expense of one's "true self-consciousness." To be "American," in other words, is to repress and compromise an essential part of one's own being – a repression which, inevitably results, in an inner conflict, even a schizophrenia: a "towness ... two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."

The same problem is expressed by Yezierska, an American of Russian origin, in "America and I." Says she, depicting the dilemma of an immigrant American who is trying to assimilate but cannot, despite the fact that she is doing her best, learning "the American language" and trying to meet the "American" society on its own terms:

I knew now the American language. And I knew now, if I talked to the Americans from morning till night, they could not understand what the Russian soul of
me wanted. They could not understand me anymore than if I talked to them in Chinese. Between my soul and the American soul were worlds of difference that no words could bridge over. What was the difference? What made Americans so far apart from me? (153)

In this citation, Yezierska is depicting exactly the same situation that Du Bois is depicting – the "double-consciousness," the "twoness," the "unreconciled strivings," and the "two warring ideals in one … body" – but in different words.

This same notion of duality or "twoness" – under which the self is suspended between a part of it that is inner and integral but unrecognized by society, due to being a member of a "marginal" ethnic or racial group, and a part that is attempting to be in affinity with the "dominant" mode, i.e. that of the "central," majority race or ethnic group (the American part) – 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 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 (as Du Bois eloquently puts it), Russian-Americans (as Yezierska potently illustrates), Hispanic-Americans, Chinese-Americans, etc. And Arab-Americans, of course.

The solution to this troubling sense of double-consciousness or duality comes – especially in Postmodernism – in the form of its recognition, not denial. Postcolonial subjects, in other words, deal with their "twoness" or "double-consciousness" by 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 the case of women's family names, this same duality (which is also viewed within the postcolonial situation – men being the "colonizers," women the "colonized") is seen at work: many start using their own family names and those of their husbands. Naomi Shihabi Nye is one of them – having a dual family name, doubly dual in fact: a surname reflecting hers and her husband's on the one hand, and her Arab (the father's name)-Swedish (the husband's name) affiliation within the American tradition. Had she lived in earlier times – those of the melting pot, she would, most probably, have dropped the dual name, and altered her family's name to sound more American.

In discussing the question of identity, the time factor is crucial. It is important to remember from the outset, therefore, that Nye emerges to the literary seen in America, after the challenge of hyphenated identity has been addressed, and after the problem of duality has been almost settled. Her times are the postmodern times, which are much more liberal, democratic and recognizing of difference and diversity. Rather than a stigma, roots have become largely an asset; rather than a dilemma, hyphenation, double-consciousness or twoness has become primarily a thing to celebrate. 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 main thesis of this paper, and the bottom line in Nye's thinking. Nevertheless, while there is a remarkable difference between Du Bois' America and that of Yezierka's, on the one hand, and Nye's on the other; and while Nye is largely comfortable with and celebratory of her dual (perhaps even multiple) heritage, there are some (largely initial) tensions.

In a number of her poems, especially the earlier ones, Nye introduces some tensions pertaining to her dual –
Arab-American – identity, some subtle and indirect, and some direct and explicit. In "Negotiations with a Volcano," she says:

Please think of us as we are, tiny, with skins that burn easily.
Please notice how we have watered the shrubs around our houses
and transplanted the peppers into neat cans.
Forgive any anger we feel toward the earth,
when the rains do not come, or they come too much,
and swallow our corn.
It is not easy to be this small and live in your shadow.*(10-16)

In these lines, nothing is said directly about the matter of identity. The words and figures of speech are too general to be pinned down to a specific point. However, the main metaphor – that of "negotiating" with a "volcano" – signifies, by implication, a colonial/postcolonial situation: a "tiny" group "with skins that burn easily," a group that is "this small," on the one hand, negotiating with a volcano or living in the shadow of a huge power, on the other hand. This, indirectly again, can be seen as the context for Nye's sense of dual identity.

Dealing with the dominant, prevalent white American culture, for Du Bois, Yezierska, or Nye is much like dealing with a volcano.

This same sense of duality is expressed – again subtly and indirectly – in another poem, "Making a Fist." Nye, speaking in the poem through a seven-year old child, says:

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,
I felt the life sliding out of me,
a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.
I was seven, I lay in the car
watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.
…
still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,
clenching and opening one small hand. (1-6, 16-17)

The expressions "a melon split wide" and the "lying in the backseat," in addition to being in "the desert" (a locale associated with both meditation and marginality within a country's setting), signify the perspective of a postcolonial subject (a child in relation to adults, a person occupying the backseat as opposed to those who occupy the front, and a "neo-romantic" perspective associated with the desert as opposed to that of the more central urban setting) in relation to a colonial power.

As a postmodern writer, Nye often mingles or merges together several postcolonial situations and articulates them in general terms – that of the child in relation to the adult, the woman in relation to the man, the minority in relation to the majority, the rural or nomadic setting in relation to the urban, the so-called third-world in relation to the first – without being particularly specific, as in the two examples above. However, she does at times depict the postcolonial situation in precise ethnic, racial terms, as in her poem "My Father and the Figtree," a poem which is rife with hints, metaphors and discourse pertaining to duality, and which does present tensions. This poem merits some special attention.

At the outset, the speaker (a version of Nye herself) speaks of her father's preference (even bias) toward fig fruits and fig trees and indifference to other trees: "For other fruits my father was indifferent./He'd point at the cherry trees and say, 'See those? I wish they were figs'…." (1-3). For the father, fig trees are a symbol of his own Arab/Palestinian heritage and his Arab/Palestinian culture. It is noteworthy here that fig trees are loved, even revered, by Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims – figs being highlighted in the Koran and planted in nearly all Palestinian villages. The father, however, does not confine himself to such passing comment, for in the lines that follow immediately, the speaker mentions that her father sits by her bed in "the evenings" and tells her stories, weaving "folktales like vivid little scarves" (4-5). These folktales, we are told, "always involved a figtree" (6). Furthermore, the father is pretty insistent on asserting the presence and importance of fig trees, "'Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in" (7). As a result of such talk about fig trees and such tales (such drilling, one should say), the daughter begins to be influenced, as early as the age of six, when she decides to eat "a dried fig" (12) and does not like it. The father promptly points out to her that he is not talking about a dried fig but 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" (14-16). The American
mother, aware of how much fig trees mean to her Arab-Palestinian husband, asks him to plant one. For years, he does not. He only speaks and dreams about fig trees. Commenting on him, the mother says, "What a dreamer he is" (24). One day, however, after singing a song in Arabic to his daughter about a fig tree, he plants "There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,/ a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world" (31-32). Finally, the dreamer acts.

Clearly, the poem is significant, with respect to the matter of identity, in many ways. First of all, the world the speaker lives in is not without cultural conflict, that represented by the father's incessant fascination with (and expression of) the fig tree (signifying his own world and heritage) and the rest of the garden (signifying the overall American culture). It takes the father a long time to plant a fig tree, but even after it is planted, it is still a minority among other trees. Additionally, the reader cannot but notice the difference between the father's and the daughter's situations. While the daughter is listening, watching and learning, the father is the one who is experiencing the conflict. The poem seems to be asserting the difference between a first-generation Arab-American (an immigrant, as in the case of Yezierska) and a second-generation, Nye herself. The father, like Du Bois and Yezierska, is experiencing the conflict: notice, again, that it takes him a long time (of yearning and talking about fig trees, and complaining about other trees) before he makes up his mind and actually plants one.

Secondly, the speaker is exposed to such prolonged conflict, through the father's continuous talk about fig trees and evening tales. The speaker's exposure is also reflected in tasting the dried fig, in an attempt to experience what the father is speaking about – which testifies to the willingness of the speaker to accept.

Thirdly, and luckily, however, the conflict – unlike in Du Bois and Yezierska – is ultimately resolved in the poem, due both to the father's insistence on the one hand and the mother's not only acceptance but encouragement, on the other: "... in the middle of Dallas, Texas,/ a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs ...." The poem, in fact, ends on a happy note: the father planting the tree and eating figs, the mother accepting it, and the daughter being totally comfortable with it.

Such acceptance or comfort is significant. It illustrates the point mentioned earlier about the importance of the time factor. Nye's America is the liberal, postmodern America, in which not only biculturalism but multiculturalism is beginning to be welcome: the biculturalism or multiculturalism being signified in the poem by the presence of the fig tree among other trees in one garden, and the poem's celebration of it. But such liberalism, biculturalism and comfort are also signified by the father's relative uninhibition and freedom to speak about fig trees, and the mother's acceptance and encouragement. This is to be contrasted, and radically so, not only with Du Bois' and Yezierska's America, but that of Malcolm X and even Pat Mora. In his Autobiography, Malcolm X depicts in great detail how he and many African-Americans of his generation go through so much, including many painful experiences (such as hair conking) trying to assimilate in the white society; the same notion is also explored in Ralph Waldo Ellison, both in "Battle Royale" and Invisible Man. In her poem "Legal Alien" (60), Mora begins by celebrating the fact that she is "Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural/ able to slip from 'How's life?'/to 'Me'stan volviendo loca,'/able to sit in a paneled office//drafting memos in smooth English/able to order in fluent Spanish/at a Mexican restaurant" (1-8). Immediately after that, she adds that she is "American but hyphenated" (9). The use of "but" here is significant, as it reveals tension, which gets explained in the following lines: "an American to Mexicans/a Mexican to Americans/a handy token/sliding back and forth/between the fringes of both worlds/by smiling/by masking the discomfort/of being prejudged Bi-laterally" (15-23; my emphasis). This is perhaps what Nye's father feels, but does not express so eloquently. For Nye herself, however, there is no "discomfort" or anxiety, about being bi-lingual or bi-cultural. Biculturalism seems to be taken for granted now.

The poem entitled "Blood" reveals the same tension and acceptance. Nye tells of a girl who comes to their home wanting "to see the Arab" (9). The young Nye, unaware that the girl is asking for her father who is an Arab, immediately replies that "they didn't have one" (10). Then her father explains to her "who he was" (11). He also tells her that his name "Shihab" means "shooting star" (12), – and she accepts it as "a good name, borrowed from the sky" (13). That the young Nye has not been aware that her father is an Arab signifies the harmony – not the tension – that prevails in her home and surroundings. This same harmony appears also when Nye seems to have no surprise or anxiety when her father tells her who he is: the explanation is accepted wholeheartedly. Simultaneously, however, the tension
appears when the girl comes to ask for the Arab in the house. After all, the American culture does make distinctions. Gomez-Vega sees Nye as writing about "what it means to be 'different' in America (248). Ultimately, however, this appears more like a curiosity than a tension.

This same tension about and celebration of bicultural identity appears in several other poems. In "Grandfather's Heaven," for example, the speaker says:

I like Grandma because she gave me cookies and let me listen to the ocean in her shell. Grandma liked me even though my daddy was a Moslem. (10-12)

It is obvious, in these lines, that the Molsem father is accepted in the family, and that the grandmother is not uncomfortable with a granddaughter who has a Moslem father. However, the expression "even though" in the third line signifies some kind of hidden or implied tension – the same tension (slight but nonetheless significant) is reflected in the speaker's own consciousness. In "For Mohammad on the Mountain," the reconciliation of the father's heritage and America (an "America and I" for the father totally different from Yezierska's) appears at the end of the first stanza in part 2: "That my father edits one of the largest newspapers in America/but keeps an Arabic inscription above his door, Ahlan Wa Sahlan" (29-30). The tension, however, is articulated at the end of the second stanza of part 2. The speaker, trying to assure her "Uncle" who had stayed in Palestine, that her father (who left him for America) not only cares a lot about him, more so than the uncles who stayed in Palestine, but that he is "closer to" him "than the brothers who never left" (40). Stressing the point further, she reveals her father's implicit struggle with identity: "And when he stirs the thick coffee and grinds the cardamom seed/you think he feels like an American?/You think he forgets the call to prayer?" (44-46).

The clearest moment of tension and awareness of hyphenated identity, however, appears not in Nye's poems, but in her novel Habibi. Liyana, the young, adolescent daughter who stands for Nye herself, reveals her acute sense of hyphenation at a moment of anger, when her father asks her, as the family starts packing in order to leave America for Palestine (her father's homeland), not to pack her shorts, for (in his opinion) "No one wears shorts over there" (19):

Lately Poppy kept bringing up Arab women and it made Liyana mad. 'I'm not a woman or a full Arab, either one!' She slammed her bedroom door, knowing what would happen next. Poppy [her Arab/Palestinian father] would enter, stand with hands on his hips, and say, 'Would you like to tell me something?' Liyana muttered, 'I'm just a half-half, woman-girl, Arab-American, a mixed breed like those wild characters that ride up on ponies in the cowboy movies Rafik [her brother] likes to watch. The half-breeds are always villains or rescuers, never anybody normal in between.' (20)

Being "not … a full Arab" and "just a half-half" is revealing of Nye's awareness of the complexities of hyphenation. Commenting on Nye's poetry, Lisa Suhair Majaj stresses the "cross-cultural complexity" (282) of Nye's poems. One could argue, however, that Liyana says what she says here not out of a deep sense of conflict or conviction (as in DuBois of Yezierska) but out of pure frustration.

All of these episodes do make clear that tension does exist in the world in which Nye lives: in both America and Palestine. However, the point to emphasize is that Nye seems to view these tensions as enriching our world, and that they never affect her sense of herself negatively or problematically. Difference appears to be quite normal, something to be accepted and even celebrated – not at all causing one a dilemma or identity crisis. In the poem entitled "The Words under the Words," she reveals how her Palestinian grandmother sees her son (Nye's father) as "lost to America" (10). For Sitti Khadra, Nye's Palestinian grandmother, America and Palestine are far apart: two irreconcilable worlds – America, in fact, could be viewed negatively by the grandmother. "She knows how often mail arrives,/how rarely there is a letter" (12-13). In "Different Ways to Pray," the children "who had been to America" (37), unlike those who staid in Palestine, "didn't care about praying" (36); they even told the "old ones" (38) that they are "wasting" their time (38). "The old ones prayed for the young ones./They prayed for Allah to mend their brains" (39-40). For Nye, however, the two worlds appear to enrich, rather than confuse, her sense of identity. As a postmodernist, she sees their difference as something to be accepted and celebrated – not bewailed or lamented. There is no anxiety on part of Nye herself regarding this dual, bicultural identity of hers.

Nye herself, speaking about biculturalism in "The
Gravities of Ancestry," 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. According to Maalouf, one's identity cannot be divided up or compartmentalized, no matter of how many layers or components it is made up. Explaining this notion, he says in On Identity:

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. (3)

Because Nye feels exactly this same feeling about herself (despite Liyana's momentary burst about the "half-half"), 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 (and this is a paradox in Nye's thinking, to be always remembered): "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. Regarding America, the citations above – from "My Father and the Figtree," "Grandfather's Heaven," "For Mohammad and the Mountain," "Blood," etc. – reveal this very notion clearly. 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 (and empathizes) 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." 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" (4).

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).

It is worth noting that Nye is, ultimately, cosmopolitan – like Kwame Anthony Appiah. For her, identity not only cuts across American-Palestinian borders (in Appiah's case English-Ghanian), but across global lines. What Appiah says about cosmopolitan identity applies to Nye hundred percent. 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. (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."

This very notion is reflected in several of Nye's poems which not only express universal themes, but experiences of peoples and countries other than American and Palestinian. According to Mercer and Strom, "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). This cosmopolitanism is reflected clearly in the title of one of her collections: Different Ways to Pray. 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, across its various poems. In "The Indian in the Kitchen," 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" (emphasis mine; 7).

Nye's biculturalism and cosmopolitanism may primarily be attributed to her bi-racial, bi-cultural parents.
Appiah makes 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" (xvi). The same can be said about Nye. Her biculturalism and her cosmopolitanism are, clearly, a product of her biculturally and racially rooted family: a Palestinian father, who is very aware and assertive of his roots, a mother who is very tolerant, and grandparents on both ends who – through 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, as I hope I have shown in this paper.

REFERENCES

الهوية في أعمال نعومي شهاب ناي: ديناميكية الثنائية الثقافية

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ملخص

تعالج هذه الدراسة النقدية موقف الشاعرة نعومي شهاب ناي من الثنائية الثقافية التي تتبعها بحكم كونها أمريكية من أصول عربية، وذلك موقع الذي يسمى بالتعميد والاتلاسية في أن واقعًا، بما يُجلٍّ في العديد من قصائدها وبعض مقاولاتها وأعمالها الثرية، التي تترافق فيها إلى ثنائية الثقافيّة: الأمريكية العربية، والمراكز الأساسية الذي تنبأ عليه هذه الدراسة أن نظرية الشاعرة تشي، في أحد أبعادها لا ينعد، بشيء من التوجّه أو التوهج إزاء إرثها المزدوج بيد أنها، على نحو عام، تنعى باركح شديد نحو ازدواجية الهوية، وتنعى لها. وأحد أهم الأسباب الشاملة وراء مثل هذا الوضع انتقاء الشاعرة لحركة ما بعد الحداثة، تلك الدراسة التي تَجزَّر تباعًا في التفاعلات والتعمّد من شأنها. أما السبب الآخر فينيّق عن فلسفة العالمية التي تؤمن بها الشاعرة، والتي تُدعَّد السياقات الأعمّ لفكرها، ذلك السياق الذي يبيح الإزدواجية الثقافية ويعزّها.

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